

Metropolis and Identity: An Analysis of Contemporary Market- Society

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Abstract:

Urban space foregrounds the knowledge-workers for producing the sign value of goods. Urban residents construct their identities through patterns of consumption and their market positions. People produce objects thinking about their market profitability. Privatisation and commodification are key features through which capitalist markets extend into new spatial contexts. All these facets compel individuals to negotiate intricate forms of society. Individual freedom and rationality form connections with market relations. Individuals gain new status and power in the changing scenarios. Reflexive modes of production create new consumer ethos. This integrates numerous people into a nexus of information, thereby increasing the possibilities of impersonal demeanour. Furthermore, contemporary economic sociology intensifies the production of recreational items. The present paper will analyse the transformation of individual identity in a market-oriented urban space.

Keywords: Market Society, urban space, consumer, identity.

- **Introduction: Monetary Economy**

The modern society is controlled by monetary exchange. It marks a shift from old order of birth rank to an order where money determines the status of individuals. The dollars-and-cents exchange brings about a unique paradigm in social order. In this society, each social actor relies on their own decision to earn livelihood. The extension of market trends influences human lifestyle. The bartering process taps into people's minds. People become dependent on markets for their consumption. Commercial relations dominate the lives of human beings in myriad ways. Computing mechanisms characterise a market society. While the feudal representatives dictated the old societies, the new system terminates a relationship after fulfilling its necessary obligations. According to Simmel, money liberates people from any kind of institutional ties and commitments. Individual feelings of objectification and alienation are going up day by day. However, it integrates people into networks of trade and interdependence. It strengthens a new sense of social connectivity, uniqueness and personal independence.

The emergence of capitalism blurs the distinction between aristocratic and non-aristocratic people. It makes things accessible for all human beings. Common folk, if they have money, are likely to purchase the luxurious things. Financial success replaces the rank of upbringing of individuals. The literary oeuvre of the nineteenth century depicts a society in which people may acquire symbols of high status only through economic prosperity. The comic character of nouveau riche provides a glaring instance of this. The development of markets is closely connected to a broader understanding of modernity. Modernity values rationality and permeates all areas of social life. Rational mind drives the motives of interpersonal communication. Thus, impersonal forces regulate the behaviour of individuals. Some key questions arise in this context,

- a) How does market society influence demeanour of people residing in urban space?

b) Is an individual free from the constraints of market society?

- **Commercial Society and Human Beings:**

In urban space, lives of individuals are harmonized by market deals. The individuals flaunt their professional credentials in striking ways. The market society rewards them for their deftness and penalises their inaptitude. Urban space gives priority to functional specialization of human beings. Markets elevate the efficacy of people and make them competitive. Self-complacence create a new society. People utilize skills to stimulate economic progress. Individuals acquire the capacity to translate the products of market society into their individual or oppositional terms. Market mechanisms provide symbolic resources for meaningful society. Thomas Bender comments in the Opinion section of the Los Angeles Times (December 22, 1996),

It seems as if our best middle-class vision of the city today is that of an entertainment zone – a place to visit, a place to shop; it is no more than a live-in theme park...This amounts to Urbanism Lite. This urban recipe is insidious, for it pretends to offer what it is not. Such pseudo-city culture offers scenes of city life, not the city itself (quoted in *Postmetropolis* 247).

Contracts navigate the activities of market society. Economic values of things determine social relationships. Commodification of everything is the main thrust of market society. Consumerist ideology shapes the identities of people. The goals of market society and human identity are connected in such ways that capitalism, consumerism and simulation of reality emerge in nuanced ways. Market trends toll the death knell of conventions. One notes the predominance of individual foothold and consumption. Folk ways of life and collective tradition decline. The expansion of markets debase the authenticity and universal ways.

- **An Instance of Market Trends:**

Julian Barnes' *England, England* shows the consequences of market trends through various characters. Martha's childhood memory lacks an organic bonding with her country. The Agricultural Show is remarkable for its display of a panorama of crops. The Exhibition attracts the attention of the people and encourages them in competition. Martha remembers Mr A. Jones for his nice crops. Mr Jones won the first prize in the Show. The narrator says, "The white marquees with striped porticos, as solidly built as vicarages. A rising hill behind, from which careless, scruffy animals looked down on their pampered, halted cousins in the show ring below" (Barnes 7).

