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## Hallyu Wave In India: A Cultural Turn

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### Abstract:

In recent years, the increasing popularity of Korean Pop Culture and Korean Drama, also known as the 'Hallyu Wave', among Indians, especially the youth, augments the fundamental aspect of the notion of culture which transgresses the temporospatial bipartite. The Korean Wave's vast influence, encompassing all the significant facets ranging from music, drama and films, on the Indian youths popped up a dynamic cultural shift. With the success of the beautiful narrative, beauty products and addictive music which differs from the Western style of music, Korean culture has garnered attention from different people of different diversities leading to becoming a global phenomenon. This paper records not only the transference of two cultures but also attempts to highlight the correlation and acculturation of engrossing consumption of Korean Pop Culture among Indian youths.

**Keywords: K-pop, K-drama, Films, Youth, Indian audience.**

### Introduction

Hallyu Wave is a global phenomenon, which is known by almost everyone in today's modern generation. It is highly accepted by the younger generations in every part of the globe. Countries like India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, Japan, America, Philippines, Thailand, etc., are highly influenced by Korean Culture. After the influence of the American Dream, it is the Hallyu Wave which is influencing the minds of people. People want to visit Korea now and want to settle there, using Korean beauty products, buying K-pop merchandise, falling in love with the most handsome heroes and having a crush on the beautiful heroines of Kdrama leading to the highest viewerships in certain OTT platforms like Netflix, Hotstar, and Amazon Prime. Not only this, Hindi Dubbed versions were available earlier and still other OTT platforms like MX Player using it to gather the attention of the audience and to increase viewership among non-English speakers. This is because

of the plot and the screen sequences, and the themes, in Kdrama, which are quite similar to the real-life situation found in the cultures of other Asian Countries.

It was quite a different scenario earlier in India as compared to now, so far as promoting Korean culture is concerned. We propose to wonder at this transference. Was it an automatic acceptance as we are part of the global citizen? It started in the year of 1990s when the government decided to accept the Korean Wave in order to prevent Korean citizens from travelling to other foreign countries leading to the citizens' ability to travel abroad and to know about Western Culture. According to an article, *Martin Roll: Business & Brand Leadership*<sup>1</sup>-

*“Many pursued their education in these countries and others started their careers in esteemed companies in Europe and the US before returning to Korea during the late 1990s. These western educated Koreans brought with them new perspectives of doing business, new subtleties and interpretations to art, cinema and music and innovative forms of expression. This gave birth to an immense pool of fresh, young, and highly qualified talent waiting to explore opportunities within Korea.”(martinroll.com, 2021)*

Besides, the Financial Crisis of the 90s played an instrumental role in the rise of the Hallyu. Though the wave was unplanned, it created a huge development in the contribution to the Korean Economy, Films and Music, beauty and fashion.

### **Hallyu Wave in India: How it Came in India?**

#### **During the 90s & the 00s**

Many considered that during the lockdown in 2020, the Indian Audiences were influenced by Korean Culture but that is wrong. It all started during the 90s, through the North-Eastern States of the Country, especially Manipur. The reason is the North-Eastern States were always neglected by the other states of the country which led to the ban of Bollywood movies and songs. This helped the people of the Northeast to access the culture of the other country. According to Ms K.C. Neela's, *“The Rise of Hallyu - A Study on the Consumption of Korean Content in India”*<sup>2</sup>-

*“The Arirang channel was launched in Mizoram in 1996 and with the newly enacted ban on Bollywood products in 2000, it served as a gateway to Korean entertainment. Close trade connections with neighbouring countries like Myanmar and China enabled the youth to also consume this content. Northeastern fans brought their*

<sup>1</sup> “Korean Wave (Hallyu) - Rise of Korea's Cultural Economy & Pop Culture.”

<sup>2</sup> Chakravarthy, Neela. “The Rise of Hallyu - a Study on the Consumption of Korean Content in India.”

obsession westward and down south when migrating for studies and the interest spread to their classmates, with many migrating from Indian and Western content to Korean content.”(Neela,2018)



**Pic. The official Poster of Boys Over Flowers and Heirs.**

Besides, Korean Drama played a very significant role in terms of popularity. Earlier, most of the K-dramas were remade in Hindi because of their amazing storylines. One of the most popular shows-*Kaisi Yeh Yaariyan* which was based on the most famous and the favourite of all K-drama lovers, '*Boys Over Flowers*' and *Kahani Hamari Dil Dosti Deewanapan ki* was based on the Korean actor Lee Min Ho's one of the best and highly recommended and popular Kdramas '*Heirs*'. Also, companies like Samsung and LG launched their products during the 90s and started to capture the Indian market.

