

## **Psychology Behind Ragging**

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Ragging has been debated and discussed for ages now but we always ignored to understand the hidden psychological mysteries associated with this menace. It has been almost two decades since we started to recognize ragging as a problem and hunt for a solution. But we have not moved much from the point, where we were 10 or 20 years back.

In our attempt to look for a quick solution we perhaps focused only on the law and order aspect of ragging but ignored to probe its psychological side. I find it extremely difficult to comprehend, that though ragging has taken so many innocent lives, ruined so many bright careers; it is perhaps the only social and human rights problem in the world in which the victim himself/herself becomes the perpetrator of the crime and yet nobody got interested to study and understand this mysterious phenomenon. We never bother to unravel the mystery that how a victim who is tormented badly makes his abuser his best pal in a short span of time and starts to believe and practice the same custom on his juniors.

We never bothered to question the ‘Whys’ of ragging. Why ragging is being practiced? Why does it get mass support? Why do people believe in such a custom? May be exploring answer to these questions and awareness of these answers could help us eradicate forever.

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In the absence of any scientific study on ragging, I would therefore start with the myths, mindset, brainwashing involved with ragging and try to explain how all this translate into a strong belief system which you can call as a psychology behind this evil and I would also try to draw similarities with other proven scientific concepts.

My understanding of this psychology behind ragging is not based on any scientific study but largely on my personal experiences of last 10 years. First as a fresher who was ragged badly in a medical college and had to leave it, then as a victim who ran from pillar to post and struggled for two years to get justice and now finally as an anti-ragging activist closely observing, researching and thinking on this issue for the past eight years.

Starting with the myths and misunderstanding, which I call as the pillars that support the concept of ragging, are (a) Many believe that ragging helps in breaking the ice between the seniors and freshers; it helps in making friendship; some say it helps in emotional bonding between the students (b) many believe that ragging helps in personality development of the students; helps them getting rid of their shyness; prepares them for the real world. And it is not only students studying in college believing in such concept but many teachers teaching in universities and colleges, people who went to college several years ago or even people who never went to college but just heard about the virtues of ragging blindly believe in such myths.

We can easily find people around us from all walks of life who strongly believe in such myths. Though because of the Supreme Court guidelines and tragic cases of ragging reported in recent times they will hesitate to openly show their support. However on talking to them, they would first segregate ragging into mild and severe and then gradually start justifying its need for the initiation of a long lasting camaraderie among students and its need to prepare the youngsters for the 'real world'.

And I see a major mindset problem whenever we try to define and draw the limits of ragging. We argue a lot over mild versus severe ragging. Any discussion on ragging

eventually turns into a debate on mild versus severe ragging. And I see even today majority of people are in favour of mild ragging. But we need to think, can there be anything like mild ragging? What may be mild for someone may be severe for others. We must not forget that all tragic cases of ragging started only in their milder forms or it was fun for someone. We need to understand that it is impossible to draw a line once ragging starts.

Then there is another problem, many of us who went to college several years ago though condemn ragging but we have a tendency to cherish our ragging days. Recently I met a very successful and a 'learned' gentleman. We met for some work purpose and after our brief introduction he came to know that I run an organization which opposes ragging. This was quite interesting for him because during his engineering and management studies he was ragged and he ragged as well, which he enjoyed a lot. He soon started justifying that why ragging is good for youngsters and how it helped him in making friends and how much fun he had those days and that Aman Kachroo's case is an exception and it shouldn't have happened. Soon our business meeting turned into an hour long debate on ragging versus noragging. And this is not the only example, I have seen whenever there is discussion on ragging we become nostalgic about our own ragging time. How good it was; how much fun we had with our seniors and juniors and it is only now that ragging has deteriorated.

When we make such comparisons and suggest others that my ragging was healthy and now it has turned ugly then aren't we somewhere in a subtle way justifying the concept and need of this evil practice? Aren't in some way we are asking only for reform in the menace but not the complete eradication of it? Next time before we do this again, we need to think about it.

Recently I visited a prestigious medical college in Bangalore and I was told that after strictness against ragging on campus, senior students have boycotted their juniors and there is confusion. There is confusion as to what amounts to ragging and what doesn't; what will happen to the senior-junior interaction in the absence of ragging. Can seniors

now talk freely to their juniors? And, this confusion exists not only in this medical college in Bangalore but in of colleges and universities across the country. Strictness alone cannot solve this problem but will lead to confusion.

Another strong reason behind ragging is our failure to inculcate in our youngsters a feeling of respect for people from different backgrounds. As a result when youngsters go to college, ragging becomes a soft tool to manifest that hatredness they nurtured against people from other communities. It is a bitter fact to accept but across the country ragging is mainly done on the lines of caste, region, language, religion, economic background and all other different diversities that we have in society. I remember just this week only a ragging case was reported from Andhra Pradesh in which seniors ragged their juniors because the juniors belonged to the Telangana part and seniors were from different region of the state.

Here I would briefly touch upon the subject of bullying, especially bullying in schools. I believe to some extent bullying in school is the seed that germinates into ragging in college. Across the world, people bully others to establish their supremacy by making fun of someone's background or certain traits which might be in minority. It could be on someone's accent; it could be on someone's physique; it could be on someone's native place or it could be on someone's economic background. Schools in the western countries have started to take bullying as a serious offence and sensitizing their students against it. However given the enormous diversity that we have in our country, bullying in school is on a much larger scale in India but the problem is yet to be recognized.

It is all this that has gradually transformed into a psychology; it is this which influences not only young minds but society as well.

Talking about the society, I see a strange paradox. Whenever there is a death due to ragging we come on the streets to show our anger against this menace. But when movies like 3 Idiots and Munnabhai show ragging scenes, then inside the theatre we find those scenes humorous and forget the protests that we participated in the past.

