

Haruki Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance*: A Postmodern Network

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Abstract

Postmodern lifestyle has made tremendous changes in the lives of human beings both psychologically and physically. Murakami in *Dance Dance Dance* has elegantly focused the postmodern effects as a network which leaves no human to be as desired. Murakami deals with Connection in disconnection, reality in imagination and society in human.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Postmodern Network, Literary Landscape, Magical Realism and Distraction

Dance Dance Dance is a novel written by a Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. This novel is of a postmodern style with postmodern themes. Postmodern network is a system made by postmodern ideologies on which the world sustains. Murakami has cleverly spun a network of such kind thrown light into that world with mysteries and twists.

Dance Dance Dance is a story of the unnamed narrator's experience in searching an unnamed girl, encountering murder of a girl, suicide of narrator's friend and a sheep professor. Narrator is depressed by his divorced life. He goes to a hotel namely Hotel Dolphin where once he has stayed years ago. He tries to track the girls on which he faces some magical events terrifying him. Only man who can solve the mysteries is the sheep professor. Narrator meets him at the end of the novel.

Murakami has tried to connect the disconnected the modern life through his landscape. "His literary landscapes are not just a technique to disrupt social hierarchies, values or boundaries but they also help his characters in their search for value, identity and commitment." (Atkins,70)*Dance Dance Dance* has a landscape of a renovated hotel, Hawaii, Sappora and a secret club. The landscape helps the character and plot to move with a magical atmosphere. The magical atmosphere is the path to the network. When anything is connected any other thing is called to be a network.

The landscape plays a role of mediation between past and present. The narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* of Haruki Murakami says "Through some clever juggling I'd managed to forge a connection to

reality, to build a new life based on token values. Was I now supposed to give it up?" (6) The past is represented as a shadow to the present. It assures a new life to the characters and new path to reality. The landscape has introduced A connection can be established with the past. Visiting the memory of the past takes the characters into a real identity. Going back to the past landscape takes the character into reality. The reality faced by the character is magical. That magical aspect connects one to another.

The modern life has been fragmented and individual's life has been alienated. But, Murakami portrays that every place and moment a person has in life is connected to that person. The writer is of a general idea that everything in the world is related to everything else. When the narrator visits the New Dolphin Hotel, he meets the sheep professor. Professor says "RealtheDolphinHotelsigndownstairs'sreal.Howrealdoyouwant?" He tapped the tabletop with his fingers, and the flame of the candle shuddered. "Andwe'rereallyhere. Webeenwaiting. Foryou. Wemadearrangements.Wethoughtofeverything. Everything, soyoucouldreconnect, witheveryone." (84)

The narrator expresses "I felt a swirl with warm secretions. I gripped the door knob, I shut my eyes, I held my breath. You're all right, you're fine. I heard a tremendous heartbeat through the darkness. It was my own. I was enveloped in it, I was a part of it. There was nothing to fear. It was all connected." (78) A connection is made between him and the new landscape he enters. The meanings of life and characters are made through the strange meetings. The magical aspects make a path between known to unknown. Mysterious turns in the story are unraveled through magical actions still not reaching an extremity. Magical movements in the story sustain the tension which ensures a kind of connectivity expectation from time to time.

Atkinson in his *Time and Space Reconsidered: The Literary Landscape of Haruki Murakami* "connects identity search with magical realism and argues that Murakami's magical realism operates as a mechanism that portrays the protagonist's unconscious (Atkinson, 8,9). In the Dolphin Hotel narrator tries to reach seventeenth floor. The receptionist has warned him already not to go. When the elevator reaches seventeenth floor, the narrator develops an anxiety in him. When he comes out of the escalator, the power goes off and a complete darkness prevails. Narrator explains the situation in *Dance Dance Dance* "footsteps halted. They were beside me. It was beside me. My eyes were shut. It is beginning to come together. I knew. I knew I was connected to this place"(78).

