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Lead Article

New World Knowledge Order: Eternal Search for Excellence

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Abstract

The notion of New World Economic Order is now passé. The New World Knowledge Order (NWKO)[i] *is both the present and future in thing. Academics, writers, researchers and critics have dealt with the development of human civilization and the nature of human evolution. They have mostly categorised various phases of the evolution in relation to the prevalence of different activities, endeavours, tools and techniques as part of the socio-economic realities. The agricultural and industrial components in the post-industrial society undergo transformations depending upon the inputs from the service sector which is primarily knowledge intensive and research oriented. This phase symbolises the Knowledge Economy. There is a logical and practical mixture of the hardware or the mechanical components and the software or knowledge, work, process and creativity at this juncture. This trend culminates in the journey from the New World Economic Order being transformed into The New World Knowledge Order (NWKO).*

Keywords*: Knowledge Driven Society, Knowledge Economy, New World Knowledge Order, Quality Higher Education.*

The much-discussed New World Economic Order is now passé. The New World Knowledge Order (NWKO) is both the present and future in thing. Academics, writers, researchers and critics have dealt with the development of human civilization and the nature of human evolution. They have mostly categorised various phases of the evolution in relation to the prevalence of different activities, endeavours, tools and techniques as part of the socio-economic realities. In this case the instances of agricultural societies and industrial societies can be taken as the glaring example of such discourse. Next came the post-industrial society. It witnessed the growth of the tertiary or service sector over and above the agricultural and

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industrial sectors (Daniel Bell: 1973). The white- collar workers slowly but steadily grew both in number and nature in relation to the blue- collar workers. Those who have been predominantly influential in making what is known as the industrial society. The critics who do not subscribe to the division of the socio-economic system into such categories of workers or even sectors point out that the post- Industrial society also did not witness the decline of industries as the basic component in any given system.[ii]

There is a view that the agricultural and industrial components in the post-Industrial society undergo transformations depending upon the inputs from the service sector which is primarily knowledge intensive and research oriented. The mixed phase is termed as information society and network society depending upon the emphasis given to information or dissemination of information (Castells: 1996). In this phase, there is a logical and practical mixture of the hardware or the mechanical components and the software or knowledge, work, process and creativity. The personnel are divided into creators of data and information; programmers and analysts of the accumulated information; network professionals in charge of sharing and dissemination of information.[iii] This trend culminates in the journey from the New World Economic Order being transformed into The New World Knowledge Order (NWKO).

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of a new society termed as the knowledge society. It is that phase of human evolution and which also stands for the ever-increasing dependence and inter-dependence of societies throughout the world on sharing of knowledge based on information, dissemination, local, national and international networking (Nico Stehr: 1994). Looking at the global scenario, some of the countries that are the front runners in terms of adoption and implementation of the nuances of knowledge society include, among others, The United States, Canada, European States, Scandinavian Countries, Australia and Japan. These countries along with a few others located in different parts of the world are also termed as knowledge driven societies (World Bank, 1998; United Nations, 2005). Knowledge is the sum total of information, facts and skills acquired with the help of education and experience. It includes both theory and practice. It makes use of the philosophical and logical derivations of what we learn, observe, perceive, store and share. It is also related to the act of recognising, accepting or judging in relation to time, place, space or persons. Knowledge is a public good which can never be confined to generations or societies anywhere and anytime in the continuous journey of human history and civilization. It is transmitted by the word of the mouth, written words, languages, symbols, subjects of study analysis and research without any boundaries or limitations. This has been the predominant trend throughout the world till recent times when economies started to rely on data, information and knowledge as the most vital resource or input. This process has been made further complicated due to the different levels of economic development across societies and consequent use of modern, sophisticated and state of the art tools and techniques of storage, processing and utilisation of acquired knowledge in various fields of human endeavour. While in theory, knowledge should be open, free and inclusive common good, the protectionist trends and practices have made knowledge exclusivist in favour of a few developed and advanced societies and to the disadvantage or detriment of many other so

