

RAGGING

INTRODUCTION

It has been rightly said that the end may not always justify the means. Behind the façade of 'welcoming' new students to college, ragging, in actuality, is a notorious practice wherein the senior students get an excuse to harass their junior counterparts, and more often than not, make them easy targets to satiate their own perverse sadistic pleasures. Apart from sustaining grievous physical injuries, those unfortunate students who succumb to ragging either develop a fear psychosis that haunts them throughout their lives, or worse, quit their college education even before it begins. For any student who slogs day and night to secure admission into a prestigious college, ragging can be his or her worst nightmare come true. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, today, ragging has taken the shape of a serious human rights violation with even the most respected and disciplined educational institutes falling prey to it.

MEANING OF RAGGING

In common parlance, ragging means playing practical jokes on somebody or teaching someone a lesson. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India perhaps has given a more comprehensive meaning of ragging as under:

"Ragging is any disorderly conduct, whether by words spoken or written, or by an act which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness any student, indulging in rowdy or indisciplined activities which cause or are likely to cause annoyance, hardship or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior student and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the psyche of a fresher or a junior student."

So far there have been two landmark judgments prohibiting ragging. These are:

1. Ragging of Freshers in Thiruvananthapuram Government Engineering College vs. State of Kerala

2. Vishwa Jagriti Mission through President vs. Central Government through Cabinet Secretary

The judgment in the case of Vishwa Jagriti Mission through President vs. Central Government, through Cabinet Secretary is particularly significant as the Hon'ble Supreme Court, while exercising its jurisdiction under Articles 32 and 142 of the Constitution of India, has laid down broad guidelines for colleges and educational institutes to prevent ragging. Very Briefly, these guidelines are:

1. Anti -Ragging Movements To Be Initiated By All Colleges And Educational Institutes:

Anti-ragging movements should be initiated by the institutions right from the time of advertisement for admissions. The prospectus, the forms for admission and/or any other literature issued to aspirants for admission must clearly mention that ragging is banned in the institution and any one indulging in ragging is likely to be punished appropriately with punishment which may include expulsion or suspension from the institution or class for a limited period or fine with a public apology. The punishment may also take the shape of: (i) withholding scholarships or other benefits (ii) debarring from representation in events (iii) withholding results (iv) suspension or expulsion from hostel or mess, and the like. If there be any legislation governing ragging or any provisions in the Statutes/Ordinances they should be brought to the notice of the students/parents seeking admissions.

2. Undertakings To Be Taken Both From The Freshmen And Their Parents/ Guardians:

The application for admission / enrolment shall have a printed undertaking to be filled up and signed by the applicant to the effect that he/she is aware of the institution's approach towards ragging and the punishment to which he or she shall be liable if found guilty of ragging. A similar undertaking shall be obtained from the parent/guardian of the applicant.

3. Undertaking To Be Taken From Seniors Students And Their Parents/Guardians Too:

The institutions which are introducing such a system for the first time shall ensure undertakings being obtained from the students and their parents/guardians already studying in the institutions before the commencement of the next educational year/session.

4. Notices To Be Issued Indicating Where To Approach For Redressal In Case Of Ragging:

A printed leaflet detailing when and to whom one has to turn for information, help and guidance for various purposes, keeping in view the needs of new entrants in the institution, along with the addresses and telephone numbers of such persons, should be given to freshers at the time of admissions so that the freshers need not look up to the seniors for help in such matters and feel indebted to or obliged by them.

5. Management, Principles And The Teaching Staff To Have Personal Interaction With The Freshmen:

The Management, the Principal, the Teaching Staff should interact with the freshmen and take them in confidence by apprising them of their right as well as obligation to fight against ragging and to generate confidence in their mind that any instance of ragging to which they are subjected or which comes in their knowledge should forthwith be brought to their knowledge and shall be promptly dealt with. It would be better if the head of the institution or a person high in authority addresses meetings of teachers, parents and students collectively or in groups in this behalf.

6. Practorial Committees To Be Set Up:

At the commencement of the academic session, the institution should constitute a practorial committee consisting of senior faculty members and hostel authorities like wardens and a few responsible senior students:

A) to keep a continuous watch and vigil over ragging so as to prevent its occurrence and recurrence,

B) to promptly deal with the incidents of ragging brought to its notice and summarily punish the guilty either by itself or by putting forth its findings/recommendations/suggestions before the authority competent to take decision.

7. Ragging- Prone Zones To Be Identified And Carefully Guarded:

All vulnerable locations in the college such as the canteen, the playground, etc. shall be identified and specially watched.

8. Society To Be Sensitised On The Issue of Ragging:

The local community and the students in particular must be aware of the dehumanizing effect of ragging inherent in its perversity. Posters, notice boards and signboards wherever necessary, may be used for the purpose.

9. Failure To Prevent Ragging To Be Constructed As An Act Of Negligence:

Failure to prevent ragging to be constructed as an act of negligence in maintaining discipline in the institution on the part of the management, the principal and the persons in authority of the institution. Similar responsibility shall be liable to be fixed on hostel wardens/superintendents.

10. Hostels/Accommodations To Be Carefully Guarded:

The hostels/accommodations where freshers are accommodated shall be carefully guarded, if necessary by posting security personnel and placed in charge of a warden/superintendent who should himself/herself reside there, and wherein the entry of seniors and outsiders shall be prohibited before and after a specified hour of night except under the permission of the person in-charge. Entry at other times may also be regulated.

11. Migration Certificates To Mention Whether The Student Ever Indulged In Ragging:

Migration Certificates issued by every institution should have an entry apart from that of general conduct and behaviour whether the student had participated in, and in particular, was punished for ragging.

12. Withdrawal Of Financial Assistance To Institutes Where Ragging Incidents Are Reported:

If an institution fails to curb ragging, the University Grants Commission/Funding Agency may consider withdrawal of financial assistance to such an institution till such time as it achieves the same. A university may consider disaffiliating a college or institution failing to curb ragging.

13. Students To First Approach Their Colleges:

In case of any incident of ragging, the students must approach the Disciplinary Committee of their respective colleges first, and only if the said Committee does not take cognizance of the matter or if they feel dissatisfied with its decision that they should approach the police. The objective behind this is to restore the faith in the ability of educational institutions to maintain discipline and protect the interests of their students.

14. Police Not To Follow A Retributive Approach While Dealing With Ragging Culprits:

It may be important to note here that the above stated guidelines are only illustrative and are not intended to come in the way of the educational institutions and authorities devising ways and mean to curb ragging. If there are any local laws governing ragging, they should be implemented and knowledge and information about such laws should also be disseminated.