

The Concept of the Rule of Law

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Abstract: *Public officials, which include elected political office – bearers and appointed officials, should always carry out their executive, administrative, functional, and technical activities with legality that means taking into account (a) the rules and principles of natural justice; (b) the constitutional principles, and (c) the rule of law of the country.*

Keywords: *rule of law, rules and principles, natural justice, constitutional principles, and legality.*

I. Introduction

In terms of section 3 of the Constitution on Founding Values and Principles, sub-section 3 (1) (b) states the rule of law as one of the founding values and principles. Effort will be paid to examining this concept in great detail.

General Observations

Public officials *should* always carry out their executive, administrative, functional, and technical activities with *legality*, that means, taking into account (a) the *rules and principles of natural justice*, (b) the *constitutional principles* and (c) the *rule of law of the country*.

Natural Law

Natural law is a value system [value standard] and is the role ascribed to reason.

According to Socrates the basic ideas are that there are absolute standards of morality which exist independently of the will of the ruler or the state. They exist in the form of external, universal, immutable laws of nature which are prescribed by reason. Here reason is not a source of knowledge, but is merely an instrument, a channel through which men analyze their values and make serviceable. The various theories about Natural Law were influenced by the following two views especially:

- The existence of a universal order that holds for everybody.
- As well as the existence of inalienable human rights.

The Stoics [Greeks: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero] and later thinkers enlarged on the idea of the existence of a ‘law of nature’ which consequently received increasing recognition. This led to the formulation of the principles that the difference between right and wrong is absolute, that is, it cannot be made or changed by any legislator, and that it is incumbent on the state to provide legislation promoting ‘right’ behaviour and actions and discouraging ‘wrong’ ones. In other words, the state has a moral obligation to its members.

This view takes us back to the very core of the writing of Socrates and his convictions, as contained in Plato’s Republic: that the concept of justice is absolute and not limited to time and place. The stoics held that justice is to be found in the nature of man: Morality is determined, not by the rule of the stronger, but by the rule of that reason, which all men share alike. The doctrine is beautifully summarized in the following extract from Cicero’s dialogue in the book De Re Publica:

“The law is right reason in agreement with nature: it extends to all men, is unchanging and everlasting; it calls men to duty by its commands and by its voice warning holds them back from deceit. Its orders and also its prohibitions are not unheeded by good men....It is sinful to amend this law, nor is it right to repeal any part of it. It is impossible to abolish it entirely....We need not seek the help of another to expound – and interpret it. There will not be different laws in Rome and in Athens or different laws now and in the future but all nations at all times will be under the sway of one law, everlasting and unchangeable.

And there will be one universal master and ruler, the God, who is the author of this law, its promulgator and its enforcing judge. Whoever disobeys him will be fleeing from himself and turning away from the very nature of man.”

Modern sense of natural justice is summarized by:

Rules and principles of natural justice

- a. That person affected by administrative action should be afforded a fair and unbiased hearing before the decision to act is taken.
- b. That the rules and principles are usually expressed in the form of two or three maxims:
 - Audi alteram partem [hear the other party]; and
 - Nemo index in propria causa sua (no body may judge in his own cause); and
 - The rule and principle against bias.

Writers and leading scholars' contributions

- Professor Hugh Last [1970], stated that this quotation from Cicero's book *De Re Publica*, is the source of the **absolute difference** between what is *good* and what is *evil*.
- Leo Strauss, in his book **Natural Right and History**, holds that knowledge of Natural Law may be obtained through argument.
- On the other hand, Jacques Maritain, in his words *Man and the State and the Social and Political Philosophy of J. Maritain*, believes that **intuition** plays an important part in man's search for Natural Law.

Rule of law

Many modern constitutions incorporate certain fundamentals such as:

Fundamental human rights and freedoms

Many modern constitutions incorporate certain fundamental human rights, such as:

- right to life;
- right to personal liberty;
- right of arrested and detained persons;
- right to human dignity;
- right to personal security;
- freedom from slavery or servitude;
- freedom from forced or compulsory labour;
- equality and non-discrimination;
- right to privacy;
- freedom of assembly and association;
- freedom to democratic and petition;
- freedom of conscience;
- freedom of expression and freedom of the media;
- access to information;
- language and culture;
- freedom of profession, trade or occupation;
- labour rights;
- political rights;
- right to administrative justice;
- right to a fair hearing;
- right of accused persons
- property rights;
- environmental rights;
- freedom from arbitrary eviction;
- right to education;
- right to health care;
- right to food and water;
- marriage rights.

