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Swapnodeep Kundu death: Raging ragging debate bares Jadavpur University campus divide

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KOLKATA: The death of Swapnodeep Kundu on Thursday laid bare the fissures on the Jadavpur University campus over the issue of ragging with a section of seniors students refusing to acknowledge the problem and others blaming the persistence of ragging culture in hostels by seniors, including those who had already passed out of the university.



Even as the issue of ragging raged on campus on Thursday, a scuffle broke out between two student groups in the afternoon with one calling Swapnodeep's death a clear case of ragging and the other trying to paint a different picture by alleging that the victim was mentally unstable and had taken his own life.

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This incident indicates that not everything is okay on campuses. An academic session has just begun and this is the time when some first-year students may feel vulnerable, especially those who have come from outside the

city. Universities and hostel managements need to take special care of such students and hand-hold them till they are more comfortable in their new environment. More importantly, they need to keep an eye on potential trouble-makers who may take advantage of freshers' vulnerability.

The differences continued to crop in multiple students' general body meetings held on Thursday following the student's death. At the meeting organised by the Faculty of Engineering and Technology Students' Union (FETSU), a section of students refused to relate ragging to the incident.

"Only a section of students feel that it is ragging. Others believe it's an outcome of gender-insensitive comments. We want a ragging-free campus," said FETSU general secretary Gourav Das.

At this very meeting, a student said there are few seniors and students who are not ready to consider this case as ragging and are trying to shield those who have forced Swapnodeep to take the extreme step.

Jahit Khan, member of Democratic Students' Front (DSF) Arts, said the student's death was a failure of the students' organisation who were not able to address the issue on the campus.

The issue of ragging also cropped up at the Arts Faculty Students' Union (AFSU) meeting. The students here demanded that the freshers be moved from the Main Hostel. They also demanded resignation of the dean and the superintendent for the continued incidents of ragging at the hostels. AFSU has decided to send mass mails to the UGC.

"What happened on Wednesday night is not something unprecedented. Ragging has been a culture at the hostels and has been normalised. Despite the issue being raised with the authorities in the past, it has never been properly addressed," said All India Students Association (AISA) JU unit secretary Barsha Baral.

SFI member Zulfikar Ahmed said the ragging at the Main Hostel had hurt Swapnodeep's self-dignity.

Bengali department teacher Abdul Kafi who was at the hospital all night broke down and said he felt guilty for

not being able to save a young life. Rajyeswar Sinha, another Bengali department professor, lamented that Swapnodeep must have faced extreme torture.

While students boycotted classes on Thursday, no JU official was present on campus. Pro-VC and joint registrar visited the campus in the morning. The dean of students, though, was there on the campus.

Governor CV Ananda Bose visited the campus in the evening and spoke to students, teachers and officials and assured that a proper probe would be conducted.