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Who Should Assess Institutions of Higher Education?

Ambrose Pinto S J*

There was a 'feeling good' emotion and euphoria among educationists and teachers when the Union Human Resource Minister, Prakash Javadekar recently announced that the government will enable IITs and IIMs to become accreditation bodies to ease the burden of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). NAAC is not even able to accredit 1000 institutions a year. There are more than 38,000 institutions in the country and NAAC is likely to take 38 years to complete the process if it carries on with the present speed, opined the Minister. However the real reasons seem to be different. With monopoly over assessment there has been rampant corruption in the accreditation system. Universities and Colleges who had received lowers grading scores have been able to move into higher grades in reassessments within a year or less. There are low quality institutions which have obtained high grades and there are quality institutions who have obtained low grades. Reasons are not difficult to guess. Besides money playing a role in some instances, many assessors are from institutions that have hardly had any experience of administering quality institutions with inadequate understanding of what higher education ought to be. There are surely cases of nepotism, favouritism and proximity to the powers to gain a favourable grade. Colleges know about it. Universities are aware that the public have sensed it and the Government has finally woken up.

Function of NAAC

The main function of NAAC was to promote quality in Higher Education through a process of assessment based on self-study report by institutions. Once the self-study report is submitted there is a visit by an expert committee called 'Peer Team Visit' and validation leading to assessment and accreditation of institutions. Till a decade ago, the role of NAAC was appreciated by one and all for its vision and mission. The Organization played a very proactive role in encouraging institutions on quality sustenance, enhancement and improvement. The Directors were competent and the peer team members were experts in the field. Good colleges voluntarily went ahead with accreditation since it was not mandatory. Several new initiatives and good practices were initiated in colleges. Once assessment became mandatory for grant-in-aid colleges number of assessors increased. Many of them were ill-equipped and some of them made use of it for their own personal interests. NAAC loudly professed that the body is above corruption. What the institution has overlooked is the practice of it in peer team visits and assessments. Not that all assessors are corrupt but corruption has penetrated the system is the public perception and that perception is not without substance.

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