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Media, Culture, And Alienation: A Perspective On The Impact Of Korean Wave In Manipur

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Abstract

The 1990s saw the emergence of an enormous wave of the so-called Korean Wave, engulfing the entire Northeast India in general and Manipur in particular. As a result, the people of this region became familiar with Korean music, television shows, beauty care and products, fashion, food habits, etc., and other aspects of this Wave. The primary facilitator of this phenomenon was the media in the form of Television in the initial days and in the present scenario through YouTube, social media, etc. This wave has significantly impacted the socio-cultural outlook of the state's youth. The proposed paper starts from a basic premise that there is already a sense of alienation on the part of the people in the Northeast on the one hand and also socio-cultural proximity that the people of the region feel towards the Eastern countries on the other. In such a situation, the advancement in ICT has brought the socio-cultural life of these countries to the region's people, mainly in the form of what has already been called the Korean Wave. Given this reality, the paper argues that these two considerations have helped pave the way for the Korean Wave to reach North East India in general and Manipur in particular. It also tries to highlight the impact of the Wave on the socio-cultural outlook of the youths in Manipur.

Keywords: Media, Culture, Alienation, Korean Wave, Manipuri Youth.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world of interconnectedness, it has become very effortless when it comes to the flow or exchange of various things, ranging from information to technological advancements, from anything to cultural products. This transaction has been made possible due to the progress in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). This transaction's primary facilitator or carrier has been the media, specifically the 'mass media.' The term 'Media' refers to all forms of communication ranging from printed paper to digital data. It comprises all forms of information that can reach or impact people, and this information is transferred through news, art, education, books, magazines, radio, television, and internet etc. Media, or more precisely mass media, is the technological means of disseminating information, ideas, opinions, etc., through a mass communication device to a diverse audience. For this process, there are different channels through which information reaches a target audience. There are various types of media, including print media, which refers to printed materials like newspapers, books, and magazines that contain

words and images, electronic media, which refers to information transmitted or provided through one of the many mass communication channels, like the telegraph, gramophone, radio, movies, television, etc., and online or mobile media, which includes media content shared or transferred through the internet, like audio, images, videos, etc. In addition, these kinds of media encourage various forms of exchanges, including culture (Hanson,2020).

The term "culture" refers to a broad range of symbolic items, including ideas, worldviews, values, morals, conventions, rituals, films, religious practices, and other skills and habits developed by man as a part of society. Culture is something that is passed down from one generation to the next. Additionally, it pertains to how individuals understand their social surroundings. It is a dynamic idea since it is prone to change throughout time and varies depending on society (Derne, 2008). A sense of alienation from the prior culture occasionally accompanies cultural adaptation to new environments. Cultural alienation is the state of being cut off from one's social connections. We loosen from the ties of the one-dimensionality of a set cultural community we belong to the more contacts we as human beings have with other communities in diverse forms (Ahponen, 2004). The indiscriminate opening of doors to new experiences and impressions by the media sometimes alienates people from their culture (Encyclopedia, 2020).

Media plays a catalytic role in transforming societies in a globalized world. Today's world is one in which, because of advancements in ICT, it has significantly become simpler to stay informed about any events happening anywhere in the world. This breakthrough has dramatically facilitated the movement of cultural elements from one location to another. Like any other social process, this one has advantages and disadvantages. The media's indiscriminate opening of doors to fresh impressions and experiences might occasionally drive people further away from their own culture, which can be understood as a form of social or cultural alienation. The media explosion has had inevitable negative repercussions due to its speed and intensity.

The present study will try to demonstrate the emergence of cultural assimilation resulting from an inclination towards Eastern culture and, more prominently, the Korean culture among the youth of the Meitei community of the state of Manipur in particular. The paper will analyse the Korean wave, when did it start coming into force, how it reached this section of society, and lastly, why society accepted this particular wave so openly. It will also look at the various components or aspects of the wave and how it has impacted the youth.

