

Murakami and Capitalism in Market: A Postmodern Reading of *Dance Dance Dance*

Dr. S. Christober Jacob¹, Dr. S. Samuel Jude Frank²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012.

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ABSTRACT

A market is a physical as well as a virtual concept that runs the economy of a country with the supply and exchange of essential things for day-to-day life. This study deals with the dangerous effects of the capitalist-centred market according to the novel *Dance Dance Dance* by Haruki Murakami. A capital-dominated market might cause plenty of dangers to people and it will result in a government that relies upon the capitalists. The capitalists will corner and control the government for their benefit. Murakami's view on capitalism in Japan can be related to any part of the world.

Keywords: Advanced capitalism, Capitalism, Investment, Market, Postmodernism

Traditionally defined, a market is a place where people come together and exchange the things that they have. Their exchange will be based on their day-to-day needs. With the introduction of currency, this concept of commodity to commodity was changed into buying and selling things. This paved the way for fixing prices for essential things. This fixation considered the amount of time and

things spent on the production of that commodity. Money ensured a smooth life. It was the time that the people started valuing money and money became the ultimate source of power and authority. The capitalists, having much money on them, entered this market to take complete control over the transactions. This ultimately made the market a capitalist-dependent one.

There are different stages of capitalism from a postmodern perspective and they are the same. In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson, a critic and philosopher, says:

The periodization underscores the general thesis of Mandel's book *Late Capitalism*, namely that there have been three fundamental moments in capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage: these are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own—wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational capital. (Jameson, 1991, p. 78)

The different stages of imperialism lead the market into domination and imperialism takes over every life with monopoly. Throughout the history of nations, development has been focused on the twentieth century. Even though it is commonly called development of the state, Frederic Jameson is very clear in stating that the capitalists were cunning enough to name it development instead of Late Capitalism. Capitalism has been condemned by Marx for it "alienates the masses. ... although workers produce things for the market, market forces, not workers, control things. People are required to work for capitalists who have full control over the means of production and maintain power in the workplace" (Prychitko).

Haruki Murakami, a postmodern writer from Japan writing in Japanese translated into more than fifty languages including English, has touched upon the capitalist intervention of the market in Japan which is very much relevant to any country in the current scenario. Though he talks about

Japanese society, the effects of a capital market are almost similar with a few changes according to the geographical location. Postmodernism is a term that is full of subjectivity and supports general scepticism. It is very much against monopoly and binary reflection. *Dance Dance Dance* is a novel by Murakami with the story of an unnamed narrator searching for a hotel where he stayed some years back. Through this story, Murakami has thrown light on the dark face of the capital market which is supportive of monopoly and exclusion.

The narrator of the novel *Dance Dance Dance* reads a fictional article entitled “Sapporo Land Dealings: Dark Hands behind Urban Redevelopment.” It is an article about how some industries have bought and sold a vast area of land among them. They have simply made sale deeds among them and raised the land value every time. Later, it is revealed that the vast area of land “buying up was slated for major redevelopment” by the government of Japan (Murakami, 2003, p. 53). It is revealed to the readers “Someone was leaking information ... the leak existed well before the redevelopment plans were finalized” (Murakami, 2003, p. 54). It is further noted that the industries “had a direct pipeline to certain political circles” (Murakami, 2003, p. 53). Having a good connection with political parties and being able to get confidential information by bribing the officials, the capitalists were able to buy the land on which the government were about to go on with redevelopment projects. Now, the government has no other way except to depend on the capitalists to buy the land for a high rate or give the projects to the capital industries. This prevents mediocre people from obtaining government-related works. Being cornered, the government become the puppet of the capital investors. The market of employment is affected fatally.

When it comes to the nature and timing of a job, a considerable amount of difference can be perceived. The narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* says about his jobs, “The reason was simple. I was never choosy about the jobs I did. I was willing to do anything, I met my deadlines, I never complained, ... even when the pay was low” (Murakami, 2003, p. 12). These lines show the situation of jobs under the regime of the capitalist. The job market, when controlled by capitalists, will undergo drastic

changes. The permanency and choosiness of jobs are no longer available for the employee and a person who does not complain will continue in the job. Even when the pay is low, the employees have no voice to raise against the low pay. This is a big threat to the mental health of the employees, and the healthy personal life is doubtful. The change in the timing of jobs is recorded by Murakami saying, "If I got a call at two-thirty in the morning asking for twenty pages of text ... by six A.M., I'd have it done by five-thirty" (Murakami, 2003, p. 12). In the natural and traditional view, night is the time for resting. But the capitalists have changed it with their big money. The narrator gets a call by 2.30 in the morning and he finishes the work. This changes the natural routine of life and metabolism. The overseas job opportunities provided by the capital markets, and jobs provided by a company from one side of the global sphere to another side of that are prevailing in almost all developing countries.

Capitalist intervention affects the natural quality of commodities produced by human beings. The narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* says, "You may not believe this, but the lettuce you buy there lasts longer than lettuce anywhere else. Don't ask me why. Maybe they round up the lettuce after they close for the day and give them special training. It wouldn't surprise me. This is advanced capitalism, after all" (Murakami, 2003, p. 129). He talks about lettuce sold at a shop, a capitalist institution. The lettuce keeps the freshness after its natural time by the 'the special training,' any kind of artificial preservative used. Murakami has recorded his thoughts against the capital market where artificiality takes over the natural behaviour of commodities. This leads to a lot of ailments in human beings who use it. To keep the market up, capitalists are ready to change any normal features in plants.

