

2. VIP culture – Polity

VIP culture in India represents a structural persistence of hierarchy within a democratic framework that constitutionally guarantees equality and dignity to all citizens. Despite legal abolition of royal privileges and titles, behavioural and institutional remnants continue to shape governance and public interactions.

1.VIP Culture– Meaning and Nature

1. VIP culture refers to the preferential treatment extended to individuals holding political power, administrative authority, or social influence in public and institutional spaces.
2. It manifests through visible symbols such as convoys, security cordons, and special access, as well as invisible practices like bureaucratic deference and institutional bias.

2.Historical Roots and Continuity

1. VIP culture has its origins in colonial administrative structures that institutionalised hierarchy and distance between rulers and subjects.
2. The continuation of feudal attitudes post-independence has reinforced the perception of authority as a status rather than a responsibility.
3. The abolition of princely privileges through the 26th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1971, removed formal hierarchies but did not fully eliminate psychological and administrative hierarchies.

3.Persistence of VIP Culture in Contemporary India

1. Large motorcades and roadblocks during VIP movement disrupt public life and reflect prioritisation of power over citizen convenience.
2. Preferential treatment in airports, toll plazas, and public offices indicates systemic acceptance of unequal access.
3. Security arrangements often extend beyond genuine threat perception and become markers of status.
4. Survey data from LocalCircles indicates widespread public perception of the persistence of VIP culture, highlighting a gap between policy intent and ground reality.

4.Constitutional and Legal Framework

1. Article 14 ensures equality before law and equal protection of laws, forming the core principle violated by VIP practices.
2. Article 18 abolishes titles and prohibits the state from creating artificial distinctions among citizens.
3. The 26th Amendment Act, 1971 abolished privy purses and derecognised princely titles, signalling a move toward egalitarianism.
4. Legal provisions such as the Motor Vehicles Act mandate uniform compliance, symbolising equal civic responsibility.

5.Impacts on Democratic Governance

Violation of Equality Principle

1. Preferential treatment creates a perception that certain individuals are above the law, undermining constitutional morality.
2. It weakens the rule of law by introducing informal hierarchies within formal institutions.

Public Inconvenience and Alienation

1. Traffic disruptions and restricted access to public spaces inconvenience ordinary citizens and erode trust in governance.
2. It fosters resentment and a sense of exclusion among the public.

Institutional Degradation

1. Bureaucratic sycophancy undermines meritocracy and encourages compliance over critical thinking.
2. Administrative objectivity and neutrality are compromised due to excessive deference to authority.

Misuse of Public Resources

1. Deployment of excessive security personnel, vehicles, and infrastructure leads to inefficient use of taxpayer resources.
2. It diverts resources from essential public services.

Erosion of Public Trust

1. Visible inequality in treatment leads to declining faith in democratic institutions.
2. It strengthens perceptions of corruption, elitism, and lack of accountability.

Ethical Dimensions

1. Concentration of power without humility fosters arrogance and detachment from public needs.
2. Authority without accountability leads to misuse of power and corruption.
3. Transformation of public service into a status symbol erodes ethical governance.
4. The gap between constitutional ideals and administrative behaviour raises concerns about integrity in public life.

6. Government Initiatives to Curb VIP Culture

1. The 2017 ban on red beacons removed a prominent symbol of status-based privilege in public spaces.
2. Security categorisation systems such as Z+, Z, Y, and X are designed to rationalise protection based on threat perception rather than position.
3. Digital governance initiatives reduce human interface and discretionary power, limiting opportunities for preferential treatment.
4. Periodic review of security and protocol norms aims to align administrative practices with democratic values.

7. Measures to Reduce VIP Culture

Strengthening Rule of Law

1. Uniform enforcement of laws without exceptions for status can reinforce equality before law.
2. Strict penalties for misuse of privileges can deter institutionalised elitism.

Administrative Reforms

1. Professional training focusing on ethics, impartiality, and constitutional values can reshape bureaucratic culture.
2. Institutional mechanisms to discourage sycophancy and promote accountability are essential.

Symbolic and Structural Changes

1. Limiting visible symbols of power such as convoys and special access can reduce perception of hierarchy.
2. Rationalising security arrangements strictly based on threat assessments can ensure necessity over prestige.

Leadership by Example

1. Modest and accountable conduct by political and administrative leaders can influence institutional norms.
2. Public display of egalitarian behaviour can reshape societal expectations and administrative culture.

Conclusion

1. VIP culture in India represents a contradiction between democratic ideals and administrative practices.
2. While legal frameworks promote equality, behavioural and institutional reforms are necessary to align governance with constitutional morality.
3. A combination of legal enforcement, ethical leadership, and societal change is essential to dismantle hierarchical mindsets and strengthen democratic ethos.

Source- <https://www.ndtvprofit.com/india/after-controversy-red-blue-flashing-lights-removed-from-mumbai-mayors-car-11219081>