called developing and under developed societies. It is a vicious circle. The resourceful and developed societies have access and capability to store and utilise knowledge in their own interest. At the same time the societies having access to vital knowledge, resources can steadily move in the path of rapid development. In essence most of the societies which are developing or under developed continue to be very poor knowledge societies and vice versa. In order to substantiate this scenario, it is significant to note that creation, accumulation, storage, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge in any given society mostly depend upon huge investments in terms of finance, infrastructure, institutional mechanism, high end technological know- how and skilled and qualified human resources. It is needless to emphasise that the advanced countries or front ranking knowledge driven societies do possess such resources or they have the capability to arrange or procure the same at a global level cutting across the barriers of borders and boundaries. On the other hand, the developing countries or the poor knowledge societies do not have the resources as mentioned above; neither they have the economic capability to procure such resources at any foreseeable future. However, much more than the resources, the societies located at different levels of economic development or the ladder of knowledge society can make considerable difference within the purview of their existing resource base by utilising the process of governance and the culture of learning attitude. India, one of the growing economies, may be taken up as a case study.

Some of the interacting features of the knowledge-based society or knowledge economy include, among others, the following:

Pedagogy[iv]

Pedagogy or teaching learning process is the backbone of education system that is primarily responsible for knowledge creation. It is the most practised method of imparting knowledge in a formal face to face or classroom situation. With a shift in the focus from formal to non-formal, open, distance and outreach education system in a knowledge driven society, teaching learning activities have come out of the four walls of the formal classroom and have reached the widest possible stakeholders through the use of computer, internet, digital and e -learning portals and such other virtual tools and techniques with a view to catering to not just the students but also to the society at large.

Access to Information

As a corollary to the teaching learning process, interactive knowledge sharing practices and the use of information and communication technology, a knowledge driven society puts emphasis on access to information by trying to remove the possible impediments including that of educational, administrative, financial and practical. For instance, weather predictions and warnings regarding possible natural calamities have proved to be vital not only for the farmers and related agencies but also for the administrative and disaster management agencies and people at large.

Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework

At the global level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the supporting Covenants along with many other international treatises and conventions urge the member states of the

United Nations to make education a universal and fundamental right of citizens. In India, Part four of the Constitution[v] that is the Directive Principles of State Policy mention the need for primary education. However, the right of children to free and compulsory education act enacted by the Parliament on August 04, 2009 has ensured free and compulsory education for children between six to fourteen years of age as mentioned in Article 21 A of the Constitution this Act came into force on April 01, 2010. By this India became a part of one hundred thirty-five nations in adopting such an historic. However, it is also a fact that millions of children in the above mentioned age group are either deprived of education due to lack of institutional arrangements or lack of access or dropping out within initial one or two year/s of joining primary education system .Such a scenario calls for a massive all out drive for universal primary education by harnessing all possible means and resources that can provide a very strong foundation for a knowledge driven society by ensuring literacy and education.

Gross Enrolment Ratio

While a knowledge driven society in the true sense of the term does not depend only on enrolment of students from primary to higher education, it definitely indicates that the wide gap between the eligible or prospective children and young men and women who are in need of education and that of actual enrolment of students at different levels of our education system that can create a big void. For instance, India has attained advancements in the fields of literacy, education and research during the seven decades after Independence. The country ranks low among the nations in terms of the gross enrolment ratio at all levels of education including the higher education sector compared with that of most of the advanced nations. This situation calls for urgent action that can attract the maximum number of prospective students to the education system by all possible means including that of formal education, non-formal education, open, distance and out- reach education. This is possible if the physical infrastructure is supplemented by virtual and digital infrastructure. It would be one of the most effective steps in creating a culture of knowledge-based society.

Aspects of Equality and Equity

India, a subcontinent due to its size and population is a classic example of regional social and cultural disparities that have direct impact on the twin aspects of the quality and equity in the education system. For instance, there is hardly any equality among regions, communities and groups primarily due to unequal funding, infrastructural facilities, lack of awareness of parents and guardians, etc. among many other contributing factors. Women, children and members of various disadvantaged groups suffer mostly because of such unequal features. At the same time, equity or the sense of justice or fairness is another significant aspect that can have impact on the output and outcome of the education system. it is also assumed that equity is basically about the process and equality is the outcome of the education system. In a knowledge driven society, it is all the more important that irrespective of the socio-economic condition, the citizens should get equal access to education, learning opportunities or acquisition of knowledge by all possible means of life and livelihood which can sustain various aspects of our society and economy. In this context, the role of the government, educational institutions mass media, funding agencies, private players civil society organizations, research and development institutions, innovation and skill development