Playing jigsaw with the counties of England acts a metaphor for market-oriented behaviour. Whenever Martha loses a particular county, her father always appears with the lost piece. One day she loses the piece of Nottinghamshire. She expects that her daddy would carry it. But her father disappears suddenly and never comes back. Martha recollects the affection of her father. This is an unredeemed crisis in her life. Being a child, she fails to understand misery of her mother. She grows a cynical attitude in her childhood through the religious chant in school. Her classmates plays tricks with her. Jessica James criticizes Martha and humiliates her before the teacher (Miss Mason). Because of her contrary views, Martha is unique from other children. The narrator comments,

They would advise her that cynicism, Martha, is a very lonely virtue. They would hope she was not pert. They would also hint, in less or more obvious ways, that Martha's home was not as other homes, but that trials were there to be overcome, just as character was there to be built (Barnes 13)

In her adulthood, Martha felt the sorrows of her mother deeply. She deemed herself responsible for the disappointment of her mother. A terrible feeling engrossed Martha. They shifted to a new village. Her mother no more pined for her father. Martha noticed a change in her mother's behaviour. Her mother attempts to become independent. She overcame the difficulties of life through her communication with various people. As the narrator states,

Men with cars would sometimes come for her mother. They couldn't afford a car themselves...She (Martha) didn't like the men who came to call. Some tried to ingratiate themselves, patting her as if she were a cat, and others stared from a distance, thinking there's a pot of trouble (Barnes 20).

Her mother became strong in her temperament. She no longer wept for her husband. She realised that women should be self-reliant. For Martha, women must earn money to become self-sufficient. Martha prepares herself for taking a white-collar job. In her childhood, she decides to take part in the Agricultural Show. This is her first endeavour in the struggle for survival. She enjoys the Agricultural Show as marker of order. This is the final trip of her parents. The omniscient narrator comments, "As she grew up, as her character was built, as she became headstrong rather than pert, and clever enough to know when to hide her cleverness..." (Barnes 22).

Martha moves from village to town for education. She becomes a grown-up lady. She has new friends, still she experiences loneliness. After completing her university education, she arrives London. She is excited about her job. One day her father calls to meet him in a restaurant. Martha is confused to talk to her father after a long time. Being twenty-five years old, she is unable to express her innermost passion. The meeting leaves no positive impression in her mind. The application file of Martha Cochrane depicts her educational credentials. But the interesting fact is that Martha makes it suitable for her jobs. She can change the profile on the basis of requirements.

She takes a job in the office of Jack. Sir Jack exploits her cynic habits in the business. Martha's impression of Jack's office is evident in the lines: "Half gentleman's club, half auction house, the product of imperious but erratic taste. It felt like the lounge of some country-house hotel where you met to commit half-hearted adultery..."(Barnes 48).

Martha finds crucial embodiment of market power in the behaviour of Sir Jack Pitman. Being the supremo, Jack never shows fragility before the employees. The entrepreneurship has obliterated his genuine emotions like anger, irritation and affection. The urban milieu influences Jack's self. His behaviour is the direct result of the market society. The omniscient narrator says,

Was he villain...Some ascribed to him a deep, instinctive intelligence which gave him equal feel for the tidal fluctuations of the market...others found him a brute and unreflective junction between money, ego and lack of conscience... (Barnes 56).

Sir Jack judges people on the basis of functional abilities. He plans to set up a replica of England in the Isle of Wight. He nominates the members of his committee according to their functions. Jack names his PA Susie, be they male or female. He calls his car driver Woodie. Jack appoints Paul Harrison as 'Ideas Catcher', Jeff as 'Concept Developer', Mark as 'Project Manager', Martha as 'Cynic'. The narrator introduces Paul to the reader in this way, "Someone had once compared him to a giant firework, throwing out ideas as a Catherine wheel throws out sparks..." (Barnes 30). Jack gains benefits manipulating the leisure trips. Jack's enterprise creates his dominance in social life. Jack tells himself,

No pleasures were simple any more...Industrialization and the free market had long since disposed of them...Nobody except dunderheads ever thought that sex was a simple pleasure...Art? Art has become the entertainment business (Barnes 41).

Jack is the representative of the people who advance their profits through the modern machinery. Jack's attitude puts impacts on the employees' lives. The marketing trends devalue the actual nature of human beings. The new England supplants the old England. As Martha speaks of her application file, "If it suits, it is true"(Barnes 45).

The self-interest of individuals generates a unique type of society. Martha counts her economic progress and makes relationship with Paul. With the assistance of Paul, she blackmails Jack. She becomes the Chief Executive Officer of the new Project. Martha maintains love affairs with different types of men. In her youth, she is in pursuit of ideal love. Some of her lovers teach her about clothes and manners. Some men betray her trust. Martha appreciates Russell for his selfless nature. Russell is a worthy person working for the village community. Her experiments with love disappoint her. She understands that ideal love is unattainable in the materialistic world. It can happen in story books. "A light, almost heady despair accompanied her life for several years after these realizations" (Barnes 50).

Market behaviour forms a rationalist psyche of people. Individuals lose their ethical senses. They become responsible for their deeds. Sir Jack, a successful entrepreneur, erases references to ancestry in his profile. He controls his newspaper authoritatively. He repudiates unfavourable opinions about The King and Queen of England. He persuades them to shift their residence to the Island. The Project Manager Mark remarks,

The island, as Sir Jack pointed out two weeks ago, is a diamond. Otherwise a lozenge. Some have compared it to a turbot. Twenty-three miles in length, thirteen across at its widest point. One hundred and fifty-five square miles. Each corner at a cardinal point of the compass, more or less...Topography: mixture of rolling chalk downland of considerable beauty and bungalowid dystopia (Barnes 73).