Restrictions imposed on the rule of law

There are always restrictions, expressly or implicitly stated, by such concepts as due process of law, public order, and the courts may or may not have jurisdiction to review legislation, which infringes such rights.

Revolutionary period of rule of law

Formulations of natural rights date from the second half of the 18th century, the revolutionary period in the United States of America and France. Both countries borrowed significantly from English experience and thought especially as embodied in the writings of *John Locke* the apologist. In the case of America, *Sir Williams*

Blakstone's commentaries of 1765. For Blackstone the absolute rights of Englishman were the rights of personal security, personal liberty and private property.

Formal declarations of the rights of man

Many modern constitutions incorporate certain fundamental rights, such as personal freedom, equality before the law, freedom of property, free elections, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and worship, freedom of contract, the right of assembly, the right of association, and family rights. They are restricted, expressly or impliedly, by some such concepts as 'public order' and 'due process of law', and the Courts may or may not have jurisdiction to review legislation which infringes such rights. Formulation of natural rights date from the second half of the 18th century the revolutionary period in America and France. Both countries borrowed largely from English experience and thought, especially as embodied in the writings of John Locke, the apologist of the English revolution of 1688, and, in the case of America, Blackstone's commentaries 1765. For Blackstone the absolute rights of Englishmen were the rights of personal security, personal liberty and private property.

The American Declaration of Independence [4th July 1776] states that all men are created equal, and among the inalienable rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The American Bill of Rights consists of ten amendments added in 1791 to the Federal Constitution of 1787. The rights include free exercise of religion, freedom of speech and the press, peaceable assembly, petition for redress of grievances (1st Amendment); security of persons, houses, papers and effects from unreasonable searches and seizures [2nd Amendment]; no deprivation of life, liberty of property without due process of law [5th Amendment]; and freedom from excessive bail or fines and from cruel or unusual punishments [8th Amendment]. The American constitution had already provided that the writ of habeas corpus should not be suspended, that no ex post facto law should be passed, and that the trial of all crimes, except in cases of impeachment, should be by jury. Later amendments abolished slavery, and preserved the franchise from discrimination on grounds of race, colour or sex.

A Declaration of the Human Rights of Man was prefaced to the French Constitution of 1791, and was confirmed by the preambles to the Constitutions of 1946 and 1958.

A Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948, and

This was followed by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms drawn up at Rome in 1950. The convention came into force in 1953. The European comes into force in 1953. The European countries which have signed the Convention, including the United Kingdom, guarantee to all persons within their jurisdiction a number of rights and freedoms. In so far as they do not already exist in their laws, these countries are under an obligation to introduce the necessary legislation.

The rights concerned are a more detailed version of those contained in the Universal Declaration of 1948. They are still expressed in very general terms, and the necessary limitations are not stated. There is enforcement machinery, partly adoptive, through the European Commission of Human Rights.

The American declaration of independence of 1776 states that: all men and women are created equal, and amongst their inalienable rights are life, and the pursuit of happiness. The American Bill of Rights consists of ten amendments added in 1791 to the Federal Constitution of 1787. These rights include:

- free exercise of religion,
 - freedom of speech and the press,
 - peaceable assembly,
 - petition for redress of grievances,
 - security of persons, house, papers, and effects from unreasonable searches and seizures,
 - no deprivation of life, liberty or property without due process of law; and
 - freedom from excess bail or fines, and from cruel or unusual punishments.
- The American constitution had already provided that the writ of habeas corpus should not be suspended, that no ex post facto law should be passed, and that the trial of all crimes except in cases of impeachment, should be by jury.
- Later amendments abolished slave trade and slavery, and
- Pressured the franchise from discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or sex.