### **During 2007-2012**

The gap between the two countries was filled due to the rise of the usage of Korean brands of electronics, especially companies like Samsung. Samsung launched its first mobile phones in India and LG with its home appliances. Other companies were there who played a very important role in creating a connection between the two countries. Smriti. S.Raj's article, "*The Whirlwind of 'Hallyu'- The Korean Wave in India*" states<sup>3</sup>

*"In 2006, TVS Motors and Hyundai formed a non-profit organization called India-Korea Cultural Centre (InKo Centre) to bridge the gap between both the countries and its people. InKo promotes languages, cultures, foods, traditional arts, exchange of hip-hop artists, authors, potters, painters, and theatre troupes between Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, and Seoul. The Government of Nagaland and the Republic of Korea came together to hold music festivals at Kohima, and even during the famous Hornbill festival."* (Raj,2021)

<sup>3</sup> Raj, Smriti S. "The Whirlwind of "Hallyu"- the Korean Wave in India."



**Pic. Stills of the Song Gangnam Style.**

In 2012, K-pop started to become a phenomenon around the world, especially in India. In the year between 2012-2013, Korean soloist and owner of the music company P-Nation Psy became a household name in every part of the country because of his song, ‘Gangnam Style’. The catchy tune and the signature step became everyone’s favourite and most people tried to dance like him during that time. This song not only became popular and made Psy an International Singer but it was also a way of exporting the culture through music around the world. The Economic Times said-<sup>4</sup>

*“K-pop acts had tried to break into international markets before 2012 with some regional success in Asia, but they had failed to make a mark in huge and lucrative Western markets such as the United States. And then came Psy, who did not fit the profile of polished K-pop idols.” (economic times, 2022)*

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<sup>4</sup> “Gangnam Style” Impact: South Korea’s Biggest Cultural Export Endures a Decade after It Broke the Internet.”

### The Rise of the Third Generation Idols and their Popularity in India.



**Pic. The Second Generation Group-2Ne1, Wonder Girls, Girls Generation, BigBang.**

Apart from Psy, many Kpop Idols were quite popular in Korea and in other countries like- Shinee, Girls Generation, Super, Junior, 2Ne1, BigBang, Wonder Girls, and Apink. These groups were amazingly talented and beautiful but what they lacked was luck. These groups were quite underrated in most of the countries including India. The main reason behind this is that India already has its own entertainment which is Bollywood. The industry already had a huge fan following of talented actors and singers. Many people earlier were not that aware of anything like K-pop. Besides, most of the people were followers of Western singers like Miley Cyrus due to her popular show Hannah Montana, Justin Bieber, Rihanna, and others who were ruling the whole world with their music during the year between 2013-2015. After the disbandment of some of the second-generation K-Pop groups, it was the third generation which led to the rise of Hallyu 3.0. This led to one of the most popular K-pop groups and soloists like BTS, Blackpink, Twice, Mamamoo, EXO, Red Velvet, GOT7, and GFriend.



**Pic.The Third Generation Group-EXO, Twice, GOT7, Blackpink, Red Velvet, BTS.**

Among all the other groups, the three major groups-BTS, Blackpink and Twice became international sensations. It all started with BTS during 2017-2018 when they released their album ‘Love Yourself’ which became one of the highest-grossing and most loved albums. The most popular song was ‘Fake Love’, one of the most streamed songs on Youtube and other online sites. Billboards state-<sup>5</sup>

*“The song debuts at No. 7, becoming the first K-pop track in the top 10 since 2014. “Fake Love,” from BTS’ new Billboard 200-topping album Love Yourself: Tear, debuts at No. 7 on Streaming Songs with 27.4 million streams earned in the week ending May 24, according to Nielsen Music, giving the K-pop group its first top 10. Previously, the group peaked at No. 38 on the Oct. 14, 2017-dated chart with “DNA,” the lead single from the previous album Love Yourself: Her, with 11.4 million streams.”(Rutherford,2018).*



**Pic. Fake Love Still By BTS**

Not only that, GOT7 member Jackson Wang became India’s favourite idol after BTS because of his love for India. He always stated that he wants to visit India once in his life and his dream came true. He had a concert in India as a soloist and then the idol went viral for it.

