



Globalization: Through the Lens of Herbert Marcuse and his ‘One Dimensional Man’

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Abstract

The notions of rationality has been redefined and restructured by various theorists. This paper aims to highlight the notions of rationality as propounded by Herbert Marcuse under the ‘One Dimensional Man’ to draw a cross linkage between technology and rationality. This paper attempts to also showcase the deeper underlying connotations and relevance that theories have in the context of the contemporary society.

Key words: *globalization, rationality, technological society, one dimensional man, freedom, unfreedom*

Globalization

The world in which we live; the contemporary world is plagued with uncertainties in terms of manmade developments, political upheavals, economic conditions, and societal reforms or instances. Each occurrence, even when the bud of such occurrences is of small scale (local level) has the propensity to stake its claims at a global level i.e. across different parts of the world. No nation, no society, no institution can claim absolute independence from the tides of changes making its waves across the globe. And the global level reality is now becoming increasingly proximate to every human being in one manner or another, and therefore “globality” or “globalization” is something everyone has to deal with (Barry, 2006). The markets are no longer able to abide by protectionist, isolation-based policies. “Internal matters” of many times are no longer able to escape the eyes and ears of the “external forces” i.e. other nations, international institutions and societies across the globe. The demand and quest made by societies within or across their physical

geographical locations are no longer localized or confined within their respective geographical territories but have transcended across physical divisions. Such is the nature of changes that the world is witnessing; unscripted yet far-reaching changes and events whose repercussions are no longer made redundant by the age-old factors of time, location, connectivity.

Modern-day, modern society and the modern world is commonly referred to as “the globalized world”; a world where economic, social, political, cultural domains no longer enjoy the privilege of being demarcated from one another. Globalization has instead led to the generation of a web of connectivity between these domains, with each depending on the other in some form or the other.

The hallmarks that govern the global system entail concepts of borderless nations; freedom in the mobility of goods, services, people, ideas, culture; a conceptualization of societies where commodification and commercialization have taken a single lane or route (choices, tastes, cultures taking the form of homogeneity over heterogeneity). What is the cause for such fluidity and rapidity in terms of multi-dimensional concurrences from a local to a global level? The answer lies in the key factor that has redefined and reshaped the dominance and longevity of the notions of Globalization i.e. the dawn and rapid development and flow of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) across the globe. No nation can remain aloof from the livid advents that have been witnessed in the domains of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Globalization has aligned the nations of the world and the societies along a pathway, where diversity



has been diluted by convergence; where man's rational outlook has been eluded under the globalized culture i.e. the advent of homogenous rational man.

Rationality

From an individualistic point of view, rationality is the ability of man, as a distinct individual to act in accordance with his own reasoning. One of the key components that determine the individualistic nature of rationality is the presence of critical thinking which is viewed as a creative element that caters to the promulgation of the individual's liberation in the advanced society. The protector of man against the notions of repression, domination and irrationality was the rationality of the individual which was wholly individualistic. The basic principles of individual rationality include a set of fundamental values that firmly establish the superiority of the individual over and above any external encroachment. These values are the 'truth values' behind the individuality of man and pertain to all spheres of man's life. Man was regarded to be a rational being in possession of autonomous, critical thinking where the ruling apparatus' (governing authority) main role was the facilitation of conditions that ensured freedom of man; freedom to exert his individualistic rationality. The rational man is able to find his own modus of thinking after the acquisition of freedom of thought and the pursuance of action courses to actualize them. It can be best summed up as the search for what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it. (Arato, Andrew, & Eike, Gibbert, 1978)

The contemporary world is believed to be one, where man due to the promulgation of a modern democratic system coupled with adoption of the latest technological advents is *living a life of freedom governed by free choices; where his every need deemed rational by the system is catered to; where the prevailing technology has provided a more productive life*. Under such conditions, man is under the notion that he is living in an individualistic society where he is free from repression, domination from external forces and the agents of social control. In such an ideal, Utopian like system the question of locating any mode of social control and repression seems to be an illusionary quest.