Comprehensive formal declarations of the rights of man

A Declaration of the Rights of Man was preferred to the French Constitution of 1791 and was confirmed by the preambles to the constitution of 1946 and 1958. A Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations Assembly on December 10, 1948, and this was followed. By the European convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental freedom drawn up at Rome in 1950, which convention came into force in 1953. The Kingdom, guarantee to all persons within their jurisdiction number of

rights and freedoms. In so far as they do not already exist in their laws, these countries are under an obligation to introduce the necessary legislation. There is also the Declaration of Delhi of 1959. The rights concerned are a more detailed version of those contained in the Universal Declaration of 1948. They are still expressed in very general terms, and the necessary limitations are not stated. There is enforcement machinery, partly adoptive through the European Commission of Human Rights, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Human Rights.

Zimbabwe Declaration of Rights

The Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, [Chapter 4, Part 1 and 2, sections 44, 45, 46 and 47 dealing with Application and Interpretation and Sections 48 to 78 dealing with Fundamental Human Right and Freedoms] incorporates the Declaration of Rights.

Part 3, 4 and 5 deal with Elaboration of Certain Rights, Enforcement of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, and Limitations of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, respectively.

Implications of the aforementioned statements

Emanating from the aforementioned:

- Public activities can be undertaken only once public administrators and their subordinates have been authorized by a legislative institution [parliament, provincial or municipal council];
- Officials may not exceed their authority;
- Officials may not cede their authority to others;
- Prescriptions regarding administrative and functional activities should be followed vigorously by means of reputable, honest, and pragmatic control measures, and evaluation systems and mechanism.

Definition of the rule of law

Meanwhile, the International Commission of Jurists, which is affiliated to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), has been trying with considerable success to give material content to the Rule of Law, an expression used in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its most notable achievement so far has been the Declaration of Delhi 1959. This resulted from a Congress held in New Delhi, India, attended by Jurists from more than 50 countries [include LORD DENNING and MR JUSTICE DEVLIN – leading British Lawyers at the time], and was based on questionnaire circulated to 75,000 lawyers.

- “Respect for supreme value of human personality: was stated to be the basis of all law.
- The rule of law, according to the Declaration of Delhi, relates to:

The Legislation

There is a right to representative and responsible Government; and there are certain minimum standards or principles for the law, including those contained in the European Convention, in particular, freedom of religious belief, assembly and association, and the absence of retroactive penal laws;

The Executive

Especially that delegated legislation should be subject to independent judicial control, and that a citizen who is wronged should have a remedy against the State or Government, or administration;

The Criminal Process

A fair trial which involves such elements as:

- Certainty of the criminal law,
- The prescription of innocence,
- Reasonable rules relating to arrest,
- Accusation and detention pending trial,
- The notice and provision for legal advice,
- Public trial,
- Right of appeal, and
- Absence of cruel or unusual punishments; and

Judiciary and the autonomous Legal Profession

This requires the independence,

- Impartiality, and competence of the judiciary; and
- Proper grounds and procedure for removal; and imposes a huge responsibility on an organized and autonomous legal profession.

Early history of the doctrine of the rule of law

The idea that the rules as well as the governed should be subject to have is found in one form in Aristotle, who said that the rule of law is preferable to that of any individual.

BRACHTON, writing in the 13th century, adopted the theory general hold in the middle Ages that the world was governed by law, human or divine, and held that the KING himself ought not to be subject to man but subject to God and to the law because the law makes him king. This view is also expressed in the year books of the 14th and 15th centuries.

This superior law governed KINGS as well as subjects and set limits to the prerogative. On this ground Fortescue, in the middle of the 15th century, based his argument that there could be no taxation without the consent of Parliament. During the conflict between king and Parliament in the reigns of the early STUARTS in Britain, the doctrine propounded by COKE was the superiority of the common law over KING and EXECUTIVE. But the common lawyers were in alliance with Parliament; the recent doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament. What was supreme therefore was the law for the time being, that is to say, the common law subject to such from time to time.

This view eventually prevailed with the revolution of 1688, although what the law now regards as supreme was not the common law in the narrow sense, but the whole English law, statute and case law, in whatever courts it was administered. The Rule of Law, therefore, precludes arbitrary action on the crown or members of the government can generally secure the passing by Parliament of such laws as it wants.

A. Dicey's doctrine of the rule of law

It is as long ago as 1885 that V.A. DICEY first published his Law of the Constitution, based on lectures he gave as Vinerian Professor of English Law at Oxford University, in which his purpose was to deal only with two or three guiding principles which pervade the modern British constitutional law.

