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**ABUSE, HARASSMENT AND TORTURE UNIVERSITY
STYLE: A STUDY OF THE FORMS AND PRACTICES OF
RAGGING IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA**

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Legitimization of change of social status of individual members in traditional societies is done through a ritualistic process called initiation. A number of contemporary institutions are known to maintain similar traditions as part of their sub-culture. *Ragging* in the Universities is one such sub-cultural tradition. However, unlike the initiation rituals in traditional societies many of the modern day initiation practices are harmful to society and the individual.

The aim of the paper is to understand the types and forms of *ragging* and to examine whether it can be considered an initiation ritual. The analysis is based on a survey that was carried out in 1995 in the University of Peradeniya. The use of 1995 data is justified as two years is not long enough to have any significant changes in the types and forms of *ragging* and its social basis.

The study showed that *ragging* practices can be classified into two groups. The first is the activities that cause physical pain, leading even to injuries, on those who are ragged. The second is those that take the form of verbal abuse causing mental strain. The injuries caused by the latter are not often visible and immediate. Of the activities of *ragging* the majority fall into the first group. *Ragging* activities in the University show a parallel between *hazing* in the United States and *ragging* here indicating to a gradual *Americanization* of *ragging* in this country.

Ragging in its physical form is predominantly a male activity. The clear majority of the students who are engaged in this form of *ragging* and those who are subjected to it are males. In inflicting mental abuse however both males and females showed similar involvement. *Ragging* across gender almost exclusively takes place in the form of verbal abuse. *Ragging* showed a close association with the socio-economic background of those who are involved. Contrary to the popular belief it is those who come from rural areas, regional schools and those who belong to low income groups are the ones who often get *ragged* and are very often the perpetrators of *ragging*. There is also a close relationship between *ragging* and political activities in the campus. *Ragging* is manipulated by political groups to recruit members. This happens in two ways. One way is to win the student over through sympathy. The other way is by subjecting one to extreme *ragging*. It helps to identify the stronger personalities and those who are won over in this manner remain loyal to the cause and the leadership.

The claim that *ragging* promotes solidarity and friendship and also a great leveler is unfounded. Only a very small minority of those who get *ragged* continued to be friends with the *raggers*. Neither has it succeeded in promoting equality among the students. There is little evidence to show that *ragging* in its present form serves any function in the University community.