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CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY.

The concept citizenship has a political meaning which implies a certain type of relationship between the government and the people. Citizens have a set of rights, duties and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect the public welfare.

Citizenship of a state can be acquired either by birth or naturalization. A person becomes a citizen of a particular country if his parents are citizens of that country or if he is born within the territory of that country. According to Turner (1997) citizenship is a formal legal identity that an individual person inherits through a collection of legal rights and duties, controlling access to the scarce political, economic, and cultural resources of society. The process by which an individual may voluntarily change their citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization.

Citizenship can be seen as divided into civil, political and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights needed to protect individual liberty e.g. Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Justice. Political citizenship is associated to as participation in the democratic use of political power, as either a member or an individual elected by members of the state. Social citizenship embodies the claim that citizens have access to the resources that allow them to live a civilized existence in line with the standards prevailing in the society.

Citizenship, as with so many other concepts does not have a particular definition. According to Brannan et. al., the concept of citizenship holds that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership but being an active member is essential of being a citizen. Citizenship is about being willing to participate in political activities. Glover (2004) argued that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: Educative citizenship, Integrative citizenship and Ethical citizenship. Educative citizenship according to Dagger (1997) is the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship. Active participation aims to expose individuals’ diverse views and beliefs and deepen their sense of interconnectedness with their fellow community members. Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices and institutions. The concept involves the belief that every individual plays an assortment of roles, and that this form of citizenship enables the individual to integrate their various roles and to immerse themselves into the community. Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship.

However, Kenny, argues that citizenship can be understood by differentiating between passive and active citizenship. The former refers to the rights ad duties given to the citizens from the state and is based on notions of social justice. While this an important part of citizenship, full citizenship is not ensured until people are empowered to participate in the continual process of shaping their society, their communities and their identities. But whichever way we look at it, citizenship is a privilege status conferred by state on its people either by birth or naturalization.

A right is a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or groups of people. Individual rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to let the citizens, have a share in running of their government, a group of rights is important. These rights entail some of the duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen.

Democracy is derived from the Greek word “DEMOS” meaning people and “KRATOS” meaning rule. Democracy is the government by the people, of the people and for the people (Abraham Lincoln). Democracy is a government of the people when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizens and that is the government by the people when its ideological undercurrents is grounded in the peoples culture and is for the people when the power employed by the custodians of the state business emanates from and resides in the collective mandate of the people. There is no single definition for democracy but, what can be deduced from the various definitions of democracy is that: fundamental rights of citizens are guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary, existence of rule of law, freedom of press and periodic free and fair election.

Citizens have duties and responsibilities to the state. Democratic citizens recognize that they not only have rights, they also have responsibilities. They recognize that democracy requires an investment of time and hard work. A government of the people demands constant vigilance and support by the people. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility and no one else’s. in turn, the government should understand that all citizens should be treated equally.