

Thanks Rahul for inviting me to share my thoughts.

It is such a personal delight to see Tom in India after close to two decades. The credit for AAERI certainly goes to an idea floated by Tom in mid 90s and ably supported by Dr Nuna and Banu Siddharth.

I was part of the executive after the founders launched it and had joined it as East India executive member.

Something that might not be known to most is that along with AAERI, there was another Association promoted by Tom's team. It was called AIGA Association of Indian Graduates for Australia. An association for Indian alumni that had returned to India. Both the associations had its secretariat within the Australian High Commission with Banu looking after it. However it was only AAERI continue on and AIGA had a sudden end. This is being stated to communicate that the credit for AAERI to live through the two decades and grow on lies with its members. And at the same time the support of the counsellors Education has helped shaped the association. 2001 was an important year when following the various security concerns around the world, AAERI secretariat moved out of the Australian High Commission. Bernadette was the Counselor at that time and AAERI raised funds to buy its office in line with the norms of Registrar of the Societies. It took a few years but finally by mid of that decade, the new office was inaugurated by the Counsellor at that time Prof John Webb along with Mr Greg Kelly, Regional Director DIBP. The guidance of Quentin, Kelly Raj and Peter Nolan and currently of Amanda and Ben have been crucial.

I don't want to miss out on any names but want to thank all the High Commissioners over the years. High Commissioners John McCarthy and Peter Varghese especially come to my mind for the collaboration that AAERI had with them at the time when Australian Education was under immense threat following the media reporting in Australia.

I have worked with various diplomatic missions but the best that I experienced was that the various departments within AHC and especially DIBP which has been very open to feedback and criticism from AAERI giving it the role of a stake holders. There two instances that come to my mind: There was a time in our history when reacting to increased fraud, the visa office had involved the police in Delhi and that led to complications even when the members were not involved. AAERI approached then Minister Philip Ruddock and in some ways to complain on what was happening and the best part is that our petition was forwarded and our meeting organised through the office of DIBP Delhi itself. This showed the maturity of our relationship. Similarly we have met with Minister Amanda Vanstone at another occasion with certain concerns on the policy and were heard and certain changes made in the processes.

AAERI now begins another chapter and has several younger members taking active lead. This is so encouraging. AAERI is lobbying on several key policy issues. Onshore poaching of students by onshore agents leads to unfairness to offshore efforts being put in by the institutions and their representatives. This is an issue that can aggravate if the rumoured amendments to the ESOS Standard 7 occurs. The area of work that AAERI may continue with is recognition in India for the pathway and diploma led Australian degrees. Returning students with such qualifications are severely handicapped with further options.

I am also pleased with the AAERI NAAER MOU signed today as I was involved in the formation of NAAER along with AEI at one point of time.

So with a lot of hope this congratulations for the 20th anniversary is to all members of AAERI and the various departments of the Australian Government.

Thank You