There is a reason behind its popularity in India. BTS and other K-pop groups like Twice promoted the idea of self-love and motivation to the fans and Blackpink promoted the idea of Savageness and being different. These groups believed in spreading the importance of loving yourself rather than someone else. BTS believed in spreading the idea of mental health. They, in fact, dedicated a song for students as well and, *“They draw inspiration from their own personal experiences and struggles with mental health, and aim to destigmatize the taboo surrounding psychiatric disorders and symptoms” (nowandme.com).*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Rutherford, Kevin. “BTS’ “Fake Love” Is Group’s First Top 10 on Streaming Songs Chart.”

<sup>6</sup> Srivastava, Simran. “Articles, Resources, & Stories on Things That Matter | Blog.” *Now&Me.*



**Pic. Official Poster of *Descendent of the Sun***

Kdrama like Song Joong Ki and Song Hye Ko's, "*Descendent of the Sun*" were the reason for the Indians to fall in love with the gripping storyline and the on-screen chemistry of the Song-Song couple. It was so popular that most of the girls fell in love with the male lead. Due to its highest demand, it was dubbed in Hindi and shown on channels like Zee Zindagi and OTT Platforms like MX Player so that others can watch easily without following the subtitles. There is a reason behind it and that is outdated concepts of Bollywood and special mention to Indian TV serials where characters like 'Naagin' is popular among Indian Women and encourage extramarital affairs like marrying two women and the concept of re-birth of the main leads and unnecessary background music and emotional sequences. The channel Zee Zindagi became a way of introducing new shows which promote the different cultures of the world like America, and Turkey and this Korean drama was the first choice. Aditi Shrivastava in her blog states,

*"The dramatic rise of K-drama In India; 6 Korean shows that bought Hallyu wave in the country. This Korean show craze went so high that it made the actor Song Joong Ki the heartthrob of the country overnight. The chemistry between the leads were not only admired by the desi fans, but the show bound the audience in such a way that it became a global hit. With a cherry on the top, the leads even got married in real life, however, things didn't go very well, and they separated after a few years. The story revolves around a South Korean soldier who falls in love with a surgeon, however, duty calls him back and their love story was left on a cliffhanger, but fate decided to unite them again but this time somewhere overseas". (Shrivastava,2022).<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Srivastava, Aditi. "The Dramatic Rise of K-Drama in India; 6 Korean Shows That Bought Hallyu Wave in the Country." *Jagran TV*.



**Pic. The official Poster of Blackpink: Light Up the Sky.**

Not only Kdrama, but documentaries also became quite popular in India. For example, Blackpink: Light UP the Sky, a Netflix Documentary which became one of the most viewed documentaries on Netflix. According to Wikipedia:<sup>8</sup>

*The film ranked first on Netflix upon release in 28 out of 78 countries and regions. According to Netflix, it was the most viewed documentary across Asia, specifically in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Thailand.” (en.wikipedia.org).*



**Pic. The Official Title Card of Run BTS.**

<sup>8</sup> “Blackpink: Light up the Sky.” *Wikipedia.*



Run BTS became the most viewed variety show because of its uniqueness in every episode and the adorable relationship between the boys. This show is one of the most genuine and entertaining shows with a great taste of humour.

### **During the Global Lockdown:**

The whole world witnessed the lockdown in 2020 and it was a difficult phase for each and everyone. But Kpop was unstoppable. K-wave content was immensely instrumental in that tough time as it not only provided a form of entertainment but also filled the gap of social and emotional connection staying at home for a considerable period of time. Most importantly, these contents helped to overcome several mental health syndromes that we came across in that claustrophobic situation. During that time, most of the groups released their new songs, people witnessed the debut of new groups like- TXT, ITZY, Stray Kids and the most popular song 'Dynamite' by BTS. Kdrama became the media of entertainment for every individual because K-drama was a solution to run away from the harsh and pathetic reality. K-pop and Kdrama helped many people to heal during that time and many idols helped their fans to heal themselves because of the positivity penned down in the lyrics of the music. According to UNESCO:<sup>9</sup>

*“K-pop has even had a beneficial effect on the psychological state of young people. Many say that these frothy videos have helped them cope with the Coronavirus blues – a term that describes the anxiety caused by the pandemic. Driven by the huge success of K-pop groups, these new trends in cultural consumption did not originate during the health crisis, but the pandemic has amplified and accentuated them. And we can only imagine that they are here to stay.”* (Young Jin,2021).