agencies etc. deserves a special mention. The synergy achieved among all the stakeholders and by extensive use of information and communication technology, e-learning, digital and virtual interactions etc. can become the real constructive and positive interventions and strategies by ensuring the continued march towards achieving the goals of a knowledge driven society. Here and knowledge management can convert all such efforts into a collaborative endeavour of the entire society in creating and ensuring a knowledge revolution which could be both productive and pro- active. It may be mentioned that the researchers and knowledge agent can continuously pursue the twin values of equity and equality in the field of education and knowledge management that ultimately results in proactive participation and empowerment of the stakeholders in general and the direct beneficiaries in particular.

Higher Education

Even though all the components of the education system such as, pre-school, primary, middle, high school, higher secondary, college and university system, all are the contributing factors to build the edifice of education, higher education is at the top of this structure both literally and substantively in terms of quantity, the number of educational institutions of different varieties and student intake capacity, higher education system may be considered as having the least participants or stakeholders. But it is the cutting-edge education that is responsible for supplying the bulk of the quality human resources to different segments of the society, economy or polity. The majority of the students who join the primary education system drop out at different points while climbing the educational ladder due to various reasons and consequently percentage wise higher education system has the lowest gross enrolment ratio in comparison to all other segments. For instance, in India it is twenty five p.c. or out of every one hundred students who join the primary education system, only twenty five of them can reach the college or university level. However, in spite of such a scenario, the students, researchers and other professionals coming out of the higher education system hold the key to knowledge driven society. The presence of the Indian diaspora in U.S.A., Canada, England, Singapore, Australia and host of other countries testify the quality, skill, expertise and acumen of the alumni who have passed out from colleges and universities in India. In fact, many of the global chief executives of very successful multinational corporations are Indians who have completed their higher education in India. Many of them are the torch bearers of knowledge driven economy and society in many parts of the world.

Knowledge Assets and Knowledge Resources

Knowledge Assets and Knowledge Resources as available in any given state at any point of time are proportional to the investments and contributions of state, public charities, funding agencies, philanthropic organizations and individual citizens. Knowledge assets stand for the manpower, information storage, data base, written documents, printed materials, hard ware and software and causal legal framework and processes in relation to knowledge management. Knowledge resources include the formal and informal resources including financial, technological material and human resources contribute to creation, maintenance and management of knowledge and its application in various segments of socio economic, political, cultural and intellectual fields which in turn can lead to sustainable human development.

Intellectual Property Issues

In the majority of nation states, intellectual property is divided into four categories such as patents, trademarks, copy rights and trade secrets. Even some of the critics refer to a fifth category of intellectual property i.e. the human intellect which is primarily qualitative and intangible. Patent is the right related to a technical invention which can be either process patent or product patent. These are regulated by national acts and regulations. A trademark is a distinguishable symbol, expression or term in relation to a particular product. It gives a legal and practical identity. Its registration process is also subject to national laws and regulations. Thirdly, the legal right of the creator or owner of intellectual property is known as copyright. It means only such a person, agency or company enjoy the exclusive right to copy or reproduce their creation or product which no one else can do without permission. Finally, there is the trade secrets. It refers to the secret or confidential data or information with the trade mark holder or holders who can try to prevent others from knowing or utilising to the practical or financial disadvantages of the creators or owners. All the developed and advanced knowledge driven societies protect intellectual property rights to their extensive benefits and they also closely monitor the global political economy for preventing other countries from using the I.P.R. regimes and their applications. This situation has created some funny IPR issues between some of the developed nations on the one hand and the developing nations on the other particularly due to lack of awareness and robust national laws and regulations concerning IPR in most of the new and developing nations. For instance, the Basmati rice, ginger, turmeric, etc. which are very much part of Indian society and culture for centuries have been declared as the patented and trade mark related items in a few developed nations some years back just because India did not have the proper system of IPR. At present the situation is much better and India has her own IPR mechanism in place.

