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Donald and Kim

The announcement by United States President Donald Trump that he will meet North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un marks an epochal moment in the post-1945 world. In 70 years, no serving US president has reached out to the secretive regimes of North Korea that no one saw this moment coming is in keeping with the ad hoc style of the Trump presidency. His own administration was taken aback by the abrupt announcement. Just last month, the US announced tough new sanctions against illicit shipping to North Korea. And weeks earlier, at the Winter Olympics in South Korea, vice-president Mike Pence had made a point of conveying that the US was not thinking about a thaw in relations with North Korea. Through most of last year, Trump and Kim hurled invective at each other on Twitter — the US president called Kim "little rocket man" and the North Korean leader mocked Trump as "the mentally deranged U.S dotard". No one could have imagined that the conversation would change overnight.

And indeed, it did not happen overnight. South Korea, in the direct line of North Korea's fire, worked overtime to bring Kim to the table. From the time the North and South Korean teams walked together at the Winter Olympics, and Kim sent a delegation headed by his sister to the games, and Trump sent daughter Ivanka to the closing ceremony, there have been signs of an outreach by North Korea. But nothing has changed on the ground yet. Despite Trump's yes, US sanctions against North Korea are to continue, and the Trump administration has said it will continue to exert "maximum pressure" to achieve the stated goal of North Korea's denuclearisation. It is hazardous to guess if a deal can be worked out, or even if the talks themselves will be held. Both leaders are the most unpredictable that the world has seen in recent times, and it's more than six weeks to May, when the meeting is planned to take place.

It is easy to read motives behind Trump's decision, such as an attempt to deflect attention from his Russia woes, but if it works, the 45th President of the United States can expect to be remembered more positively by history than what his track record so far suggests. For that to happen, the Trump administration would need to put in the sort of effort that the Nixon administration made for the breakthrough with China in 1972. The wider message from the development is that talking as a means of conflict resolution has still not gone out of fashion, even though the outcome is not always certain. Leaders wishing to leave a positive legacy still feel the need to fall back on jaw-jaw rather than war-war.

Reshaping Indo-Pacific

The expansive prospect for India's strategic partnership with France unveiled in Delhi on Saturday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the visiting President, Emmanuel Macron, underlines the growing importance of middle power coalitions that transcend the traditional alliance frameworks and new geopolitical fault lines. Amidst America's uncertain external orientation and China's effort to reshape the global order, second-tier powers like India and France seek a greater say in world affairs through more intensive collaboration. In that process, they are breaking down the old stereotypes of East versus West and North versus South. In taking the lead on mitigating climate change, through the International Solar Alliance, India and France are demonstrating their potential for shared global leadership. France, a long standing military ally of the United States, is also looking beyond NATO to forge security partnerships with Asian democracies like India. Delhi, in turn, appreciates that its quest for a larger role in the world can't be founded in exclusive security partnerships with either Russia or America. Nor does it want to cede Asia and the world to the rigidity of a new bipolar framework between the US and China. By taking more responsibilities in partnership with each other, Delhi and Paris improve their relative national positions in a changing world.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the new arena for cooperation between Delhi and Paris. Although India's strategic partnership with France is the oldest and dates back to the late 1990s, it lacked a regional anchor. The focus was mainly on expanding bilateral defence and high technological cooperation. With their long standing national advantages in the Indo-Pacific threatened by the global power shift, they have chosen to band together. Their shared maritime vision seeks to uphold the law of the sea in the Indian Ocean, prevent the kind of military unilateralism that has come to grip the Western Pacific, secure the sea lines of communication, respond to humanitarian disasters and promote sustainable blue economy. To pursue these objectives, Delhi and Paris have agreed on greater political coordination in the region, mutual logistical support and seamless interoperability between their security forces. This cooperation will not be exclusive but will include engagement with other partners — big and small — in the littoral.

Beyond their effort to influence the high politics of the Indo-Pacific, Delhi and Paris have agreed to address a huge gap in the bilateral relationship — the limited contact among the peoples of the two countries. Macron has promised to make France a major destination for Indian students, engineers, scientists and artists. At a time when borders are closing elsewhere in the world, this is a huge opportunity for the new generation of globalising Indians. Macron's unbridled enthusiasm for India connects with his effort to rejuvenate France and revitalise Europe. It is upto Delhi to make the best of this moment.

Fortune favors the prepared mind.

