

All the Noise

What stillness fails to garner, noise succeeds to gain

FREEZE FRAME

SYEDA AFSHANA

s_afsha@yahoo.com

Asks the unnamed protagonist, "Just exactly what is that sound?" The loud noise of hammering that drags him into antithetical world of his real beliefs. Constantly interrupting his thought stream and transporting him into an entirely different realm. A sorely thudding recall for a young Japanese soldier, of a short story *A Sound of Hammering*, who has returned home after his country's surrender at the end of World War II.

Set in 1947 postwar Japan, ravaged by hunger and homelessness, besides dilemmas born out of futility of war and relocation of life thereafter, it's a story that portrays 'hammer' as a noisy tormentor all along. Throughout the narrative, while the protagonist addresses his admired writer in the form of a letter, trying to seek answers to his agonizing quest for self-actualization, he is continually thrown back by the noise from the hammer. Drifting him away from his posi-

tive ponderings to a state which "shatters even nihilism!"

This amazing story stimulates search for the definite significance of noise. Can noise be personified? And, more so, has it to be essentially the loudest for getting heard and noticed? Since the very basic nature of noise is blaring and blowy, it can't but be the loudest. It catches listenership. It catches interest. Even if it rumbles beyond certain meanings and metaphors.

Perhaps, the quintessence of noise is its strangeness. What stillness fails to garner, noise succeeds to gain. What common sense fails to salvage, noise bails out. The loudest the noise, the longer the clout. That's why, noise today has turned more into a psychosomatic phenomenon than an over-simplified coincidence or stratagem where anything rarely goes amiss. Today's noise is calculated and specific. It is no more unacceptable, and it no more possesses an uncontrolled nature. It knows its target and has a unique expertise to tag on. And going by the current media jinks, noise is now a perfect science. From clutter of bytes to bulletins, views to visuals, symbols to slogans,

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texts to tweets—the noise is thorough. The growling deluge is not just a happenstance. What media scientists call as *Information Overload* is in effect an *avatar* of noise!

Relating this discourse with Don DeLillo's *White Noise* provides an interesting connotation to this entire method. It is a speculative interpretation of 'noise' through a satirical novel that is taking place in the life of a college professor and his dysfunctional family. With messages flowing unrestrained, through tabloids and television sets, *White Noise* describes fears and insecurities of consumer-world shored up by media proliferation. Perhaps, *White Noise* is one of the types of noises that are aligned with products, cultures, lifestyles and media market-places (also called *attention economy*).

This goes to say that noise comes in

various forms. It roars out from our homes to hyperspaces; from our mind-scapes to media houses. The brisk heartbeat to inner voice that creates a 'noise'; the conflict within and without that surges in 'noise'; the imaginary tool that hammers a protagonist to noisy "self-conscious despair"; and the "terrifying data" that is now a noisy industry scaring a college teacher—*Noise* pervades all around us.

Bottomline: Noise is not simply a datum. Noise is a depiction. Of feelings, ideas, concepts and approaches that have become the hallmark of our times. They land with a thump, kick up the ruckus, and chug away with an agenda. Unlike the *Shor* of yore (*...Bohet Shor Suntay thay Pahlu...*), this noise is misleading and subjective. Loudly and brashly. It conjectures up one thing and executes scores of others. Wittingly. The clamor is typical of any political spin that smartly blanches real motives and meanings, and holds the sway. As such, noise has come to stay as an indispensable part of both crafty endorsements and reach of prevailing *mantras* /notions that govern the world today.

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SYEDA AFSHANA | s_afsha@yahoo.com

The Painted Donkeys!

As animals get painted, so do individuals

In fascinating, rather weird news from Egypt, it was reported that in a bid to fool visitors, a zoo in Cairo had painted a donkey black and white to make it look like a zebra. The image of the fake zebra went viral after a student posted it on social media. Even as the zoo authorities brushed off the incident as false, despite the evidence, the vets within the country were quick to confirm that the animal was indeed a donkey.

The cases of animal trickery aren't unheard of. In a zoo in China some years back, a hairy dog (Tibetan mastiff) was passed off as a lion. When visitors went to the cage of the 'lion' at the zoo, they heard a loud bark. Similarly, a zoo in Gaza painted two white donkeys to look like zebras in 2009.

With seemingly little in common but actually so much typical, there is a daily trickery in human world as well. As animals get painted, so do individuals. There are hapless donkeys in zoos. There are daredevils in world. And, most notably, donkeys are scapegoated by none but humans!

So, we have donkeys, overly glorified and hence overly painted. Painted with colors of 'brilliance and wisdom'. Overburdened with portfolios, errands and missions—both undercover and openly. For, in reality, donkeys are meant to toil.

The painting is a skilled art. Reflective of the way the powerful of a society coordinate on interpretations of "ability" as eligibility. Thus, a mediocre donkey is guarded with muscle. A corrupt donkey is showered with credit. A scandalous donkey is sheltered with law. A dumb donkey is decked with award. A wicked donkey is favored with lushness.

All these images of donkeys live and stay with us. That's why, some donkey stories reach us, and some get slayed. Generating a persuasive perception of "painted donkeys".... A kind of narrative about cryptic criminal culture, that presents a strand of complicated meanings. Meanings that are socially constructed and strengthened by human actions and agency; contingent upon socio-cultural, historical and political influences

That's how donkeys are picked up and

endowed with 'colors'. Painted to please and pray to Masters when ordered; Grunt and bray as and when required; Kick and kill whenever needed; Exploit and eliminate when commanded—somewhat like the modern version of dystopian novel *Animal Farm*. The only difference between Orwell's allegorical story and our painted tale is of *Pigs* putting up in farm and *Donkeys* roving in open. There pigs gain the supremacy; here donkeys take the control. Pigs being the cleverest of the animals turn commanding leaders; and Donkeys being the dull of all, become blind henchmen. Pigs give orders. Donkeys take orders.

The painted donkeys can be anyone from 'working to pet to rescued donkeys'—all tamed for a survival mechanism that's intended to make donkeys rule the roost, and become imperative

1 All the strokes of color could never brush them in striking shades. They are used, misused, and eventually cast off.

element of Mandarin mentality. In fact, the brazen bravado of our donkeys, who are painted as anything from loud lions to gentle giraffes, moving in fortified vehicles and blaring cheek, is a projection of showdown that aims for the subjugation of population as a necessary political schema.

Of course, the painted donkeys don't exist for donkey's years. And then, as they say, donkey is a donkey though it may carry the Sultan's treasure or is finely saddled. They don't symbolize what they supply. Anything, from bucks to body bags and from stacks of shame to tons of temerity! Well, donkeys remain donkeys. All the strokes of color could never brush them in striking shades. They are used, misused, and eventually cast off.

Bottomline: Ours is an open zoo. We are playing human trickery. Carrying out the grand script of humbug. We are forced to think that the painted donkeys don't lose color and never ever get smudged. But the reality always proves otherwise. Layer after layer, we see them losing their paint, fading into parody... discoloring to pits.