Constitution, Law and Justice System

Constitution of a state is regarded as the most fundamental law based on which all other laws are formulated and implemented. The judicial system ensures fair play and justice on the basis of the provisions of the constitution and the statutes or the laws made by the legislature. The Constitution of India has provided for the development of scientific temper, humanism, spirit of inquiry and reform as given under Article 51 A(h) as part of the fundamental duties of the citizens. This provision provides the basis of a knowledge driven society in the post - Independence era. This notion, inter alia, stands for questioning, observing, testing, analysing and communicating, all of which are the building blocks of a knowledge driven society. Another aspect which requires the pro- active intervention of judiciary is that as and when the occasion demands the judiciary upholds the spirit of the constitution and our legal framework which ensures participation and empowerment of cross sections of the society including women, children, youth, marginalised and disadvantaged sections of the society in relation to acquiring and making use of the features of knowledge driven society.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020[vi]

On 29th of July 2020, the Government of India has announced the National Education Policy- 2020. One of the primary objectives of the policy is to make India a knowledge

driven society or knowledge economy by strengthening research capabilities and international collaborations. The target is to make India a global knowledge superpower. In the international field, higher education in particular is in sync with corporate learning and market expectations. Achievement of the target of gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 50 p.c. is going to be a significant milestone in achieving the status of a global knowledge superpower. The NEP promotes a strong environment for innovation and skill development. The academic scenario has to work in tandem with our economic, business and international activities and dynamics. The ambitious target of investment in education to the tune of about six p.c. of the GDP will have tremendous boosting effect. The proposals for flexible entry and exit options along with removing the traditional compartmentalization of arts, science and commerce streams will lead to interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary educational system. Another noteworthy aspect is the pro-active step would be ambitious aim of providing educational avenues to almost a billion eligible young men and women by the year 2030. Incidentally, by that time, India will have the largest percentage of young people in the entire world. The youth of India along with their power of knowledge, skill and innovation would be the backbone of the national development edifice as well as that of the global society.

Knowledge as Capital

In classical economic theory, capital is considered as one of the most fundamental resources in any economy. Other resources such as, land, raw materials, machines, techniques and technology and human resources interact as well as depend heavily upon capital. Here, capital stands for money used for constructive and productive purposes. Slowly but steadily, knowledge has replaced capital as the main resource of economy in most of the contemporary societies. In fact, the most developed economies make use of the most advanced knowledge sources which is just the opposite of the situation in the underdeveloped and developing economies who are yet to explore and utilise the knowledge resources available to them to their fullest capability. In every society, rich or poor, education or sharing and dissemination of knowledge needs to be flexible, futuristic and problem- solving process by ensuring multiple stakeholder participation. With a view to creating a lasting educational environment that is conducive for a knowledge driven society, institutional and formal education should be supplemented by avenues for life- long learning by means of open, distance and outreach educational opportunities.

Skill and Soft Skills

Skill is the capability to perform a task by using minimum of resources that can result in maximum possible outcome. It stands for expertise or expert knowledge in the fields of cognitive, affective or evaluative domains. It is the critical link between theory and practice. While theoretical background ensures acquisition of knowledge, efficient and effective application of that knowledge completes the journey of skill. In knowledge driven society, only bookish knowledge may be regarded as the starting point. But attainment of the desired objectives by utilising that knowledge is the real hallmark of the knowledge driven society. Soft skills, on the other hand, refer to the personal qualities and attributes such as, communication, interaction, empathy, creativity and getting along with people supplement the technical or professional skills or rather sharpen those attributes. For instance, a

professional with exceptional domain knowledge can become a motivator or master trainer if he or she has a brilliant soft skill like communication ability. So, in essence, a knowledge driven society requires both skill development and soft skill advancement (Popa and Dobrin: 2007).

Knowledge Transfer

Different levels of education coupled with information and communication technologies function as the most significant channels of transfer of knowledge in a knowledge driven society. The interacting factors which facilitate knowledge transfer in a knowledge driven economy or society include, among others, academic institutions and infrastructure, information and communication technology, related state of art and highly sophisticated tools and methods, agencies and agents of the print and electronic media such as internet and local networks, social media platforms and channels, internal and external financial services and funding agencies, consulting firms and experts, and the overall societal environment, state machinery that aim at civilized living (Dinu and Curia: 2007).