Louis Pasteur

Glimpses of Karti's clout

By Kabir Firaque

In horror's night of triumph at the Oscars, which acknowledged the genre with five awards, including three of the top five, there was something for the genre itself to acknowledge. In seeking the recognition it has long been denied, horror has lost a part of itself. Not on this night, but in the 90 years leading to it.

Are *The Shape of Water* and *Get Out* really horror? Yes, they are, the latter more so, yet neither is conventional horror. Both the question and the answer underline the reinvention that horror has needed in order to make itself presentable to the Oscars' jury. If presented in its conventional form, horror runs the risk of falling victim to a long tradition of snubs: *The Shape of Water* is only the second horror film (after *The Silence of the Lambs* in 1992) to win Best Picture, and one of only seven horror entries, including *Get Out*, among 546 Best Picture nominees in 90 years. And only one of these seven — *The Exorcist*, nominated in 1974 — has been unadulterated horror.

It is a well-known fact that Oscar juries have often looked at horror as a low-brow genre



unworthy of the top honour. This might explain why director Guillermo del Toro felt the need to tweet last year that *The Shape of Water* is not a horror movie but a fairy tale. The distributors of *The Silence of the Lambs*, too, had marketed it as a thriller rather than as horror.

The Shape of Water may lack the scares that are the hallmark of horror, but it is built around a beast inspired by the monster from the *Black Lagoon* (1954). It convinced the

jury not because of its moorings in horror but in spite of them. Del Toro, a master of crossing genres, subtly turned his film into a commentary on American social hierarchy, including reinventing the beast as a romantic hero.

Get Out, which is no less subtle, has a sounder claim to being horror. Compare its plot to those of the classic Gothic novels and films in which a young, naïve woman marries a mysterious man, moves into his ancestral home where she is greeted by

sinister domestic staff, and goes on to find clues that suggest a horrible family secret. In *Get Out*, the genders of the two protagonists are reversed. I owe this convincing explanation to Kevin Heffernan, an American scholar and historian of films and horror.

It is not the reversal of conventional horror roles, however, that brought an Oscar to the screenplay of writer-director Jordan Peele, who is said to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of conventional

horror. What clinched the verdict was the social satire subtly packaged into the story: It is a black man who moves in with his girlfriend's mysterious family, and it is race that drives an apparent disparity of power between him and the white family. Without what you read between the lines, neither *Get Out* nor *The Shape of Water* stood a chance. This is the price horror has paid in making itself Oscar-worthy.

This is not to suggest that such films should not be made. If such

trappings or camouflage help bring recognition to horror, we welcome it. But spare a thought for horror in its chastest form. Will a haunted house ever win an Oscar? Ignore Rebecca, Best Picture in 1941, because it is more hybrid than horror. Will *Dracula* ever win awards worthier than those for costuming or sound? Will the Oscars ever honour werewolves of the kind that terrorised London and Tarker's Mills, conventional monsters of the kind that Frankenstein built, zombies of the kind that George A. Romero made immortal?

Speaking of the late Romero, he was honoured in the montage "In Memoriam", as was *The Silence of the Lambs* director Jonathan Demme. What horror fans are livid about, however, is the omission of Tobe Hooper, who gave us *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *Poltergeist* (1982). To get a sense of how much it offends a horror fan when a tribute includes Romero and Demme but omits Hooper, think how much it might offend a Bollywood fan when the same tribute includes Sridevi and Shashi Kapoor but leaves out Vinod Khanna.

(Courtesy: Indian Express)

Murder in Attappadi

By S M Vijayanand

As someone who worked as the head of the Integrated Tribal Development Project in Attappadi over three decades ago, trekked to almost all the hamlets, conducted research on local development, mentored several programmes in the area, including the Japanese-aided eco-restoration project and the latest livelihoods project to strength the network of self-help groups of tribal women supported by the Government of India, I was stunned by the explosive mixture of powerful feelings — sadness, outrage, disillusionment and a dangerous despondency — on hearing about the inhuman lynching. Over the years, there has been hardly any cheering news from Attappadi. Similar feelings were aroused when the implementation of the act to prevent alienation of tribal land was stalled in the late 1980s by local violence and, more recently, when there were a series of infant deaths due to malnutrition. The Government of Kerala shockingly rejected a generous offer made by the then Union Minister for Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh, to set up state-of-the-art national-level institutions for livelihoods with a focus on tribals and eco-degraded areas in Attappadi, using the idle infrastructure of the closed Japanese-aided project.