In accordance with popular viewpoints, the magnitude of individual rationality is at its peak point in a modern democratic society dictated by a liberalist outlook dedicated towards the interplay of

freedom, equality and autonomy; where the impact of globalization and the subsequent adoption of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has entered a multi-faceted domain. In such a society, the individual's performances were held as tangible attainments for the betterment of the society, which were indicators of his individuality.

Is man really free from the chains of social control and domination or is the individualistic man already under the domination of such forces, encapsulated in a dome where he is unable to identify his perpetuating repressive self? These questions looming over man's rationality and the state of the prevailing system is analysed in accordance with the propositions put forth by a Political Theorist, Herbert Marcuse who established the currents system as one where rationality and its domains of social control have taken a technological form and where man is in a state of false consciousness, unaware of his perpetuating *un-free self*.

Herbert Marcuse and the One Dimensional Man

Herbert Marcuse (19th July 1898- 29th July 1979) was a German American Neo Marxist and a Critical Thinker who was among the founders of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. He was regarded as the Father of the New Left. During the 1960s and 1970s, Marcuse's magnum opus, *The One Dimensional Man* published in 1964 was one of the earliest books which addressed the concerns of the Student Movements and New Left Movements.

The *One Dimensional Man* throws light on the recurring nature of repression and domination; on the transmutation of rationality; on the new modes of social control where the epicentre of all such occurrence is deep rooted in technology. This technology is consciously or unconsciously accepted by the individuals as the catalyst needed to spearhead the attainment of an ideal life; a life governed by freedom and equality where man is able to make free choices. In a technologically driven world, rationality has undergone a transmutation i.e. from individualistic to technologically induced rationality where man's power of negative thinking is repressed to such an extent that he is under a false notion; false consciousness where he is under the assumption that the usage of technology by the governing apparatus in every dimension of life; the grant of freedom based on his so-called sexual libido and the adoption of technology are all social necessities to enjoy "the good life". (Marcuse, Herbert, 1964)



Based on the propositions put forth by Herbert Marcuse, the modern democratic societies appear to have the distinguishing features of a technological society perpetuated by repression; where the individualistic rationale of man is repressed and where the modes of social control have taken a technological form and man is thus characterized as the One Dimensional Man living in a technological society.

Features of a Technological Society

Based on Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, three characteristics of a technological society have been highlighted, which will serve as the objectives for the study. These characteristics are:

- a. The urgency of man towards adoption of technology in his day to day life.
- b. The increasing adoption of technology by the governing authority.
- c. The belief in the "advent of more freedom" due to the legitimization of certain modes of freedom which were spearheaded by the technologically induced system. This system is propounded greatly by a globalized world.

Modern democratic society

The Indian Context

In the modern, globalized world where the democratic system is deemed to be an ideal system from a multi-faceted angle, India is an example of a nation that appears to have adopted a system which is vied as favourable for the prevalence of individuality rationality among the individuals residing in the society.

The governmental or ruling authority in India is sensitive towards the individual identities of the people along with their needs and aspirations and ensures favourable conditions for the existence of liberty, justice, equality which are continuously embedded within its democratic, liberal framework. These are the hallmarks of a globalized world, a world where the capitalist values and doctrines; the liberal democratic framework is promoted to sustain the one-dimensional nature of man

One critical element of modern democracy is democratic decentralization; decentralization of governance at the grassroot level. India is a shining example of a nation where democratic decentralization has been given due importance. The promulgation of power transference from the top to lower tiers and the constitutional recognition granted to these lower, grassroot level bodies under the Constitution 73rd and 74th Amendments Act, 1972 strengthened their roles at both the rural and urban areas. These constitutional

developments also paved way for the greater participation of people from diversified sections of society, paving the way for enhanced development in the economic, social and political dimensions.

Urban local bodies: The Aizawl Municipal Corporation

The Aizawl Municipal Council became functional from the 1st of July, 2008. It consisted of a total of 19 elected members, where one-third of the total elected seats (i.e. 6 seats) were reserved for women. The Aizawl Municipal Council was renamed as the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) in 2015 as the total population of Aizawl city had reached the benchmark of 3,20,000. The continued presence and role of women in the AMC has been guaranteed due to the provision for seat reservation of women which has provided a political platform for Mizo women to partake in the process of administration and governance.

