Combating Ragging in Educational Institutions

For Prelims: Legal Consequences of Ragging in India, Raghavan Committee, Supreme Court

For Mains: UGC Guidelines to Curb the Menace of Ragging, Issues Related to Higher Education System in India.

Source: IE

Why in News?

The issue of ragging, a persistently troubling phenomenon in Indian educational institutions, has once again captured national attention due to a recent incident at Jadavpur University.

- The Supreme Court of India has taken significant steps to address this issue through various cases and guidelines.

What is the Current State of Anti-ragging Measures in India?

- Defining Ragging: Supreme Court’s Perspective
  - In the 2001 (Vishwa Jagriti Mission) case, the Supreme Court provided a comprehensive definition of ragging.
  - It described ragging as any disorderly conduct that involves teasing, treating, or handling fellow students with rudeness, engaging in undisciplined activities causing annoyance or psychological harm, or generating fear among junior students.
  - The Court also noted that the motives behind ragging often include deriving sadistic pleasure, showcasing power, authority, or superiority by seniors over freshers.

- Key Guidelines Issued by the Supreme Court:
  - The Supreme Court guidelines emphasized the importance of setting up proctoral committees within educational institutions to prevent and address ragging.
  - Furthermore, it highlighted the possibility of reporting ragging incidents to the police if they become unmanageable or amount to cognizable offenses.

- Raghavan Committee and UGC Guidelines:
  - In 2009, the Supreme Court revisited the ragging issue and appointed a committee led by former CBI Director RK Raghavan to address it comprehensively.
  - The committee's recommendations were later adopted by the University Grants Commission (UGC).
    - The UGC issued detailed guidelines that universities were required to follow in order to counter ragging effectively.
    - The UGC guidelines, titled “Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions,” highlighted several forms of ragging, including teasing, causing physical or psychological harm, generating a sense of shame, and engaging in financial extortion.
    - The guidelines also mandated universities to publicly declare their commitment to
preventing ragging and required students to sign undertakings that they would not engage in such activities.

- The UGC also placed responsibility on educational institutions to take proactive measures against ragging.
  - Universities were required to establish committees comprising course-incharges, student advisors, wardens, and senior students.
  - These committees were tasked with monitoring and regulating interactions between freshers and seniors, ensuring a healthy and safe environment.

**Note:** UGC also recognised gender identity and sexual orientation as grounds for ragging in 2016.

**Legal Consequences of Ragging in India:**
- While ragging itself is **not categorized as a specific offense**, it can be penalized under various provisions of the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.
  - For instance, **wrongful restraint**, as defined under Section 339 of the IPC, can lead to imprisonment for up to one month or a fine of up to five hundred rupees, or both.
  - **Wrongful confinement**, governed by Section 340 of the IPC, can result in imprisonment for up to a year or a fine of up to one thousand rupees, or both.

**Related State-Level Legislation:**
- Several Indian states have introduced special legislation to combat ragging.

**Way Forward**

- **Strengthening Anti-Ragging Measures:** There is a need to institute collaborative audits involving external experts, students, and faculty members to assess the effectiveness of anti-ragging measures.
  - These **audits can provide insights into gaps**, areas of improvement, and successful practices.
  - The **findings can be used to refine and adapt governance strategies**, ensuring a proactive approach to preventing ragging.
- **Digital Reporting Tools:** There is a need to develop a dedicated reporting portal or mobile app where students can report ragging incidents anonymously.
  - The system could **incorporate real-time notifications to relevant authorities**, ensuring swift intervention.
- **Community Engagement Events:** There is a need to organize regular community events that involve students in **volunteer work, community service, and social outreach**. Building a sense of responsibility and unity can help reduce the inclination towards ragging.