



K-WAVE: Its Growth And Influences Among The Young Adults Of Darjeeling And Kalimpong Districts In West Bengal

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Abstract

The paper explores into the way of life adopted by the young adults influenced by the effects of K-wave also known as Korean wave of South Korea in small districts like Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal, India. The Korean culture has been a wave of cultural assimilation through digital age, especially Korean popular music, K-pop. The young adults who are part of the popular culture and has an impact on other social relations and structures of any given society, is the focal point of the paper. It looks into how adapting another culture has changed the lifestyle, perspectives, social relations and approaches towards life among these young adults. The paper primarily focuses on understanding nuances and experiences of the young adults and their personal accounts on how has K-wave impacted their lives and how do they perceive a culture which has been learnt through the medium of digital world. It intends to explore a basic understanding at a micro level on how the young adults relate to the Korean culture and their choices and preferences towards their own culture.

Keywords- K-wave, K-pop, social relations, impact, experiences

Introduction

K-wave or Hallyu originating from South Korea has been a common term across the globe which has been garnering a lot of attention. It has been creating powerful impact in the lives of their audience culturally, socially and economically as well. K-wave is a part of South Korean culture which has been significantly gaining global attention and recognition through various forms of Korean culture like music, dramas, movies and many more. Its popularity began in early 1990s through Korean dramas and music. (Sarma.Atheena,2023, p.87). K-wave seem to have first appeared in an article in Chinese newspaper in 1999, about a H.O.T concert in Beijing. (Hae- Joang, C., 2005). Its popularity was further fueled by the advent of globalization and advancement of technology and telecommunications. In the contemporary period, Korean artists have been making global appearances and have a huge fan base across the globe.

Globalization has had a far-reaching effect often intervening with the traditional forms of culture or indigenous culture. Culture as we understand encompasses both the material culture i.e. tangible or physical objects which form a part of the society like buildings, homes, textbooks, offices, factories, clothing so on and so forth and non-material culture like beliefs, language, values, norms, morals. With the advent of

Globalization, Culture among the human society has been shaping and re-shaping human lives and social structure in various ways. Multiculturalism has paved its way into the lives of the individuals. In a world that has been transitioning itself into a Global Village, it is often seen the cultural exchange has been quite prominent and easily accessible through various digital platforms. Darjeeling and Kalimpong are small districts in the state of West Bengal, India is often called the hub of fashion and recently K-Pop originating from South Korea; a form of Korean pop music, has been one of the major influences especially among the young adults.

Anthony Giddens explains that with the development of information and telecommunications, the intensity of globalization has had far-reaching effects across different nations and have increased the speed of interaction between people all over the world. (Giddens.A, 2006, 50). The easy accessibility through various digital platforms without crossing borders have made it convenient for the audience across the globe to be a part of popular culture sitting at the comfort of their home environment. This has led to the increasing popularity especially among the young adults of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, where the audiences consuming the Korean pop culture content have been associating themselves with the Korean culture and have been building social associations and community creating a cultural identity within the larger community of these regions (Kirin et. al., 2025). Culture as a process keep changing and continuing. Darjeeling is a land of diverse ethnic cultures. Each group has their own specific language and tradition but Nepali as a language has been the dominant one. The main concern is the changing patterns in the cultural traits especially adopted by the young generation. It is observed that this group of population is more inclined and easily influenced by the mass media. The cultural pattern or trend that is quite prominent among the young adults of Darjeeling hills is seen acquiring the sub-culture which has been a global phenomenon in recent times. K-pop has been paving its way into the lives of these young adults. The Korean pop music from South Korea boomed after the economic liberalization in the early 1990's, which incorporated western style of music while retaining their traditional form. (Reimeingam, M. (2014, p. 15-30).

