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People once thought that the greatest obstacles to individual freedom and equality were political. They believed they could preserve freedom simply by changing the form of government that governs least governs best. But in time, many people became convinced that some government regulations of society and the economy was necessary to make personal freedom more meaningful and to promote equality, as well as to improve the welfare of the nation. Thus this eventually led to a democratic government. In today's democracies, there are extensive programmes to provide economic security, to ease suffering, and to develop human potential.

Democracy began to develop in ancient Greece as early as the 500 BC. The word democracy comes from the Greek words "demos" meaning people, and "kratos" which means rule or authority. Greek political thinkers stressed the idea of rule by law. Democracy in ancient Athens differed in important ways from democracy today.

Democracy is a form of government, a way of life, a goal or idea and a political philosophy. The former president of United States of America, Abraham Lincoln described democracy in just three simple phrases, as such self –government as, "government of the people, by the people, for the people" unquote.

The characteristics of democracy vary from one country to another. But certain features are more or less the same in all democratic nations. Free elections give the people a chance to choose their leaders and express their opinions on issues. Elections are held periodically to ensure that both national and local, truly represent the people. The possibility of being voted out of office helps assure that those elected pay attention to public opinions. In most democracies, the only legal requirements for voting or for holding elected office have to do with age, residence and citizenship. The democratic process permits citizens to vote by secret ballot, free from force or bribes. It also requires that election results be protected against dishonesty.

One of the most basic signposts of democracy is citizen participation in government. Participation is the key role of citizens in democracy. It is not only their right, it is their duty. Citizen participation builds a better democracy. All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Article 21, states that, "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Democracy calls for widespread participation in politics by the people. A few democracies have compulsory voting. But in most countries, it is believed to be the duty of all adult or eligible citizens to vote in local, state or provincial and national elections. Qualified individuals should be willing to seek election for public office for the welfare of their country.

Citizens should help shape public opinions by speaking out on important issues and by supporting the political party of their choice. An active and informed citizenry is generally thought to be one of the best guarantees against corrupt and inefficient government.

Faith in the power of education is a character of democracy. According to democratic ideals, widespread participation does not necessarily ensure good government. The quality of government depends on the quality of participation. Well-informed and well-educated citizens are able to participate more intelligently. A democracy needs educated citizens who can think for themselves and for the nation. Citizens have a duty to take part in public affairs, to keep informed on public issues, and to vote intelligently. Democratic institutions must produce leaders of public trust and responsibility.

Democracy is a means for the people to choose their leaders and to hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. The people decide who will represent them in parliament and who will head the government at the national and local levels. They do so by choosing between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections. In democracy people are sovereign- they are the highest form of political authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of the government, who hold power temporarily. The people are free to criticize their leaders and representatives, and to observe how they conduct the business of government. Elected representatives at the national and local levels should listen to the people and respond to their needs and suggestions.

For elections to be free and fair, they have to be administered by a neutral, fair and professional body that treats all political parties and candidates equally. Voters must be able to observe the voting and the vote counting to ensure that the process is free of corruption, intimidation and fraud. That is why it takes a lot of time to organize a good democratic election and to choose good and eligible leaders. Any country can hold an election, but for an election to be free and fair requires a lot of organization, preparation, and training of political parties, electoral officials and society organizations who monitor the process.

Throughout history, the most important aspects of the democratic way of life have been the principles of individual equality and freedom. Accordingly, citizens in a democracy should be entitled to equal protection of their persons, possessions, and rights; have equal opportunity to pursue their lives and careers; and have equal rights of political participation. In addition, the people should enjoy freedom from undue interference and domination by government. They should be free, within the framework of the law, to believe, behave, and express themselves as they wish. Democratic societies seek to guarantee their citizens certain freedom, including freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech, freedom to work and live where they want to and choose leaders of their own interests.