Treatment of magical elements has been so powerful throughout the novel to elevate the situation of unconsciousness and stickiness. Readers can feel a kind of an effective alienation of the characters from reality. Soon after the power shutdown, the narrator walks on the corridor and stunned by unknown footsteps near him. The footsteps were approaching him slowly. Narrator's muscles were hardened and became stiff. "The tissues hardening, stiffening from within. Terrifying me"(83). "How I barely made the connection to this place."(83)

The mystic occurrences and imaginative events have their effects on the story and create a lot of questions in the mind of the narrator as well as the readers. Narration has an effect on the searching intensity. Magic realism further confuses the mind which has already been confused. The narrator has broken up his marital life and searching for nothing. When the narrator reaches the Hotel Dolphin, his mind has a lot of questions about his life as well as the hotel building. He faces failure in finding one of his former girlfriends with whom he has spent one night previously. In the search, the narrator is connected to one of his school friends. The move of the story takes its turn when the narrator goes to Hawaii.

The narration of the novel *Dance Dance Dance* has its own unique effects on the revelation of the past. Atkins in *Time and Space Reconsidered: The Literary Landscape of Haruki Murakami* says “Murakami constructs his narrative in a dualistic spatial stages such as a hotel in Hokkaido that has a dark hole where the protagonist’s past waits to be rediscovered in *Dance Dance Dance*” (77). The revelation of the past has an important role in the novel as it takes the readers to a postmodern network. Reading the novel from the beginning takes the reader back and forth. The past events of the characters are not shown as important as present. But, the past makes a greater effect in the flow of the story.

The space introduced by Haruki Murakami in *Dance Dance Dance* consists of different worlds. The narrator is influenced by all the worlds whereas some characters who belong to the other world want to come to the world of narrator. In *Time and Space Reconsidered: The Literary Landscape of Haruki Murakami* Atkinson denotes “In *Dance, Dance, Dance*, Murakami illustrates the disconnection of body and mind in the character Gotanda-kun by introducing the concept of an ‘other world’ in the sense of the spiritual and alien as opposed to the world after death or the netherworld” (286).

The other worlds are either physical or mental. Most of the characters make their own world and lose their lives eventually. Their anguish over the ordinary world takes the novel swift and sweet. Kiki, Gotanda, the one-handed poet and receptionist are lost in different worlds. Narrator gets into a search for these characters. Murakami has tried to ensure that the postmodern network always leaves the human being in long running search which never ends, but, add to it more. The novel *Dance Dance Dance* starts with the narrator starting his search for a girl whom he missed in the past. In the end, he is compelled to search for many other people including the girl. The narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* describes his situation of restarting his search as

It was cool as water. Time wavered, sequentiality twisted, gravity lost its force. Memories, old memories, like vapor, wafted up. The degeneration of my flesh accelerated. passed through the huge, complex knot of my own DNA. The earth expanded, then chilled and contracted. Sheep were submerged in the cave. The sea was one enormous idea, rain falling silently over its vastness. Faceless people stood on the beachhead gazing out to the deep. An endless spool of time unraveled across the sky. A void enveloped the phantom figures and was encompassed by a yet greater void. Flesh melted to the bone and blew away like dust.

Extremely, irrevocably dead, said someone. Cuck-koo. My body decomposed, blew apart—and was whole again. (391)

The narrator himself is an embodiment of the 'other' from the other world. The feelings and emotions are nowhere to be seen. Right from the beginning, the life style of narrator shows a kind of alienation from the life. The emotional bonds and reflexivity of senses have been lost. Narrator takes everything as same as anything and continues his journey of finding something which he does not know. He tries to know the connection with the Hotel Dolphin and the characters he has met around. Yoshimoto Takaaki in his essay 'The Appeal of *Dance Dance Dance*' notes the narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* to be 'exceedingly ordinary.'