Various studies identified mental health deterioration during stressful times among children, adolescents, and young adults and here lies the impact of cultural embrace on world citizens. BTS became one of “the emotional support of K-pop boys”. The powerful message of “life goes on”, BTS’s latest song helped many to go through that crisis. In India, almost everyone, except a few, started following the band Boys and K-pop stars and started interacting with their dream icons through social media. Thanks to these iconic stars, who moved out from the cocoon of stardom to connect with their fans and brought a spark of smiles to their faces. Cultural proximity is one of the main reasons behind the success of the Hallyu Wave in India. And this is the beauty of culture as it transcends all demographic lines and cultural hybridization brings a fresh leash to every culture. But this is an undenyng fact that the surge of K-wave content was immensely felt in India during the Lockdown.

Apart from Kdrama and Kpop, Korean beauty, fashion and food became the popular choice for everyone. Korean brands saw a huge rise during the lockdown and many start-up companies became popular and earned a huge profit by selling Korean brands in India. Companies like- Oppa Store, Inkarto, K-Pop Merch,

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<sup>9</sup> UNESCO. “K-Pop: A Cure for the Pandemic Blues.” *UNESCO*.

Meesho, Maccaron, Korikart, and Nykaa, these companies launched unique products at an affordable rate which attracted a lot of buyers to buy their products. Besides, companies like- FaceShop and Innisfree became India's favourite Korean brands and many online shopping sites are selling these brands at affordable prices and, “Many home-grown brands like Dot and Key, Juicy Chemistry, Mamaearth, Wow Skincare are taking inspiration from Korean skincare and introducing themselves in the Indian market with Indian natural ingredients” (Raj,2021).<sup>10</sup>

## Hallyu Wave: Post Covid

Korean Wave became the favourite choice of everyone in India, except a few. Instead of the American dream, people want to indulge themselves in the culture of Hanguk. Now, most of the people of India want to study the Korean language and various restaurants are opened in every part of India to taste the flavours of ramen and Soju. In Kashika Saxena’s blog-*On The Hallyu High: Decoding Soaring Popularity Of Korean Classes In India*<sup>11</sup>:

*“The Hallyu wave, or the rise in global popularity of South Korean culture, had taken over India a few years ago, but it exploded during the pandemic. The number of people who started watching K-dramas and listening to K-pop skyrocketed, fuelled by OTT platforms heavily investing in South Korean programming. Recently, the language-learning app Duolingo surveyed 1,013 people across 10 Indian cities and found that Korean is now the fastest growing language in India. While it was the seventh most popular language for Indians in 2020, it rose to the fifth position in 2021, and will only continue to go higher. Duolingo’s 2021 language report attributes this in large part to the release of Squid Game in 2021.”* (Saxena,2022)

Apart from that BTS, EXO, Blackpink, Twice, ITZY, and TXT have a huge fan following in India. According to the survey by Jennu Louis:<sup>12</sup>

*“The popular K-pop girl group BLACKPINK drew more than 830 million views from Indian fans as of March 2022, according to data from the FanEdge website. More than 738 million views were received from Thailand, followed by 640 million from Indonesia. Black Pink is a well-known K-pop act in both the United States and internationally. The majority of the female audience for blackpink are represented in album sales, with 59.1% of them female and 41.1% of them male. The most important aspect of their popularity is their songs, which describe independence and vulnerability, bilingual lyrics, and a strong stage presence. The band’s videos, also known as concept videos, are also styling.”* (Louis,2023)

<sup>10</sup> Raj, Smriti S. “The Whirlwind of “Hallyu”- the Korean Wave in India.”

<sup>11</sup> Saxena, Kashika. “On the Hallyu High: Decoding Soaring Popularity of Korean Classes in India.”

<sup>12</sup> Louis, Jenny. “Exploring the Growth and Reach of Blackpink’s Global Fan Base.”