The study aims to find and locate this group of young adults into the larger cultural context. K- Pop and K-drama has been garnering a lot of attention in the entertainment industry worldwide. With its new genre of music in addition with energetic forms of dance style infused with western form of dance, K-pop emerged as a fresh and novel genre to the entertainment industry. Some of the songs also include English as a language which makes it more popular and reachable to larger audience. K-pop is often seen to create a niche among the fans who relate to each other in terms of the concepts and terminology and cultural patterns used only by the K-pop fans. It also forms a social identity and solidarity on a collective basis among its audience across the globe. K-pop extends beyond entertainment producing various cultural and symbolic products which has accelerated the marketing and purchasing power worldwide. The change in the cultural taste reflects the advanced modernity and how technology has surpassed all human barriers.

The study aims to identify the main characteristics of cultural identity with the South Korean culture and what attracts these young adults to develop habits and lifestyle similar to the Korean culture. It further tries to understand the perceptions and how the representations are made in the larger cultural context within the domains of the Nepali culture. The cultural identity formed among this generation of the population has transcended not just the local but national boundaries as well. Among the modern thinkers, Stuart Hall also discusses that the construction of social identity as one of the essential features of modern cultural identity. The popularity of K-pop songs, series and movies are more prominent among young group of people who have also formed a community identity that includes all others who have acquired the taste of Korean culture. The popularity has also resulted in a change in the food culture of these areas which has witnessed a growth in the number of restaurants and cafes serving Korean cuisines. Besides, food culture, the marketing of the Korean products like accessories, fashion, make-up products, stationary items, shoes etc. have seen higher purchase and demand of these products among this section of population. The consumption of these products, music and entertainment are easily accessible through various digital

platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Instagram, Facebook and many other social media applications which has been one of the primary factors in mushrooming into the socio-cultural lives of people especially among young adults in case of these two districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

Objectives

- understanding the influence of K-wave and production of new cultural identity among the young adults of Darjeeling
- observing the way of interpretation of the Korean culture by the young adults and adaptation of the lifestyle
- to explore the implementation of the Korean culture into the ways of life of these group of population.

K-Wave – its rising popularity among the young adults

Sociologically, as one of the essential functions, culture unites a plurality of individual in a specific collectivity and also performs the function of shaping individuals' personality. It is quite inevitable that an individual's life has been altered since the advent of globalization and its forces which has penetrated into local contexts, communities and households. To a great extent it has restructured the nature of our everyday lives. In the contemporary period, individuals have more opportunities and access to shape their own lives. With globalization, the shift has been towards individualism and construction of own identities and way of life. K-pop as one of the global phenomena along with music has also been introducing cultural traits into the lives of the individuals. The technological advancement has resulted in disseminating cultures worldwide. As Manuel Castells argues, that the information society is marked by the rise of networks and network economy. For Castells, networks are the defining organizational structure of our age. (Giddens,2006).

What embarked as a part of music genre has now been influencing the cultural patterns and personality of the young adults. K-Pop is a form of music band of boys and girls. Various music band like BTS, Blackpink, TXT, Stray Kids, Red Velvet etc. has been ruling some of the list in the global music charts in recent times. Simultaneously, Korean series and dramas has been another form of wave having cultural and social influence.

From the 1990's K-wave or the Korean wave also known as Hallyu started to make its mark globally and transcended the borders and boundaries. K-wave means the spread of South Korean popular culture through the means of entertainment in various forms like music videos, dramas, series and movie. So, it is basically an increase of popularity and influence across the globe. (Reimeingam, M. (2014, p. 15-30). The K-wave got introduced in India through the north east region. With the telecast of Korean dramas and movies through Korean Channels in Manipur, the outspread of K-wave was inevitable which was further aided by globalization and liberalization. The young adults were strongly attracted to the new found culture also because of the close ties with the neighboring countries like China and Myanmar. (Sarma.Atheena,2023, p. 90)

The wave started in relation with T.V dramas, music, movies and fashion style. The technological development also helped in the consumption of the cultural content. The studies show how various media like YouTube, Viki, Spotify music, V-Live, Weverse, Instagram has made it easily accessible. The audience at large have not only been a fan of the music and entertainment but the studies also revealed that it is also the traditions, cultural habits and lifestyle which has been one of the significant reasons to adopt the Korean Culture. The cultural proximity also posed as one of the significant factors towards its growth and popularity. The influence of K-pop has transcended beyond consumption of digital entertainment to adopting cultural habits like fashion, food and learning the language as well.