The three leading characteristics of the British constitution which he chose to explain and illustrate were:

The sovereignty of Parliament

Sovereignty of Parliament

Sovereignty means the supreme power within the state. The supreme power in Great Britain lies with the Parliament. Hence sovereignty of Parliament (or supremacy of parliament) is a cardinal principle of the British constitutional law and political system. This principle implies the following things:

- a. The British Parliament can make, amend, substitute or repeal any law. De Lolme said: "The British Parliament can do everything except make a woman a man a woman."
- b. The Parliament can make constitutional laws by the same procedure as ordinary laws. In other words, there is no legal distinction between the constituent authority and the law-making authority of the British Parliament.
- c. The parliamentary laws cannot be declared invalid by the judiciary as being unconstitutional. In other words, there is no system of judicial review in Great Britain.

Source: O. Hood Phillips: *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 1962. pp. 45-47.

The Rule of Law

Rule and law:

The doctrine of rule of law is one of the fundamental characteristics of the British constitutional system. It lays down that the law is supreme and hence the government must act according to law and within the limits of the law. One of the most celebrated and quoted British authorities, A.V. DICEY in his book: *The Law of the Constitution* [1885], has given the following three implications of the doctrine of rule of law:

- a. Absence of arbitrary power, that is, no man can be punished except for a distinct breach of law.
- b. Equality before the law, that is, equal subjection of all citizens (rich or poor, high or low, official or non-official, literate or non-literate) to the ordinary law of the land administered by the ordinary law courts.
- c. The primary of the rights of the individual, that is, the Constitution is the result of the rights of individual as defined and enforced by the courts of law, rather than the Constitution being the source of the individual rights. The rights of the citizens of Great Britain flow from juridical decisions, not from the constitution.

Source: O. Hood Phillips: *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 1962, pp. 36-44

Conventions of the Constitution

A large part of the book was devoted to an exposition of his doctrine of the Rule of Law, and this has had such a profound influence among those who think and write about the constitution, as well as those who work it, that an examination of the doctrine is called for here. For Dicey the expression the Rule of Law includes three distinct though kindred conceptions:

- a. No man is punishable or can be lawfully made to suffer in body or goods except for a distinct breach of law established in the ordinary legal manner before the ordinary Courts of the land. In this sense the rule of law is contrasted with every system of government based on the exercise by persons in authority of wide, arbitrary, or discretionary powers of constraint. It means, in the first place, the absolute supremacy or predominance of arbitrariness, or prerogative, or even of wide discretionary authority on the part of the government.
- b. We mean in the second place, when we speak of the Rule of Law as a characteristic of the United Kingdom, not only that every man, whatever his rank or condition, is subject to the ordinary law of the realm and amenable to the jurisdiction of the ordinary tribunals. This equality before the law V.A. Dicey contrasts with the system of administrative law in France, according to which the responsibility of government officials for acts done in the public service is determined by a distinct system of administrative courts – an idea which is utterly unknown to the law of England, and indeed is fundamentally inconsistent with the English traditions and customs.
- c. The general principles of the British constitutional law, as for example, the right to personal liberty, or the right of public meeting, are with us the result of judicial decision determining the rights of private persons in particular cases brought before the Courts of Law whereas under many foreign constitutions the security, such as it is, given to the rights of individuals results, or appeals to result, from the general principles of the constitution.... The British constitution, in short, is a judge – made constitution. There is in the British constitution absence of those declarations or definitions of rights so dear to foreign constitution is the result (product) of the ordinary law of the land.

Modern and more appropriate version of the Rule of Law

Giving substantive, appropriate, correct and modern content to Dicey's doctrine of the rule of law, various leading constitutional authorities, for example, Professor A.L. Goodhart, Sir Ivor Jennings, Professor Phillips, Professor E.C.S. Wade, amongst others, will be included under the Rule of Law:

- Effective control of and proper publicity for delegated legislation, particularly when it imposes penalties;
- That when discretionary power is granted the manner in which it is to be exercised should as far as practicable be defined;
- That every man should be responsible to the ordinary law whether he be private citizen or public officer;
- That private rights should be determined by competent, impartial and independent tribunals; and
- That fundamental private rights are safeguarded by the ordinary law of the land.