In a meeting with Jerry Batson, Sir Jack reveals the reality of market society. “Everything’s in a damn contract nowadays. It is the way the world is going, Jerry” (Barnes 215). From Jeff, Jack collects a list of fifty characteristics of English people. He bribes the famous lawmakers of England and the football club to make his dream successful. Jack decides to send Mark as his convoy to negotiate with the football club. He can use the technique of deception to achieve the goal. As the narrator states,

Sir Jack knew that in such cases it was rarely just a question of price: it was price combined with the necessary self- deception that price was finally less important than principle... And if they dug their little studs in, you could always buy up the club’s title behind its back. Or simply copy it and tell them to fuck off (Barnes 86).

Following Sir Jack’s principle, his employees behave uniquely. They know the master well and what their employer seeks from them. They are the performers in a spectacular project. Mark tells Jack,

I am not an ideas man. I am just the Project Manager. I merely put to you the proposition: Quality Leisure, top dollar, long yen, market expectation, England and sex. May I offer that cocktail to the meeting? (Barnes 92)

Martha severs communication with the old boyfriends. Genuine love is rare in such place. Martha is not a fragile woman. She notes a disjunction between her public life and personal space :

At work, faced with a problem or decision, her mind would work with clarity, logic, and, if necessary, cynicism. By nightfall, these qualities seemed to evaporate. Why could she sort out the King of England more easily than she could sort out herself? (Barnes 205)

Julian Barnes depicts England as a physical place. Jack Pitman recreates the physical space in his imagination. This becomes the target of his commercial ventures. He turns the heritage of a country into saleable products. The 'new' England becomes a site of diverse pleasures – pleasures of fantasy, desire, longing and so on. It provides a kind of utopian moment. People would spend their holidays in such places. It validates extravagance within capitalist market mechanisms. Like T.S.Eliot's 'The Waste Land', Barnes portrays England as an 'unreal city'. The narrator in Barnes' novel says,

The crowds and the cameras are for real; so are the clouds. But the guardsmen are actors, Buckingham Palace is a half-size replica, and the gun salute electronically produced. Gossip has it that the King and Queen themselves are not real, and that the contract they signed two years ago with Sir Jack Pitman's Pitco Group excuses them from this daily rituals. Insiders confirm that an opt-out clause does exist in the royal contract, but that Their Majesties appreciate the cash fee that accompanies each balcony appearance (Barnes 179).

England is a consumable spectacle in which individuals engage in self-centred pursuits. The place is tinged with moral lacuna. Like the jigsaw game, a person can reconstruct England. The lost county of England acts as a metaphor for identity crisis of Martha. "Did those who were content with their lives remember previous contentment, or some moment of well-arranged adversity heroically overcome?" (Barnes 6)

Barnes's novel bears resemblance to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Barnes foregrounds the effects of rational outlook in the post-imperial England and its influence on individual psychology. The character of Jack Pitman echoes the nature of Kurtz. The narrator implies a comparison of England with the city of Babylon in the following lines:

Sir Jack had divided his last months between architects' drawings and the weather forecast...The mighty William had somewhere remarked that noisy laments from the sky frequently betokened the passing of great men...The first Baron Pitman was still ruminating his farewell epigram when he died,...loyal enthusiasm pointed up the emptiness and melancholy of the building after its proprietor's death,...Then the logic of marketing flamed like a message on Belshazzar's wall... (Barnes 249).

Conclusion:

Although Martha spends her childhood in a village, she is not rustic in her manners. She enjoys the freedom of metropolis. Employing tactics of market society, Martha gains success in her career. She affirms, "We are merely following the logic of the market" (Barnes 182). The more a person becomes individual, the more one becomes dependent on others. Sir Jack is dependent on his employees and other people outside his advisory board. "What is happening on the Island is a recognition that man is a market-driven animal, that he swims in the market like a fish in the sea" (Barnes 184).

The analysis highlights the construction of human identity within the changed societal conditions. Julian Barnes takes an exemplar through the character of Martha Cochrane. Martha puts her trust on Paul. Jack lures Paul to give the supreme position in Pitco company. Paul secretly assists Jack Pitman for ruining Martha's career. Jack warns her, "Your career is at an end. But just in case you are inclined to disagree, the fraud and embezzlement charges we have prepared will lie on the record for future activation if necessary" (Barnes 234)

In the post-modern era, individuals fail to associate themselves with the state. Barnes examines the infiltration of market forces into memory, culture and identity. Barnes suggests that moral logic

is secondary in the commercial world. Commerce reshapes individual self and national identity. The replica of England is more appealing than the original. There is a transparent demarcation between private and public spheres.

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