

Is it Ragging or Stockholm Syndrome in our Campuses?

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Coalition to Uproot Ragging from Education (CURE)

Ragging is debated and discussed for ages now but we always stopped short of understanding the hidden psychological mysteries behind it. It has been more than a decade and a half since we started to recognize this problem and hunt for a solution but we are still far way from our goal. At the outset the problem looks very simple but as one enters into it and tries to understand, it becomes more complicated than unfolding the Bermuda triangle mystery.

In our attempt to look for an early solution we perhaps focused too much on the law and order aspect of ragging and ignored to probe on the psychological front. We didn't 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 follow the same strategy on his junior. May be exploring answer to these questions and awareness of these answers could have led to a better understanding of this problem and have sorted it by now.

In August 1973, two bank robbers in Stockholm held 3 women and one 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'. They say that this is a common behavior seen in hostage situation. Psychologists believe that hazing, child abuse, pimp-prostitute relationship, battered spouses' relationship, etc work on the same psychology and call them 'Societal Stockholm Syndrome'.

In evolutionary psychology, psychologists explain that 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 believe that anyone can get Stockholm Syndrome if the following 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. Psychologists believe that it takes about three or four days for this psychology to take hold of the victim mentally. A more in depth information about the psychology that works in such situations and the effect it has on one's personality can be found in the book '*Psychology of torture*' by Dr. Sam Vaknin

Now, when I look back to my ragging days in Medical College, I can easily understand why my seniors, each time during ragging, used to first beat me recklessly for hours without any provocation then show act of kindness towards me and offer me tea, samosa, etc. and promise me of helping me later with notes. Perhaps they were applying this same psychological technique of torture by playing the good guy and bad guy at the same time, trying to break me psychologically- an art they learnt from their seniors. Same pattern in ragging can be seen across the country. Most of the victims just give in to this strong psychological tactics. Fortunately this phenomenon did not work on me; however, I feel that if little less torture had been applied, I would have easily become a victim of it.

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. The 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 simultaneously using torture and kindness. The director of this Film, Franco De Penn, while doing research on this subject found that using this psychological phenomenon, 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. Psychologists who have worked on this

phenomenon believe that this is not only harmful to the individual who goes through it but also to others around him/her.

This psychology is so long lasting that we can find people around us who went through ragging decades ago but are still under the influence of this psychology. 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 students for the 'real world'. Psychologists agree that this phenomenon helps in establishing emotional bond but they call it 'traumatic bonding' and a manipulative behavior which has harmful effect on victim's personality. We need to ask ourselves that 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. I am sure none of us would agree.

People are so blind folded by the virtues of ragging that they are not aware of the destructive psychology behind it. Furthering our understanding and awareness of this psychology could help in weakening the mass support that ragging enjoys and can gradually put a psychological taboo on it. I believe that asking the students and faculty to do some Google search on such psychological phenomenon might prove more useful than various methods of awareness that we are currently following. After knowing that ragging is a psychological disorder, many would just hate to be identified with it, many would be forced to rethink about the virtues of ragging they believe in, many would be forced to rethink the justifications they give to support ragging and this might eventually lead to peaceful and natural death of ragging by the simple method of thinking and application of logic.

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