

Ragging should be curbed

POINTS TO DEVELOP

Widely prevalent.

What it means and implies.

3. An issue of concern because of the sadistic turn it has taken; no longer mere fun.

manifestation of beastly instinct.

offshoot of socio-cultural milieu and psychological aberration.

reflection of the violence around us.

how to tackle the malaise-long-term and immediate steps.

ragging is obnoxious, and the defense put up for it is hollow; it should be curbed.

Come the months of July and August, and a new batch of students enter the portals of our colleges and universities. It should not surprise an onlooker if he sees an expression of furtive apprehensiveness on many a face; they are anticipating (not looking forward to, mind you) the traditional welcome their seniors have in store for them. Ragging.

Opinion differs on the nature and use of ragging. Some say; it is mere horseplay, just exuberant youthful spirit, only innocent fun. It is often justified as a means of putting the confused and inhibited 'fresher' at ease, a form of initiation ceremony which builds a lasting bond between the new comer and the seniors. The dictionary explains the term as having fun or poking fun at someone; to tease. Obviously, it implies some mild and harmless jokes.

Ragging, however, would not be an issue of concern if it were, indeed, only a form of fun. It might have been so once upon a time. Admittedly even now in most educational institutions, newcomers are subjected to some teasing and innocent chaffing. Hardly anyone would mind imitating a donkey or a favorite film star to afford some fun and laughter to the onlookers. But in some colleges, specially the professional institutes, ragging is not confined to such mild forms.

No sane person can call it fun to make fresher walk on the ledge of a building and ask him to jump off. Nor can one find anything amusing in asking a girl to strip in public. The boy fell off the wall and suffered irreparable injuries and

the girl went through untold mental agony. Is it possible that such experiences would make youngsters “feel at home” in their new environs and build a strong bond with their seniors? Obviously not. What it does, instead, is to blight a bright career or even end it altogether as the victim is driven to suicide.

And yet, this sadistic form of behavior is gaining ground in many of our institutions. A savage barbaric practice. R.K Narayan once compared this kind of response on the part of a senior towards a newcomer to the behavior of a wolf pack which falls upon a new arrival in their territory and dismembers it. It is a manifestation of the beastly instincts that lurks below the surface of the seemingly civilized man.

In a way, ragging is a reflection of the kind of society that exists today. Aping the West in so many ways and so indiscriminately, the Indian youth has taken to ragging, too. Ragging, once rampant in the west, is now on the wane there. But then, just as we are ready to accept obsolete technology from the West, we adopt their decadent practices as well even if they have discarded them. It is not just imitating the west, however, that is responsible for the growth of sadistic forms of ragging. The problem has psychological and socio-cultural roots.

Society today is beset by the competitive urge. With high population and low employment prospects there is a nightmarish scramble for the jobs available. Children are urged from a very early age to study and do well. And at the school leaving stage tension grips the children and parents alike as the future course of action has to be decided. In the constant race to do better, the child's mind is overburdened and somewhere along the line there is a sad loss of sensitivity, imaginative impulse and sense of proportion. The less said of values the better; the goals that society strives for are power and pelf by hook or by crook. In this milieu an adolescent mind is ruined.

Why is it that ragging takes the most atrocious forms in our premier ‘elite’ institutions such as the IITs? The best brains and brilliant minds are there; but most of them have reached that status because of the goading of ambitious parents and most of them are haunted by the specter of intense hard work, but curiously enough it does not. What happens instead is the development of a warped mind torn by resentment at the constant goading and a deep wish to defy it, and the tension born of the continuous effort to maintain a winning lead in the heartless competition. The frustrations and helpless anger find an easy outlet in the form of sadistic ragging of a newcomer who is weak and vulnerable.

We are living in an increasingly violent society, violent not merely in action but in mental attitudes as well. Images of bloodshed and terror confront us on all sides, making us immune to violence. Nobody is particularly conscious of what is

decent and what is indecent. Cultural values have got confused and eroded. And in the total emphasis on academic proficiency, humane ideals, beauty and taste have been sidetracked if not completely discarded. Vulgar ragging is only an offshoot of this chaotic world in which there is a vacuum of values and meaningful outlet for energy and creativity.

If this obnoxious phenomenon has to be stopped, it is clear that our educational pattern has to change; our socio-cultural decadence has to be reversed. Sensitivity to human and social problems must be inculcated in our youth and their imaginative creativity given a chance to develop along constructive channels. This, of course, calls for a sea- change in attitudes in adults – the parents and the teachers and the leaders of society.

Long –term efforts have to be, however, supplemented by immediate firm steps to thwart the practice of ragging. Merely banning it on paper is meaningless if that ban is not seriously implemented. It is disturbing that most wardens of hostels, who are more deeply affected by the malaise, and professors tend to turn a blind eye on incidents of ragging, almost defending it or at least excusing it on various grounds. And if the perpetrators are caught, there is an unwillingness to blight a bright academic career by suspension or expulsion. Academic brilliance is surely no excuse or compensation for inhumane behavior. Indeed, this knowledge that they will go scot free further breeds an arrogance in the students which is the very antithesis of wholesome education. Incidents of ragging must be firmly dealt with and the situation more carefully monitored by the authorities as well as right-minded students themselves.

To an extent, ragging is part of a vicious circle. One batch of students experience it, and when it is in a position to hand it out, it cannot resist the impulse. It is immaterial that those on whom revenge is being taken are innocent of the original crime. Nor does anyone want to realize that two wrongs do not make a right. At some point of time, a spoke has to be put in that vicious wheel; one batch of students has to be wise enough to desist from ragging the ‘freshers for that first time. A cooperative effort is required to solve the problem.

However, one considers it, ragging in the form that is prevalent today is an obnoxious practice. The brave attempts to defend it- “it is all in good fun”, “no one really minds”. “it helps one to grow up”-have a hollow ring I the face of stark reality; the trauma experienced by the victims and suicides that have been its end products. It is high time the practice is firmly curbed.