Say No To Ragging

Extreme measures are proving to be a hurdle for institutions in eradication of ragging from their campuses. All that is required is a strong will to end it. A new academic year has just begun in the country, and with it the fear of ragging has once again raised its ugly head. Time we resolved to nip the menace in the bud.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has framed rules in order to curb ragging. It mandates creation of an anti-ragging committee in all higher education institutions, with the provision that freshers be given mobile numbers of committee members; institutions conduct surprise night checks in hostels, take no undertakings from seniors (signed by parents too) that they will not indulge in ragging; and put up posters across the campus warning seniors of the consequences of ragging, while informing freshers about whom to contact in ragging cases.

An institute is also required to lodge a compulsory FIR within 24 hours of a ragging case coming to the notice of the institution. However, as per the Supreme Court guidelines, the police will treat senior students accused of ragging humanely and not as criminals. The “zero tolerance” policy being espoused by most is, in fact, proving to be a major hurdle in curbing ragging. In my discussion with a dean of students’ affairs of a reputed institute, it turned out that schools feel helpless in taking any action for they fear its consequences. For instance, earlier, if a minor case was reported, they would give exemplary punishment commensurate with the act, which acted as a deterrent for others. However, now they do nothing and simply destroy the complaint after giving an oral warning. For, if they were to punish the senior student, there would have to be a record of complaint and punishment. As per the rules a ragging case must be reported to the police. It would thus be difficult for an institution to argue as to why it did not file an FIR.

Unfortunately, when an institute trashes ragging complaints and gives only oral warnings, the message to the student community is loud and clear—the institute will tolerate ragging till it reaches a level where they feel it is justified to involve the police. No academic institution wants to involve the police or the district administration in insignificant matters. By insisting that they do, the UGC and others have actually tied their hands.

Recognise the Signs

To nip ragging in the bud, it is extremely important that institutions recognise the first signs of it. Ragging starts with identification of freshers. Different institutes have different ways of identifying them, but invariably it involves seniors dictating what juniors wear. Academic administrators ignore such episodes, as they don’t want to inter-
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“Where There’s a Will...

To counter ragging, the focus of institutions in the first few days should be on making freshers comfortable and laying emphasis on interaction between the faculty and freshers. This will not only melt their shyness but also make senior students realise that during such close interaction with faculty, some fresher may actually complain about ragging.

When I was at LNMIIT Jaipur, we would ask freshers to join the institute a week before the seniors would come. In this one week, there would be an orientation programme, where there would be lectures on general topics – campus life, time management, stress management, values, and so on. Such interactions succeeded in breaking the wall between the students and the faculty. During this time the only seniors on campus were those who had been carefully chosen as volunteers to help the freshers settle down. We also organised several matches between faculty and freshers in different sports – cricket, badminton, table tennis, etc.— further cementing the ties. Such interactions may vary from one institute to another, but it must be held if ragging is to be curbed. In IIT Kanpur, one faculty member is assigned the responsibility of talking to five to six students. He meets them, invites them to have a meal at his home and interacts with them – all this, to make them feel comfortable enough to complain, if the need arises.

The place where discrimination usually starts is the mess. A fresher can be easily spotted here, as unaware of the mess culture, he can be found asking simple questions. Senior students either ask freshers to sit with them where they can carry out verbal ragging, or ask them to stand last in the queue, just to discriminate against them. Our solution at LNMIIT was to make sure that at least one faculty member was eating in the mess at every meal in the first couple of weeks.

Another strategy adopted was to find any newsletter about a student punished for ragging and forward it on email to all students. This sent out a strong message to the students that if such an incident happened on our campus, we would not shy away from taking similar action. We also adopted community punishment. We told all students that if there is ragging in any hostel wing, and if we are not able to identify specific individuals involved, then the whole wing will be fined. This way if there was even one student opposed to ragging, he would ensure that it did not take place in his wing. Once you have ensured that there will be no ragging in the hostels, you have already won the war.

Yet another strategy is to involve parents. Students do not want their parents to get any negative news about their behaviour. Parents ensure that their ward does not do anything silly again.

It is possible to eradicate ragging from our campuses – if we want to.

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