Pruma Chakraborty in her blog, 'India Trippin' On K-Pop, said:<sup>13</sup>

“Another group, EXO, one of the most popular idol boy groups of Korea has a huge fan base in India. With over 13,000 Indian followers on Twitter, the EXO-Ls (official name of the fandom) have participated in several mass streaming and other fan projects. From last year, they have started with a project called ‘Miracles of December’ named after one of Exo’s songs where all the concerts of EXO are screened in various cities across the country in the month of December. This began with the Manipur EXO-Ls where they booked a whole theatre to screen the latest concerts.” (Chakraborty,2018).



**Pic.Official Poster of the album Taste of Love by Twice.**

Twice’s mini album-*The Taste of Love*(2021) became the highest-grossing album which was streamed on Youtube, where the title song, Alcohol-Free became the most streamed song in India after the pandemic. The survey by the Times Of India says:<sup>14</sup>

“The Indian fan base has reportedly contributed significantly to the views on the 'Alcohol-Free' music video apart from helping the TWICE Chart No.1 on Indian iTunes.At present, India's YouTube hits account for 15.1 million views of a total of 80 million views and counting. This makes India #2 among the top streamers, with Japanese Ounces leading the way.” (timesofindia,2021).

Indian celebrities like A.R. Rahman, Tiger Shroff, Rashmika Mandanna, Ayushman Khurana and many more are followers of BTS. Indian singer Armaan Mallik did a collaborative project with Korea’s Boyfriend Eric Nam in a song called ‘Echo’. Telugu movie Actor Allu Arjun became a sensation after making a collaboration with Armaan Mallik and Korean Girl Group TRI.BE for a Coca-Cola advertisement. This made a historical

<sup>13</sup> Chakraborty, Pruma. “India Trippin’ on K-Pop.” *The Patriot*.

<sup>14</sup> “Alcohol-Free: India Rank Number 2 among TWICE’s Top Streamers on YouTube.” *The Times of India*.

collaboration between both India and Korea. Zoom TV Digital penned down their views about the collaboration:<sup>15</sup>

*“In what seems to be quite a new and refreshing concept, Allu Arjun, Armaan Malik and K-pop crew Tri.be have come together for a brand TVC. With the Indian audience going gaga over South cinema and K-pop at the moment, this surely must be a dream come true for many.” (Zoom TV Digital,2022).*

K-pop idol Jackson Wang is the first K-pop soloist, who performed in Mumbai and he performed for the Lollapalooza music festival. This music festival was first performed in India and Jackson Wang was the only Korean artist to Perform in this festival in India. He enjoyed and explored the city with Bollywood actress Disha Patani and the video went viral. It was a proud moment for India when a small-town girl became a K-pop idol and she is none other than Sriya Lenka. According to the news of Economic Times:<sup>16</sup>

*“Sriya Lenka, an 18-year-old girl from Odisha, has grabbed headlines as she became the first Indian K-pop star. She is brilliant with many dance forms like classical, hip-hop, freestyle and contemporary. Since her childhood, Sriya had been very inquisitive and wanted to pursue her dreams. The talented girl was chosen by the BlackSwan group on Thursday. Her journey however started in 2020 as a K-pop star, she has come a long way since then.” (Economic Time,2022).*



**Pic.Official Poster of the Hockey World Cup.**

After Jackson Wang, The Kpop group BlackSwan where Sriya Lenka is a member performed at the inauguration of the Men’s Hockey World Cup in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on 11th January,2023.

<sup>15</sup> “K-Pop Meets India! Allu Arjun, Armaan Malik Join Hands with Girl Group Tri.be for a One of a Kind Collaboration.” *Zoom TV*.

<sup>16</sup> “Who Is Sriya Lenka? How Did Sriya’s Journey Start? The First K-Pop Star from India.” *The Economic Times*.

**Conclusion:**

Undoubtedly, the pandemic was instrumental in the rise and popularity of the Hallyu Wave in India. But the cultural proximity with the North-Eastern region and the continuous effort of cultural hybridization through a process of nativized approach cemented the cultural bond between the two countries. The growth of the wave was amazing within two years and they introduced lots of conceptual music videos, amazing storylines and beauty products which made a lot of satisfied customers around the world. It is challenging to maintain goodwill in a country like India where popular brands are there to give neck-to-neck competition, but it will be really an interesting thing to see how Korean products slowly creep up the market size in the country. Along with this, the Korean entertainment industry is soaring higher and higher. This results in the correlation and acculturation of engrossing consumption of Korean pop Culture among Indians.

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