Certainly, the latest incident of the brutal killing of a youth, from a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), who was suffering from mental illness, by people in the neighbourhood who knew him and of his condition, has set a new low. To prevent this being repeated, there is a need for prompt justice



seen, understood and felt by everyone. The exploitation of tribals in Attappadi has been ruthless but, fortunately, if this word may at all be used, bloodless. The sight of one set of poor people riding roughshod over the rights and entitlements of another mocks at theories of class and the ideals of village swaraj — and certainly puts off politicians from seeking basic solutions.

Before the feelings ebb away, it is necessary to reflect on the real situation in Attappadi. It has been the graveyard of every development innovation and the killer of every progressive intention. It was in 1962 that Attappadi was declared as a Tribal Development Block, with a higher staff component and a series of measures were initiated, particularly creation of infrastructure. Alas, this opened up the tribal lands for settlers to rush in, reducing the Adivasis from nearly 90 per cent of the population in the 1950s to less than one-third in the 1970s. In the mid 1970s, using the newly-introduced concept of the Tribal Sub-

Plan and substantial funds from the Western Ghat Development Programme, the Integrated Tribal Development Project came into being. Large cooperative farms were set up to commercialise tribal agriculture in the belief that the tribals could leapfrog from the stage of primitive communism to the stage of socialism, bypassing the dangers of feudalism and capitalism. But the tribal cooperatives managed by corrupt bureaucrats soon collapsed. It is worth mentioning that in the early 1980s, a future panchayat president constructed a road in one of the farms and claimed Rs 20 lakh after spending less than Rs 2 lakh.

The notification of rules to operationalise the act to prevent alienation of tribal land in 1985 after an unpardonable delay of 10 years raised hopes among the Adivasis and their supporters. But cold-blooded vote-bank politics prevented even a rational discussion. This, for the first time, truly alienated the tribals and they lost trust in the system.

In the late 1980s, hope revived briefly through the outstanding work of community resource persons from among the local tribals in the form of health guides. For the first time, a common vision of development started emerging among the tribals. But vested interests struck back, conjuring a conflict between Adivasis and settlers which would mar "the dance of harmony in the hills of Attappadi", as a senior politician put it. In the mid-Nineties, a massive eco-restoration project with Japanese assistance was initiated. Though it focused largely on combating land degradation, towards the end it helped to institutionalise the most successful tribal housing programme in Kerala.

The two state-level development innovations, People's Planning and Kudumbashree, both acclaimed internationally, for people's participation and empowerment of marginalised women, respectively, fell flat in Attappadi.

In the aftermath of the infant deaths in 2013, a centrally-supported livelihoods programme

was initiated and seems to be striking root and sprouting the first green shoots in this wasteland of development. I understand that there is a concerted attempt by local politicians of all hues, in combination with different interests, including some from within the project itself, to strangle the scheme in its infancy. It would be a great service to Attappadi if the crisis of conscience induced by the murder could open the eyes of political leaders, senior officials, the media and activists to join ranks to save this project and nurture it.

Learning from the continuous failures, the conclusions are stark but simple. Funds are in surplus. There are several institutions in place — anganwadis, schools, hospitals, cooperatives and so on — but what is missing is the "subject" of development, namely the Adivasis. Attappadi needs empowerment of Adivasis and now there are several proven methods, the most promising of which is the network of women self-help-groups, supported by a string of community

resource persons, taking up development from its rudiments, that is, through participatory analysis, collective reflection and concerted action — the only way out for the oppressed as taught to us by Paulo Freire, years ago.

A committed young IAS officer could facilitate this if he/she is suitably empowered to be the head of every department for the Attappadi area, supported by a team of young professionals and dedicated officials, particularly teachers and doctors specifically selected, preferably from among volunteers. The way out is to operationalise development rights, focusing on the right to work, the right to education, the right to food, the rights of persons of disabilities, all rooted in deep social accountability. This can be mentored by a small group of dedicated people drawn from different sections of society within and outside Kerala.

In a newspaper, I saw a photograph in which the agriculture minister of Kerala, V S Sunilkumar, of the CPI, A K Balan, minister for SC/ST development of the CPM and V M Sudheeran, former state Congress chief, were standing together near the dead body of Madhu, the tribal youth killed in the incident with their faces expressing genuine distress. If they could persuade their respective parties and reach out to other parties, to ignore their local party functionaries and officials of different unions, then Attappadi can look forward with hope — not for some depoliticised development but for a full-blooded supra-partisan politics of participatory development. If this tragic death can motivate a change of mindset, then Madhu would be a martyr.

(Courtesy: Indian Express)