Before discussing the relationship between quality higher education and knowledge driven society, it is pertinent to point out some of the challenges faced by most of the knowledge driven economies and societies. First and foremost, the perceptible gaps among different groups and individuals in any given society particularly in the sectors of technical and professional education pose serious challenges. Next, the issues relating to state-of-the-art educational infrastructure and ICT infrastructure may be considered as very grave issues with direct implications for uniform knowledge creation and dissemination. The digital divide that exists between the urban citizens and those from the rural areas is the outcome of lack of computer literacy, internet connectivity and unavailability of necessary gadgets such as, smart mobile phones, computer and lack of awareness and knowledge about the digital and virtual interactions and operations.

Talking about scenario in India, there is an urgent need to augment the educational opportunities that can lead to better accessibility, excellence and quality. In spite of the presence of brilliant and highly successful human resources or quality teachers, the overall situation in the entire country is not that encouraging both in terms of number and quality of teachers who are the most essential facilitators of quality higher education and the mentors of the knowledge driven society. The challenges concerning the availability of world class study materials including books, journals, magazines research publications as well as online resources need to be addressed without any further delay. The contribution of knowledge resources, networks, and public libraries having facilities for both print materials and e-resources calls for immediate attention by all concerned. Even though the scientists and experts from India occupy the front ranking positions in the fields of knowledge creation, retention, sharing and dissemination throughout the developed world , research and development , innovation and sharing of best practices continue to take a back seat as the majority of knowledge specialists , knowledge experts, knowledge trainers and knowledge workers till now harbour an undeclared fascination and inclination towards the western developed societies at the cost of the Indian knowledge society requirements.

Not only in the context of India, but also in most of the societies, intellectual property rights, patents and trade related protectionist measures have become highly restrictive in relation to the creation, dissemination and sharing of knowledge and in effect led to monopolistic practices that hinder the establishment of a truly global knowledge environment. The World Trade Organization and its different round of negotiations including the trade related intellectual property rights agreement have done less benefits and more harms to the developing countries in the absence of a level playing field for the developed and developing societies. Instead of supporting the domestic economy, industry and welfare measures such as reduction of poverty and illiteracy, the developing societies are compelled to accept and adopt many of the IPR and trade related notions which are heavily tilted in favour of the developed nations as against the urgent requirements of the developing societies. In the context of a growing knowledge driven society, knowledge transfer becomes the biggest casualty. The domestic environment suffers and the liberalization-privatization-globalization diktats compel the developing societies to allow one sided flow of goods and services from the developed societies while facing severe trade barriers and restrictions for sending their goods and services to the developed societies. This scenario in turn has created new and perceptible gaps among the advanced knowledge societies and the developing knowledge societies. Such knowledge gaps among the societies can be seen not only at the global level, but also within different regions and across sectors. Some of the resultant ill effects arising out of the above mentioned unfair regimes and practices are brain drain from the developing knowledge societies to the developed ones; one sided migration; and, unhealthy concentration of highly skilled knowledge workforce or human resources in a few of the pockets within the developed societies to the detriment of the developing knowledge societies who in fact are in dire need of such skilled workforce in the interest of the development of such knowledge driven societies. In the context of any knowledge driven society, the workforce that is essential for its day today activities and also as the catalyst of further development and innovation, may broadly be divided into three categories. They are, first, the lowest level of workers who are in charge of support mechanism and personal services; second, the middle level workers or the bulk of personnel operating at various spheres and who are engaged in the common, simple and repetitive activities; and, finally, the top level workforce consisting of decision makers, problem solvers and symbolic analysts and the experts or consultants who provide the overall direction, guidance, strategy and control mechanism (Robert Reich: 1991). The present-day world which is supposed to be a New World Knowledge Order (NWKO) based on common knowledge and knowledge sharing or knowledge transfer among all the societies has become a system of discrimination and domination. This is antithetical to a free knowledge based global system in which all such societies are supposed to be equal o partners.