Study conducted in Aizawl city

In accordance with the three characteristics of a technological society listed above, a field study was conducted in Aizawl city in 2016. The study was descriptive and analytical where scheduled interviews were conducted for data collection. The sample size of the study was 34, comprising 17 male and 17 female respondents. Five strata were drawn namely college students, shop level employees, businessmen, government employees, pensioners. The respondents for each strata were selected based on the technique of random selection. The data obtained was interpreted in a descriptive manner and analysed accordingly.

Findings and conclusion

The urgency of man towards adoption of technology in his day to day life

Based on the study conducted in Aizawl city, 97% found the urgency to adopt the latest technological developments and develop the skills needed for its utilization in their day to day life, especially due to governmental mandates which support the use of technology. 82% of the respondents utilized technology in their everyday life, whose usage varied for each strata. For the college students, the bulk of the usage was related to academic activities and interaction with their fellow peers. For shop level employees, besides using technology as a form of leisure and entertainment, the roles defined within the gambit of their jobs are highly dependent on technology.



For businessmen, majority of financial transactions is executed via usage of technology. For pensioners, technology is utilised for services ranging from pension services, gaining information related to their environment. 77% found the need to develop the skills needed to utilise the prevailing technology while 33% did not find the need due to certain issues or hardships being faced due to the adoption of technology. Even with the possibility of hardships or issues in the adoption of technology, 100% of the respondents do not find the need to raise their concerns on the hardships/ issues caused by the adoption of technology on larger platforms, even though both hard and soft elements entwined with technology i.e. ICT are plagued with many difficulties.

The increasing adoption of technology by the governing authority

The extent of adoption of technology through digitalization and adoption of ICT in the operations and undertakings of the governing authority is evident. Around 170 governmental departments in India have fully operational websites and the spearheading of E-Governance lead to a more extensive use of ICT in governance. National level initiatives like the Digital India campaign, the NEGP (National e-Governance Plan), rapid advent of ICT skill development centres further contributed to its perpetuation. Even in the state of Mizoram, under the MSeGS (Mizoram State e-Governance Society), more than 30 departments have fully operational websites with ongoing projects in another seven departments (based on data collected from 2016).

The belief in the “advent of more freedom” due to the legitimization of certain modes of freedom which were spearheaded by the technologically induced system

In the context of “grant of more freedom”, the grant of seat reservation for women in the AMC was taken as a mode of freedom satisfying the conditions put forth by Marcuse. 56.4% of the respondents believed that seat reservation is indeed a “grant of more freedom in the society”. But, only 38.4% of the respondents found the actual need to have seat reservation as it is seen as an opportunity to promote more political platforms for women and ensure their participation in the system of governance. 61.6 % did not find the need for seat reservation as they view seat reservation as a mere extension of promoting callous, unfit candidates by the parties for the sole purpose of attaining power

and raise questions of the “legitimate ground for the earmarked percentage i.e. 33%”. Despite difference of opinions at a one on one level, none of the respondents have raised their concerns at a larger platform or even to their close peers on the issues related to seat reservation for women in the AMC. Instead, whole heartedly or half-heartedly, they conform to the standards laid down by the governmental authority.

The study was conducted in 2016 and has many limitations. Elections to the Aizawl Municipal Corporation have been conducted in 2021 but a new survey has not been conducted after 2016. Also, with the advent and rapidity with which ICT has been expanded in all walks of life, new and updated data based on the tools and techniques utilised has not been collected post 2016. This study is reflective of the nature of transmutation and degrees of freedom hidden underneath the notions of a modern democracy post 2016 in the context of Mizo society.

The high dependency on ICT in the normal functioning of man; the lack of deeper rational thinking of man in various gambits of governance; the rapidity in terms of the flow of ICT are factors that have been intensified under a globalized world. A globalized world; where the market operates freely and disseminates a global culture, economy and system to sustain the dominance of power and control that globalization brings for the capitalist based doctrines are hallmarks that paves the way for the intensification of the ‘one-dimensional man’.

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