Professor A. L. Goodhart's idea of the Rule of Law

The essence of the Rule of Law according to Professor A.L. Goodhart is that public officers [and this is inclusive of ministers, public administrators, governors, police officers, city and town clerks, secretaries of government departments and their subordinates] are all governed by law, and which law limits their powers.

Sir Ivor Jennings's conception of the Rule of Law

Sir Ivor Jennings would equate the Rule of Law with democracy as understood by the liberal tradition. It demands in the first place the powers of the Executive should not only be derived from the law as V.A. Dicey said, but also that they should be limited by law. What this means is that every political authority, except perhaps Parliament, is subject to considerable limitations. Liberal and democratic principles require:

- a. That all Government powers, except those of Parliament, should be reasonably precise laws;
- b. Equality before the law, that is, that among equals the law should be equal and should be equally administered, that like should be treated alike – without distinction of race, tribe, colour, religion, wealth, social status, or political influence;
- c. That the limits of police power should be rigidly defined; and
- d. Liberty, a somewhat vague notion, Sir Ivor Jennings concludes that is the Rule of Law is only a synonym for law and order, then it is characteristic of all civilized states.

We further give detailed analyses of the Rule of Law below.

Rule of Law by Professor Wade:

Substantive correcting and modernizing Dicey's doctrine, Professor E.C.S. Wade includes specifically under the Rule of Law:

- a. Effective control of proper publicity for delegated legislation, most particularly when it imposes penalties; that when discretionary power is granted the manner in which it is to be exercised should ask for as practicable be defined;
- b. That every man be responsible to the ordinary law of the land whether he be private citizen or public officers;

- c. That private rights should be determined by impartial and independent tribunals; and
- d. That fundamental private right is safeguarded by the ordinary law of the land.
The Rule of Law Professor Wade adds, is reconciled with the supremacy of Parliament and by the independence of the Judiciary,

Rule of Law: simply means equality before the law and freedom from arbitrary government.

- a. It is not assumed that administrative compliance with the letter of the law is sufficient for valid administrative action.
- b. When there are no legislative provisions the courts will assume that certain additional principles have to be observed, for instance, principles of natural justice, fairness, reasonableness and justice; but there are limits to the role which the law can and should play in presenting the limits of administrative action.
- c. Sometimes the law can only permit officials to determine the appropriate and necessary course of action to be adopted.

Contemporary operational definition of the rule of law

Rule of Law as legality

Public official should carry out their executive, administrative, functional and technical activities, with legality that means taking into consideration the rules and principles of natural justice and the constitutional principles of the rule of law of the country. All these rules and principles constitute what we may call the important aspects of the western and Christian ideals of justice and democracy.

All public officers are governed by law, and which law defines and limits their powers.

Democratic principles require that:

- a. All governmental power, except those of Parliament, should be distributed and determined by reasonably precise laws;
- b. There be equality before the law;
- c. The limits of police powers should be rigidly defined;
- d. There be freedom:
 - And civil liberties, and
 - Right to choose and participate in the government and administration of his country;
- e. Be effective control of and proper publicly for all delegated legislation;
- f. Be an independent, impartial, and competent functional judicial system and autonomous respectable legal profession.

Rule of Law: means equality before the law and freedom from arbitrary government and administration.

Respect for supreme value of human personality shall form the basis of all law.

Institutional or procedural side of the rule of law

- a. The legislature: there is a right to representative and responsible Government and administration; and there are certain minimum standards or principles for the law;
- b. The Executive: especially that delegated legislation should be subject to independent, impartial, and competent judicial control, that a citizen who is wronged should have a remedy against the State, or Government, or administration;
- c. The Criminal process: requires a fair trial system which entails such essential elements as:
 - certainty of the criminal law;
 - prescription of innocence;
 - reasonable rules relating to arrest;
 - accusation and detention pending for legal advice;
 - public trial;
 - right of appeal; and
 - absence of cruel or unusual punishments.
- d. The judiciary and legal profession: requiring the independence, impartiality, and competence of the judiciary; and proper grounds and procedure for removal, and autonomous legal profession.

Forming part of the law and from another point of view in itself secured merely by Act of Parliament.

With this background on the theoretical aspects of the constitutionality of the rule of law, it is now intended to examine the applicability and application of these theories to practical situations in the next issue of our discussions on this subject.

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