Extensive advancement of information and communication technology along with state-of-the-art procedures and processes widen the gaps among different societies, while opportunities for creation and progression of knowledge are also concentrated among a few developed societies to the disadvantage of majority of developing societies. We are reminded of the universal nomenclature that is knowledge workers who should be evenly distributed

throughout the world for contributing to the necessities of different knowledge driven societies (Peter Drucker: 1994). In this context, it is obvious that knowledge-based occupation are ought to be different, wide-ranging and numerous depending upon the immediate, short term, medium term and perspective requirements of all the societies (NicoStehr: 2002).

Quality Higher Education among the developing knowledge driven societies can prove to be the panacea. Learning opportunities for most of the eligible young men and women who are the prospective entrants into the higher education system can open the hitherto closed or unexplored avenues of knowledge creation, dissemination, sharing and transfer. Quality is the buzz word here. It can be ensured with the help of appropriate and effective pedagogy or teaching, learning activities, student support services, continuous process of evaluation and assessment and futuristic learning output and outcome. Higher education system has been in advertently associated with granting, awarding or acquiring degrees and diplomas. This path has to stop at some point of time. The interacting aspects such as acquisition and sharing of knowledge, skill upgradation and skill development, innovative practices, community outreach and extension activities and empowerment of the youth, etc. should be the building blocks of quality higher education which is complementary and supplementary to the stated objectives of a knowledge driven society. Again, the twin principles of adaptability and flexibility concerning the requirements and expectations of the stakeholders could be the hallmarks of quality higher education and knowledge driven society.

The internal quality assurance cells (IQACs) which have become an integral part of the higher education institutions have the most vital and pro- active role to perform at the micro level for ensuring all the necessary quality standards and the best practices by means of sharing and networking in tune with the macro rules, regulations and guidelines. The National Education Policy-2020 of India prescribes very clear and exhaustive guidelines and frameworks for quality higher education in India with a view to revolutionizing the higher education scenario and heralding a new era of quality, innovation and excellence which can promote the cherished objectives of knowledge driven society. These include, among others, the role of HECI – Higher Education Commission in India which has four verticals as the integral parts:

a) The first vertical NHERC: The National Higher Education Regulatory Council which covers the activities of regulatory agencies such as UGC, AICTE, and NCTE as the common and single point regulator for higher education sector including universities, colleges, technical institutes and teacher training and education.
b) The second vertical NAC: The National Accreditation Council will accredit Institutes based on basic norms, public self-disclosure, good governance, and outcomes.
c) The third vertical HEGC: The Higher Education Grants Council will facilitate funding and financing of higher education based on transparent criteria.
d) The fourth vertical GEC: The General Education Council will frame the expected learning outcomes for higher education programmes, also called ‘graduate attributes.

The GEC will also frame a National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF).

Some of the existing professional council such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Council of Architecture (CoA), National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), Veterinary Council of India (VCI), etc. will act as Professional Standard Setting Bodies (PSSBs) and they will be responsible for maintenance of quality in these segments of higher education.

To conclude, there is an urgent need to develop a symbiotic link between quality higher education and knowledge driven society or knowledge economy by harnessing all possible factors, resources, agencies, techniques and technologies and stakeholders which has been somewhat wanting till date. It is assumed that with the announcement and adoption of the National Education Policy-2020 in India such cherished dreams can become a reality. As predicted by a number of international and national planners, policy makers and researchers, the demographic dividend of India that is the existence of large number of young men and women vis-a-vis the overall population of the country is also a positive and encouraging contributory factor that can definitely ensure correlation between quality higher education and knowledge economy. This would be equally applicable to the majority of nation states around the globe.

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Endnote

[i] New World Knowledge Order (NWNO), a novel idea, concept and discourse, is coined by the authors to highlight the relevance of knowledge in the contemporary world in all spheres of human life, work and endeavour.

[ii] Daniel Bell (1973) has given a clear and exhaustive explanation of the post-industrial society and its characteristics.

[iii] For details, see Manuel Castells (1996).

[iv] Pedagogy has been the central focus of the educational pyramid throughout the ages and across societies that has contributed to meaningful interactions among the stakeholders.

[v] See the Constitution of India, 1950, particularly Part Four, the provisions under the Directive Principles of State Policy, in sync with the Fundamental Rights as given in Part III.

[vi] See www.education.gov.infor the details of the National Education Policy, 2020 and the roadmap envisaged therein.