

## The Death of Formal Introduction; the End of an Era

*Students at Pilani explore how ragging and the absence of it have changed the cultural chemistry between seniors and freshers. The Era had finally come to an end.*

**BITS Pilani Campus TEAM**

"Intro?" booms a great voice, resounding with the weight of seniority, as a poor, cowering first *yearite* makes an attempt to gather his wits and not blabber hopelessly under the hawk-like scrutiny of the fearful seniors around him.



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"I see English seems to be a problem for you..." a sarcastic voice quips from a corner. "Is there any other language in which 'we want your intro' can be driven into you?" A nervous smile escapes the first *yearite*. The moment it comes, he tries hard to wipe out its existence, but too late. They've spotted it. "Let's teach him how to bury that smile, boys," Fade out...

Cut to a year later. Our fickle first *yearites* in the above tale have now grown up to be lanky, unshaven men with long hair and in unwashed T-shirts. They own the Earth, they rule the show. And after the indignities they've been put through in their first year, they feel entitled to a little poetic justice from the guy up there. So while wending their way back to the wilderness amid the cactus shrubs, they dream of a day when

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they too shall surround some innocent *freshie* and demand in raspy voices "Intro?" Nothing fancy, you understand, just the old intro and maybe a few questions and perhaps a little fun with a bucket and floor mops...

But before the happy film over their eyes has time to dissolve, a rude shock awakens them from their reverie.

"I ----- bearing ID number----- hereby pledge that I shall neither indulge in nor abet any form of ragging as I know it to be a punishable offence under the Indian penal code..."

Their throats dry up, as those pleasant images of reclining on a bean bag with two first *yearites* fanning them and a third running to order food at Sky, suddenly dissolve into Technicolor pixels before vanishing altogether. They gulp. They sign. They leave, with broken spirit and broken heart.

Once out of the sight of authority, however, the thoughts come creeping back to them. Courage seems to return. They band together and soon, raucous cheers are heard. "This will not stand! This hostility will not stand! We have the right to get to know our juniors!" And so the Brotherhood of the Brave is formed.

Finding a poor unsuspecting junior proves harder than ever because now, first *yearites* are no longer allowed to share meat, mead and computers with seniors in the same *bhavans*. They've instead been sequestered away in Ashok *Bhavan*, far away from the poisonous breath of the vile seniors. There are rumors of a spot-fine of 500 rupees if a second year beast is found molesting the virtue of a first *yearite* by talking to him or her.

But luck seems to favour the brave indeed for all of a sudden a first *yearite* practically

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drops into their hands. The little innocent being approaches them with a friendly smile and wants to know the way to C'not. A slow smile of pleasure spreads across the face of the Brothers. "We'll show you the way, little one," they assure him as they usher him along. Their grins become wider as they approach the gates of Budh *bhavan*.

But no sooner do they attempt to cross the border when the 'little first year' stops and turns around to face the nearest Brother. "This isn't C'not. Let me go." he says softly. The Brothers look at each other, grinning mischievously at the naive one. One Brother places a hand on the first *yearite's* shoulder and says "That's not the way it works, boy. You leave when we say you leave."

"I don't think so." The first *yearite* whips out his phone and waves it in the air, arrogance oozing from every pore. "I've got the UGC hotline on speed-dial number 1. Anti-ragging committee on speed dial number 2. And the first year protection squad, number 3. Take your pick."

The Brothers back away from the first *yearite* as men away from hot coal, confused, "Listen boy, relax. We haven't even asked you for an intro yet..." "Yeah, put the phone down. We're from a department; we just want to talk..."

A menacing smile spreads across the first *yearite's* face, "Well, I can't take that chance. I don't plan to be ragged. Now turn around and walk away, I don't want to see your faces ever again."

The Brothers step away humiliated and saddened. As they slowly walk down the road towards the *redi*, they are joined by another group of disheartened seniors from Ram *Bhavan*. They pat each other on the back. "Drinks are on me", someone shouts. They raise their *shikanji* glasses in a toast, "To the death of 'The Formal Introduction' - To the end of an era."

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We have used the license of dramatic exaggeration to a some extent in this article. However, it is based in ground reality. The UGC regulations for anti-ragging are being imposed in colleges across the country. This strategy does comprise of a three tier support system for first *yearites*- a student

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level anti-ragging squad, an institute level student anti-ragging committee and an overseeing faculty group.

And of course, every Indian is well aware of the nation wide fine for 'ragging'- fifty thousand rupees.

In addition, wardens have been on the prowl in Pilani, covering careful rounds, checking every room that might hold seniors indulging in "questionable activities". They are doing all they can to make sure that these juniors feel at home, just stopping short of escorting first *yearites* to their rooms after meals.

And in the light of all these arrangements to make the juniors on campus feel 'comfortable', we are faced with certain questions. Can no one see over and beyond the 'ragging' to see the good it brings? Is this what the bond between a senior and a junior has been reduced to? Next year, how close will the new batch be to their juniors on campus? The BITSian traditions, unheard of in other colleges, of knowing seniors better than your batch mates, having some of your best friends in senior batches and going to seniors for help is dying. We can only hope that a balance is struck between these anti-ragging measures and BITSian traditions, else the BITSians of tomorrow will definitely be nothing like the BITSians of yesterday, the bond will stand broken. A sad day that will be for Pilani.

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