Fashion as a part of material culture has highly influenced this section of population. It was observed how the market economy in clothing sector has been affected since the advent of K- wave. Fashion style influenced by the K-pop seems to have gained its foothold in the market economy through the clothing stores in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The younger generation has also adopted the way of getting dressed and representing the Korean culture through their sense of fashion and products including skincare products and routine. The impact of K-wave can also be seen in the food culture of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Many restaurants and food joints have been serving Korean food and thus propagating the Korean culture and introducing it to the masses. These restaurants have Korean themed ambience and are aesthetically pleasing, which reflects the emergence of Korean culture in the lives of the people of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Through the taste buds the Korean culture has been creating a space in minds and hearts of the people.

K-wave has been a major factor in shaping the idea, knowledge, expression of feelings and attitudes of these young people particularly between 14-26 age groups. The study also found that most of the young adults adopting Korean Culture were mostly girls. It also revealed that the world of K-wave has several symbolic meanings attached like the word 'wave' which symbolizes the actual wave (similar to tidal wave) which is created by synchronizing the body movements of the audience in a form of wave and that signifies the strength, unity and support among the fans. Various other body languages and gestures are used which is exclusive, only to the K-pop fans like calling themselves as Army, forming fans groups in support of K-pop which also functions as a support group in dealing with life struggles and stress.

One of the basic questions probed in the study is as to why has the K-wave engulfed a large part of the younger generation of Darjeeling and Kalimpong under its wing and how technology as a part of culture played a significant role in everyday lives and have successfully disseminated the Korean Culture into the lives of the young people in these districts of Kalimpong and Darjeeling.

Methodology

The focus group study was conducted in intervals with 15 groups to have a clearer insight into the K-pop world through their experiences and perspective. An in-depth interview and group discussion was conducted among 15 groups of young students. Each group consisted of 6-7 respondents within the age group pf 13-17 years. The tool used to draw an analysis was based on unstructured interview. Simple random sampling was applied for the study. The influence of K- pop among these young adults was observed on various aspects.

Impact And Influences Impact on

Mental health

It came to light that K-pop works as an escape to these young adults who otherwise feel unheard and unable to communicate to other members of the society regarding their personal issues. Many of the young respondents also mentioned how K-pop creates awareness on mental health and personality disorder which has also helped these young adults as a way of gaining knowledge. One of the respondents, a student of Standard XII expressed, how K-pop has helped her become emotionally mature and considerate of others' emotions well, through various live sessions conducted on mental health by the K-pop stars or idol as called by the fans. Many of the respondents were of the view that K-pop played a major role in their personality development and has given them a sense of confidence and has been more of a positive influence in their lives. On a larger context, it has helped them deal with problems, stress and frustrations.

When the studies intervened into as to what was the main attraction towards the K-pop, the respondents shared that K-pop is not just about how entertaining or catchy the music is, but it also about how it deals with various social issues and also addresses mental health issues via online streaming platforms and social

media accounts of the celebrities.

Many of the respondents were of the opinion that K-Pop has helped in creating mental health awareness which otherwise is not discussed in everyday basis in their lives. The respondents also shared how K-pop has been a support to their mental health and made them aware about mental health issues like Borderline Personality, Anxiety issues and others.

Fashion and Food

Cultural assimilation was mainly seen mainly through the adaptation of Food and Fashion as a way of life. Fashion to a large extent had highly influenced these young adults. From accessories to clothing and also skincare routine has been a part of their everyday lives. K-pop fashion was served as a part of expressing their feelings and creativity. The respondents had a high regard for the Korean style of fashion which in their opinion was individualistic, gave a sense of confidence, chic and trendy. Most of the respondents had adopted the skincare routine in their day to day lives. They also followed the beauty regime – the Korean glass skin, beauty masks and use of various Korean products available through e-shopping. It was also found that various merchandise like toys, stickers, mugs, clothing etc. were purchased online and some of the merchandise was exclusively available in the local stores. The respondents also had a lot of knowledge about the Korean food. The influence of the Korean culture has been quite prominent which could be seen from the chain of Korean themed restaurants and cafes which has been serving Korean food, posed as one of the centers for the dissemination of Korean Culture.