Landscape used by Murakami in his novel *Dance Dance Dance* is very vast and broad. The time and space play an important role in getting the search done. Narrator visits different places in Japan. The main places which sustain the journey of connection are Hawaii and Hotel Dolphin. "To return to the Dolphin Hotel means facing up to a shadow of the past" (6). The landscape takes time in its grip and alters between past and present. Hotel Dolphin has its effect on the journey from present to past. Time is a factor which determines the action and emotion. The natural effects of time is realised when the narrator is packed into a mental dilemma.

The journey towards nothing is proved by the end of the novel. The humanitarian base is not completely prohibited. The connection between an individual and the society has been enlarged in the view that the man is a part of the society still remains to be an individual with his individuality. In other words, man keeps himself as an alien from the society with a connection which is of a necessary measure. A gripping power ensures him with the universal arena for the purpose of fulfilling the universal rule. The sheep man in *Dance Dance Dance* says "sonowyouneedus. Else, youwouldn'tbehere. Youlostthings, soyou'relost. Youlostyour-way. Yourconnectionscomeundone. Yougotconfused,think-yougotnoties. Buthere'swheretailtiestogether" (84).

A potential concern over the contemporary society is evident in *Dance Dance Dance*. Jay Rubin in his *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* remarks "There is a new level of seriousness in *Dance Dance Dance*, a growing sense that the writer has a responsibility towards the society in which he lives" (170). Murakami is very clear about the man's tie with the society. The worldly losses do not ensure a universal end to a human being. "For three and a half years, I'd been making this kind of contribution to society. Shoveling snow. You know, cultural snow" (7).

An alienated life has been portrayed in the novel. The past experiences of the narrator have put him in an estranged life. He wants to have a disconnected life from the society in which he lives. In *Dance Dance Dance*, the narrator denotes

From January through June 1979. I didn't read one book. I didn't open one newspaper. I didn't watch TV, didn't listen to the radio. Never saw anyone, never talked to anyone. I

hardly even drank; I wasn't in a drinking frame of mind. I had no idea what was going on in the world, who'd become famous, who'd died, nothing. It wasn't that I stubbornly resisted information, I simply had no desire to know anything. Even so, I knew things were happening. The world didn't stop. I could feel it in my skin, even sitting alone in my apartment. Though little did it compel me to show interest. It was like a silent breath of air, breezing past me. (8)

The lonely life has disconnected narrator from everything. A physical connection between human and the society is made through information. The magical events take the narrator far removed from the well-informed society. Murakami has tried to portray that the life of an ordinary man is always in a confusion between what reality and illusion are. The narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* is trying to keep himself away from the real world. It is not a deliberate alienation from the world, but, a self-comforting and psychological alienation.

Though Murakami has a lot of responsibilities towards the society, he has made a landscape which consists only the space he desires. "Boku of *Dance Dance Dance* does have another world that belongs exclusively to him" (170,171) as said by Jay Rubin in *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. This landscape has a vital role in connecting the reality to the physical world. A connection between the reality and magical world has been made at some places of the novel ensuring that there is always a connection in a well-established mode.

A complete anarchy is found in every one in the novel *Dance Dance Dance*. Lives have lost aims and focus. Reasoning has nothing to do with human mind as it has invaded by dilemmas. The narrator in *Dance Dance Dance* says

You're probably right. As you say, I've lost and I'm lost and I'm confused. I'm not anchored to anything. Here's the only place I feel like I belong to." I broke off and stared at my hands in the candle light. "But the other thing, the person I hear crying in my dreams, is there a connection here? I think I can feel it. You know, if I could, I think I want to pick up where I left off, years ago. That must be what I need you here for.(85)

Narrator of Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* says about the sheep man that he is hiding from "From war, civilization, the law, the system, . . . things that aren't Sheep Man-like" (389). Escaping and hiding from the civility are so common in a postmodern society as the characters have developed a kind of gap from the society for no reason. This gap shows the common affinity incurred by human on the society.

