



DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

THE HINDU

(16th April, 2019)

**Topic: GS4 - Respect and
Leadership**



THE HINDU
Daily News Paper

Respecting leaders in a democracy

Introduction:-

- 'Respect' has multiple senses, of which three are relevant here namely
 - Directive Respect Egalitarian/ Moral Respect
 - Directive Respect Hierarchical/ Commanding Respect
 - Evaluative Respect
- Respect for politicians is in short supply in our times because democracy in contemporary time reduce to electoral politics where **mass mobilisation** plays dominant role and **development and other aspects of democracy** take back seat.
- Hence political leader reduced to mass mobilisers and most citizens of contemporary democracies seem to tolerate, not respect, those they elect.

Egalitarian Directive Respect or Moral Respect:-

- One sense, that might be called 'directive respect', was elaborated by the late 18th century German philosopher, **Immanuel Kant**. For him, **respect had the force of an authoritative moral instruction, a directive**.
- As Kant understood that humans in their **social interactions** can never entirely eliminate using one another for personal benefit, because we have **inherent dignity** that imposes limits on the extent to which we can use each other for personal benefit.

- The quality of dignity that inheres in a person is the ground for a moral directive not to treat someone only as an instrument to realise my purpose but also always as a person with distinct purposes of her own.
- To respect others is not just to have an **attitude**, but also to act towards humans in a way that does not merely use them. This is what makes it a form of directive respect.
- In addition to being directive, Kant's notion is also **egalitarian**. This is because each of us commands this respect regardless of our **differential social status or position**, class, gender, race, talent or achievement.

Hierarichal Directive Respect:-

- Quality that **commands respect** from others inheres not in the person qua person but in the **social position** she occupies or the role she performs. For Eg:
 - children must respect their fathers; wives, their husbands; servants, their masters; lower caste people, those in higher castes; and so on.
- Indeed, this **unequal status is the original site of the idea of respect, its breeding ground**.
- The notion of respect was for long intertwined with **ideas of superiority and inferiority** and had **deep hierarchical overtones**.
- Virtually indistinguishable from **fear and deference**, it was expressed not only in **words** but through **silence and bodily stances**.

- Hence **social stratification** based on superiority and inferiority most of the time takes **coercive element** such as not directly look him in the eye; always had his or her head bowed or covered; could not touch any part of the superior person or could, at best, touch only his feet; was always to obey, do as he was told, never question or even respond.
- This hierarchical notion of directive respect has not disappeared from our society (as many had hoped) and continues to permeate social relationships.
- But disturbingly, just when we thought that because of our **anti-colonial struggle** and **equality-centred reform movements** led by **Jyotirao Phule, Mahatma Gandhi** and **B.R. Ambedkar**, it is fading away from politics, it appears to be raising its ugly head again.
- Revived here is the older, deeply hierarchical idea of respect as deference which **brooks no dissent, muffles voices, demands unquestioning silence from all**. It is also being used to elicit **obedience to a 'supreme leader'**.
- This appears to be happening not only in India but in many other polities of the world. For Eg:
 - Many conversations between **Trump loyalists** and his critics come to an abrupt, screeching halt by the complaint that critics don't respect the President.
 - In **Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán** says that any attack on his policies is a sign of disrespect for Hungary.
 - **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, when charged with rigging the polls by journalists, Mr. Erdogan claimed that this showed disrespect to the people of Turkey and their choice.

- The hierarchical notion of respect is a **one-way street** and **incompatible** with the very **idea of democracy**.
- The **egalitarian notion of respect** articulated by Kant, a perfect riposte to respect as deference, is presupposed by democracies and relevant as a value in relationships among citizens but is **too general to be of use in the specific context of citizen-ruler relationship**.

Evaluative Respect:-

- Evaluative respect is owed to people not because of what they are or their social position but **by virtue of what they have achieved**.
- This may manifest in some praiseworthy **qualities of character** such as moral **integrity** or **by perfecting some skills** as a cricketer or scholar.
- This respect consists in **an attitude of positive appraisal** of the person's **moral qualities or non-moral skills**. Here respect is not presumed but earned.
- It is this notion of **'evaluative respect'** or **'appraisal respect'** that is relevant in democratic politics.
- Politicians occupy a contingent political position where they have a job to perform: work for the common good; ensure that everyone is treated as an equal, not suffer from negative discrimination at the hands of the government; get what the people need; ensure that there is peace and justice. Also, that they work truthfully, sincerely, transparently.
- When politicians achieve these goals and behave in accordance with the highest standards of political morality, they earn our respect. When they fail to so, we begin to disrespect them.

Conclusion:-

- There is no question of hierarchical respect or deference to our leaders in modern, democratic polities.
- It is our right to question, challenge and criticise our politicians. All power wielders, including the Prime Minister, must submit to these demands.
- All of us, the rulers and the ruled, are bound by **norms of egalitarian respect more generally, and by evaluative respect specific to democratic politics in particular.**
- To our politicians, we can only say: perform well, and earn our respect!