I sometimes ask myself, when the society hasn't accepted ragging as a social evil but still seeking humor in it then how will we implement the anti ragging laws? After all implementation has to be done by the society, on the society and this is possible only when there is conviction and consensus on that issue, which seems to be currently lacking with regard to ragging.

When ten years ago I was affected with ragging and later when I started working as an anti ragging activist, I always believed that law needs to be strengthened to curb this menace. However in the last 4-5 years I have come to the conclusion that ragging is more of a mindset problem than anything else. Though it looks simple to solve it by making strict laws but we can never solve it unless we change the mindset as well. This can be done best by going into the roots of this problem. Though no specific study has been done on ragging, however I find certain western psychological concepts like Stanford Prison Experiment, Miligram Experiment, Stockholm syndrome, having close similarities with ragging and can help us broaden our understanding.

Amongst these three concepts, I find Stockholm syndrome to be most closely related to the phenomenon of ragging. Some of you might already know what Stockholm syndrome is. For others I will give a brief introduction.

In August 1973, two bank robbers, in Stockholm held 3 women and a man hostage for a period of 6 days. In those six days the hostages developed emotional bonds with their captors and exhibited shocking attitude. They not only resisted the attempt made by the police to rescue them but one of the woman hostages later got engaged to one of the kidnappers and another arranged fund for the legal defense of the kidnappers. This incident baffled many across the world.

Psychologists later tried to study the behavior shown by the Stockholm hostages and termed this phenomenon as 'Stockholm Syndrome'. Psychologists believe that hazing,

child abuse, pimp-prostitute relationship, battered spouses' relationship, etc work on same psychology and call them 'Societal Stockholm Syndrome'.

According to evolutionary psychology, capture-bonding, or social reorientation after capture, was an essential survival feature for millions of years. The captives who reoriented survived, and those who did not form social bonds with captors were killed. Psychologists say that anyone can become a victim of Stockholm Syndrome if the certain conditions are met: (i) Perceived threat to survival (ii) The captive's perception of small kindnesses from the captor (iii) Isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor (iv) Perceived inability to escape. And it is said that it takes as little as 3-4 days for this psychology to take hold of the victim.

When I recall my ragging days in Medical College at Allahabad, I find close similarities with Stockholm syndrome. Each time during ragging, my seniors used to first beat me recklessly for hours without any provocation then show act of kindness by offering me tea, samosa, cold drink and promise me of helping me later with notes. Perhaps unknowingly they were applying this same psychological technique; trying to break me psychologically. Same pattern can be seen in ragging across the country. Most of the victims just give in to this strong psychological technique. Fortunately this phenomenon did not work on me; however, now I feel that if little less torture had been applied or my parents had not allowed me to leave the college, I would have easily become a victim of it and would have happily bonded with my tormentors.

Here is another example of this psychology. Recently I saw a similar situation in an award winning Polish film '*Your name is Justyna*'. This film almost brought tears to my eyes and on several occasions even forced me to change the channel. This film shows a pimp who uses similar strategy to convince Justyna, the lead character in that film, into prostitution. His strategy was to psychologically break her down by using torture and kindness alternately. The director of this Film, Franco De Penn, while doing research on this subject found that using this psychological tactics, more than one hundred and fifty

thousand girls in Europe were taken into prostitution. He says that this experience is so shocking that it takes away individual's whole personality.

People who have worked on Stockholm syndrome agree that it does help in establishing emotional bonds but they call it 'traumatic bonding' and a manipulative behavior. If this is the same psychology that helps in establishing bonds between the students during ragging then we need to ask ourselves. For the sake of bonding, is it justified to go this far and try destructive methods at the cost of one's liberty, dignity and personality or even life? I am sure none of us would agree.

So now we come to the question how do we solve the problem of ragging? Where does the solution lie? Today Laws have been made, ragging has been banned by the Supreme Court, 24 hour helpline number has been started but it seems that the problem just refuses to die down. Did we ever question why this is so? It is so because the pillars that support the concept of ragging are still intact. We have not yet tried to address the fundamental reasons which are given to justify ragging. Real problem is that we have done everything we could do but we are yet to make our students think on this issue. Solution lies in thinking. We have to give students a chance to think and question the reasons that support this menace.

And not only students but we all need to introspect and realise, isn't ragging like a mass friendship crash course? Does friendship require any artificial mechanism? All friends that we have are because of ragging? Can we make friendship only by dancing and singing? What if I don't know to dance or sing but I am good at painting? Then I can't make friends?

To my knowledge ragging is not prevalent in western countries, does that mean people there don't make friends, don't have good personality; they can't face the real world?

Today we have created lot of awareness about the ill effects of ragging, about the ban on ragging, about the toll free number, which I think is good but we also need to create awareness about various other important aspects of ragging. There is still a very little knowledge about the origin of this sort of tradition, why is it irrelevant in today's time, Where did it come from? How and when it came to India? Which other countries in the world follow this practice? Spreading awareness of these aspects can play an important role in weakening the mass support, which ragging currently enjoys.

In the end, just summing up my points and re-highlighting them again I would say that along with strict laws we need to create comprehensive awareness, we need to dispel all the misconceptions about ragging, we need to intelligently break the belief system that supports ragging, we need to instill in our youngsters a sense of respect and sensitivity towards the differences and diversity that we see in our society.

I am sure after introspection on ragging, we would just hate to be identified with it, we would be forced to rethink about the virtues of ragging we believe in, we would be forced to rethink the justifications we give to support ragging and this would eventually lead to its natural death simply by the way of thinking and application of logic.

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