The perception of the world is full of uncertainties and weak. Human being has lost faith in anything. There is always a friction between human and the world. Man goes on to ask plenty of questions ultimately to end up with null. Narrator says "No, anything can happen. This world is more fragile, more tenuous than we could ever know" (392).

Murakami has dealt the theme of nothingness into whole unity. The central character lives a life which does not have a particular aim. He did the assignments given to him just for the sake of a job. Later he finds an aim in him to search the girl whom he had missed some years back. The search reveals him some truths and gives him some mysterious experiences. The narrator introduces himself in the novel written by Haruku Murakami *Dance Dance Dance* as a depressed creature surrounded by uncertainties. The postmodern life style has depressed him a lot with experiences of nothingness. The introduction is

Due to some unavoidable circumstances, I had quit an office that a friend and I were running, and for half a year I did almost nothing. I didn't feel like doing anything. The previous autumn all sorts of things had happened in my life. I got divorced. A friend died, very mysteriously. A woman ran out on me, without a word. I met a strange man, found myself caught up in some extraordinary developments. (8)

The postmodern identity plays an important role in the alienation of characters. Identity of each character would undergo a vast change in the stream of a self-centered world. Gotanda, a school friend of the protagonist, is known to the protagonist by his name. But, he is a well-known actor to the outer world. Every one, except the narrator praises him for his appearance on the screen. Though others think that Gotanda is enjoying his life with plenty of money, the bare reality is that he has been trapped by the film producers into acting for money without any physical and mental solace.

The postmodern network has an impact over the human relationship. Most of Haruki Murakami's narrators are divorced. They have nothing to feel emotively. In Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* the narrator and his friend Gotanda are talking about their familial status, "Correct," I said. "Married and divorced." "Just like me," he said. "Married and divorced. Paying alimony?" "Nope." "Nothing?" (135). Relation and emotions have lost their value as there is a powerful fragmentation of lives.

In the postmodern characters posed by Murakami, the reason is lost and distraction is energetic. The reason for the severance is unknown and unrecognized. Gotanda asks the narrator of Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* the reason and situation for the divorce. The narrator has no clue. He says "Yup. No warning, not a word. I didn't have a clue. I thought she'd gone out to do the shopping or something, but she never came back. I made dinner and I waited. Morning came and still no sign of her. A week passed, a month passed. Then the divorce papers came" (136).

In Gotanda's case, the conversation goes on between the narrator and Gotanda as follows,

"With me, the wife didn't leave. I got thrown out. Literally. One day, I was thrown out on my ear." He gazed out through the silvered glass. "And the worst part about it was, she planned the whole thing. Every last detail. When I wasn't around, she changed the registration on everything we owned. I never noticed a thing. I trusted her. I handed everything over to her accountant—my official seal, my IDs, stock certificates, bankbooks, everything. They said they needed it for taxes. Great, I'm terrible at that stuff, so I was happy for them to do it. But

the guy was working for her relatives. And before I knew it, there wasn't a thing to my name left. They stripped me to the bone. And then they kicked me out. A real education, let me tell you," he forced another smile. "Made me grow up real fast." (136)

A dishonest relationship and a planned defraud happens in the life of Gotanda. Ultimately, it is found that all the dishonesty has been planned by his wife. He still remains to be in love with her.

Identity loss is one of the major influences made by a space of postmodern network, wherein the lives are at stake. Gotanda, an individual with all comforts and luxury, is unsure about his identity. He demands what really, he is. In *Dance Dance Dance*, Gotanda expresses

"You got a point. I haven't had it bad. But when I think back on my life, it's like I didn't make one choice. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and it scares me. Where's the first-person 'I'? Where's the beef? My whole life is playing one role after another. Who's been playing the lead in my life?" (146).

Throughout the novel, Murakami has portrayed many of the aspects of postmodern network in which the human being is the victor as well as the victim. The connection between the individuals is lost where as there is compulsion that everyone is connected to other. A societal detachment is observed in the novel with fragmentations. Thus, *Dance Dance Dance* is a novel depicting the postmodern network.

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