Social Issues Awareness

The respondents were of the view that K-pop has been breaking down gender stereotypes, acting as a source of inspiration adopted by the idols (as they would like to address their favorite K-pop celebrity or artist) through the medium of virtual interactive sessions, through their comments and replies, propagating humanistic values and ideas, facing inner conflicts and strength. It was observed that the K-pop was beyond the genre of music to these young people, it had an important psychological role to play in the lives of their audience, from minute everyday lifestyle habit as skincare routine to facing one's inner conflict and struggles was the opinions of the respondents about the K-wave. A student of standard XII, shared how she has been aware of women empowerment and breaking of the gender biasness. Such a move initiated by these artists seems to have a profound impact on the audiences.

Inspiration

As stated by the respondents, there are documentaries that showcase the struggle, hard work and efforts behind the making of a success story which seem to inspire these young adults in achieving their goals in life. The reality behind the scenes has have had an impact which inspires these younger generation. One of the respondents, shared how the way of being non-judgmental among the K-pop culture has inspired her to have a more positive approach towards life and have mustered self-confidence in facing difficulties in life. The respondents were well aware of the negative side of the Korean entertainment industry. While some even stated how rigorous training, commitment and binding contracts, the K-pop idols have to undergo to keep the industry running. The reality served as a transparency which had a boomerang effect, such a harsh reality was viewed as a matter of inspiration for the hard work put in by the celebrities to cater to the needs of the fans across the globe.

Conclusion

The study showed that K-pop has made its mark among these young generation of Darjeeling and Kalimpong Districts. It revealed that K-pop has been a coping mechanism to address various issues faced by these young adults. The popularity of K-pop has been a social phenomenon influencing the socio-cultural life of these young adults which can be reflected in their lifestyle and approaches towards life. A society is built on the cultural values and understanding of its region but the study revealed a shift from the Nepali culture to K-pop culture especially among this group of the population. As basic as skincare routine to food habit the respondents seem to have been adopting and implementing Korean culture in their daily routines which reflects the power of technological advancements and its influences across borders. Darjeeling and

Kalimpong districts in the state of West Bengal has its own profound ethnic cultures, the cultural continuity seems to be challenged with the greater impact K-pop has been having over the younger generation. It mirrors an identity being formed which has encompassed different aspects of life and provided a space for cultivation and adaptation within the larger population. The formation of a sub-culture with its characteristics seems to have found its way in these districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The K-pop culture has also successfully made its way into the material culture through various products being a part of the lifestyle and building its cultural identity among the respondents. One can view the influence of K-Pop having its far-reaching influence in shaping the cultural identity and individualism as a result of globalization. The study helped explore the interests and fandom of K-pop, addressing the query as to what makes K-pop survive and build its identity among the young adult population of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts. The expansion of such a culture also exhibits the mass consumption of technology which otherwise the popularity of K-pop would be less prominent. It is evident that the influence of K-pop has extended beyond the socio-cultural lives of their audience along with its impact on the economy through the production and marketing of the symbolic cultural products. The easy accessibility of e-commerce has accelerated the use of such cultural products paving its way for strengthening the influence and control over the lives of its K-pop fans. It can be observed that the K-wave serves a purpose of fulfilling the interests and preferences of its audience which fosters the growth of its prevalence and existence in the contemporary time.

In juxtaposition, the ethnic culture of the region has lesser influence on the young adults of Darjeeling and Kalimpong as compared to the influence of K-pop. The cultural patterns adopted by this section of the population are more inclined towards Korean culture which is the result of the implementation of the Korean entertainment industry assessing the interests and demand of its audience and consumers. It produces cultural content relevant to everyday lives and creates a space for resonance among its audience. The romanticization of the South Korean culture often blurs the line in understanding the cultural hegemony and a shift and decline in the local culture and their continuity. This has also created a sense of bubble for these young adults which sometimes have little relevance to their social reality.

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