In addition to the changes in lettuce, the capital market suppresses and alters the emotions and natural reactions of human beings. When the narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* goes to the front desk of Hotel Dolphin, "... three light blue blazered young women with toothpaste-commercial smiles greeted me. This smile training surely figured into the capital outlay" (Murakami, 2003, p. 24). The term 'toothpaste-commercial smiles' means an artificial smile. Trained by the big money in the market, the ladies at the front desk smile at the customer, no matter whether they like doing it or not. It is very

sceptical to state if it is possible for any human being to smile at everybody without any prior information. The capital market has done it by compelling human beings and suppressing their emotional reactions. Artificiality infiltrated by capital investors will go up to any level as they expect money from anything that they see.

The capital investors have taken over the cultural thinking of the people. Their capability to manipulate myths and symbols paves the way for the expansion of the capital market. They use technology in their favour to reach plenty of people thereby insisting on changes.

And it's megacomputers that have made it all possible, with their inhuman capacity to pull every last factor and condition on the face of the earth into their net calculations. Advanced capitalism has transcended itself. Not to overstate things, financial dealings have practically become a religious activity. The new mysticism. People worship capital, adore its aura, genuflect before Porsches and Tokyo land values. Worshiping everything their shiny Porsches symbolize. It's the only stuff of myth that's left in the world. (Murakami, 2003, p. 55)

The net calculation of the capitalists has pulled every factor into the capital web with the effective use of mega computers, the technology. It has made the money transactions among human beings a religious one, an addiction. People can worship the capital outlay and the cars like Porsche become symbols of the society, thus luring people. The commoners are cornered to spend a lot of money on luxurious things. The remaining of all activities will be the manipulated pieces of myths.

As the capitalists spend a lot of money on the market, they develop good connections with different people from various categories. In *Dance Dance Dance*, the fictional article states, "Huge companies have their connections, and you can bet they count everyone from politicians and novelists and rock stars to out-and-out yakuza in their fold" (Murakami, 2003, p. 54-55). When needed "... they just call on the boys with their samurai swords" (Murakami, 2003, p. 55). The capitalists use their

connections to strengthen their market. “Sometimes they even force hands. For instance, suppose there’s someone who doesn’t want to sell. Say, a long-established shoe store. That’s when the tough guys come out of the woodwork” (Murakami, 2003, p. 54). They use tough guys to force a traditional trader to sell a long-established shop.

The capitalists have a good relationship with famous people to control and promote their market. A friend of the narrator with the name Gotanda who is also a cinema star in *Dance Dance Dance* says, “Some of the bigger stars have very close friends in high places.” The closeness of capitalists towards the cinema stars and other famous people is not for a single reason. Gotanda says “And because I’m a money tree for the agency, ...” (Murakami, 2003, p. 287). Not only to attract people to the market but also to get high returns from the stars themselves. The readers are also able to read Gotanda saying “I’m a major investment” (Murakami, 2003, p. 287). The capitalists use famous people to attract the commoners to buy from their market and ultimately get addicted to the market. At the same time, they invest money on the stars to get more money through them.

Capital marketers claim that anything can be bought from their markets. They have been able to convert the transactions among the people into money-involved transactions. It is not only about the commodity-to-commodity concept being changed from money to commodity but also about the conversion of the commoner’s mentality into thinking that anything can be bought for money. Being true to their words, the capitalists have converted every small transaction and emotion into business. For example, Gotanda in *Dance Dance Dance* says about a sex club, ““You won’t believe it, but I can. There’s a whole system. This place has this front as a party service, so they can make out these very legitimate receipts. Sex as ‘business gifts and entertainment.’ Amazing, huh?”” and the narrator replies ““Advanced capitalism”” (Murakami, 2003, p. 151). Advanced capitalism has converted sex, an emotional and physical need of the human body, into a business. Different ways of describing sex as a ‘gift and entertainment’ paves the way for acceptance from people.

The intervention of capitalists in every matter of everyday life is visible in the current scenario also. Murakami has registered his observation of the change in the taste of people with the advent of capitalists in the market. The narrator says in *Dance Dance Dance*, “Latter-day capitalism. Like it or not, it’s the society we live in. Even the standard of right and wrong has been subdivided, made sophisticated. Within good, there’s fashionable good and unfashionable good, and ditto for bad” (Murakami, 2003, p. 55). There is no chance for the people to accept or reject. When plenty of chances are given in the market, capitalists have promoted an ideology of subdivisions of things into good, fashionable good, sophisticated wrong and right. Having all these chances, whether one likes it or not, one must go by any of them.

As the paper deals with how Murakami records his dissatisfaction towards the capitalism in market, Murakami himself is to be examined in the same context. Akins, in his “Time and Space Reconsidered: The Literary Landscape of Murakami Haruki,” talks about how literary production has been dominated by the capitalist for which Murakami is no exception:

one listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald’s for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and ‘retro’ clothes in Hong Kong’.¹³⁶ So, to what extent is corporate control exercised over the quality of literature, thereby possibly jeopardizing the relationship between the process of pure literary creation and the manufacture of a publisher’s commercial product? (Akins, 2013, p. 231)

It is noteworthy to say that Murakami has been backed by the capitalist market for commercial success.

This paper has studied Murakami’s views on capitalist intervention on market prevailing in Japan and is very much relatable to any country called a developing nation. The capitalists have been able to control any transaction into money; bring any emotion under control; bring in artificiality into plants and well as human beings; demolish the traditional form of trade; convert sex into business and entertainment; and change the nature of job opportunities. Ultimately, their aim is always to make

money out of anything. This is one of the major crises being faced by common people without realisation.

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