THE KOREAN WAVE

The term "Korean Wave" is used to refer to both the phenomenon of transnational consumption as a whole as well as the growing international diffusion of various South Korean (hereafter referred to as Korean) cultural products, such as television shows, pop music, movies, beauty products, online games, fashions, and smartphones. It also refers to the rising societal acceptance and consumption of Korean popular culture. The Korean Wave is particularly notable for its nuanced meanings and wide-ranging effects on the creation, distribution, and consumption of transnational media, particularly in the context of the internet and social media. In light of the ongoing shift in global culture's power dynamics away from a centre-periphery dichotomy, which has been viewed as an outdated and dominant paradigm since the early 21st century, Korean Wave studies aim to provide a sound theoretical characterization of this phenomenon.

The painful effects of globalization during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–1998 have historically contributed to the formation of the Korean Wave. Asia as a whole had a severe economic collapse as a result of the crisis, and Korea was no exception. As a result, the country was obliged to transform its socioeconomic system to accommodate a knowledge-based society. The government acted to facilitate resources in the cultural industry per the country's reforms since it saw it as a crucial component of a knowledge-based society. For home-produced media material to successfully tap into local and international markets, proactive commercial circumstances were developed in Korea by television stations, broadcasting associations, telecommunications businesses, and government agencies. The Korean media market has evolved since the early 2000s from a state-protected system to one with free-market competition and private ownership. This enabled multichannel broadcasting and extensive commercial activities from the broadcasting system's private sector, which was greatly influenced by market principles

and commercialism. The Korean Wave was promoted by Korea's new capitalist regime in the twenty-first century as a revival of its developing economic system based on the neoliberal government philosophy (Ju, 2018).

The Korean wave began to spread in Manipur in the early 2000s. The environment at the time, including the different insurgent and revolutionary parties' prohibition or ban on Hindi films (Bollywood) and Hindi satellite channels, made it possible for the wave to spread quickly. In addition, the Indian government's Look East Policy had opened new vistas in terms of trade with the Southeast Asian countries through the Indo-Myanmar route through the Moreh sector in the state of Manipur, had facilitated the import of many goods including CDs and DVDs of films, dramas, music, and series from the east, with South Korean productions being the most in-demand and well-liked. The physical location of Manipur has also been a significant factor in the wave's penetration (Reimeingam, 2014).

We must concentrate on the wave's facilitators to understand how the wave expanded worldwide in general and the so-called northeast region of India in particular. The media, particularly in the form of television, movies, broadcasting channels, etc., has unquestionably been the primary facilitator of the wave, both during its initial phase, which spanned from roughly 1997 to 2007, and during its current phase, which started from approximately 2008 till the present day, with K-pop, K-dramas, video games, animation, etc., primarily through social media. In two interrelated ways, the media significantly impacts cultural globalization. In addition to greatly facilitating the international transmission of cultural items, the media also helps to build social networks and communication channels. Existing local and national cultures are tested by the media goods produced by an expanding global media culture (Singh, 2017).

The Korean Wave is no exception to the rule that a phenomenon must fulfil specific conditions to manifest or take effect; these conditions will determine the phenomenon's success or failure. Due to several factors, one of which being physical dissimilarity, the people of the Northeast area already have a sense of estrangement from the rest of the nation. Additionally, the socio-cultural proximity of the countries on the eastern side of India has made it much simpler for the locals in this area to embrace the many elements of the so-called Korean Wave readily.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE KOREAN WAVE

The Korean wave may be classified or divided into three phases, namely Korean Wave 1.0, which spanned from 1997-mid 2000s, and it was characterized mainly by visual content such as dramas, movies, etc., which was facilitated through cable TV, satellite TV, and DVDs, CDs, and the Internet. This phase remained limited within the Asian continent.

The second phase spanned from the mid-2000s to the early 2010s, and it focused on K-pop groups, facilitated through video websites (YouTube) and Social Networking Service (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter etc. This phase crossed the Asian continent and spread across some parts of Europe, Africa, Central and South America, and the United States.

The third phase spanned from the early 2010s to the present, and it is characterized by traditional culture, art and culture, popular culture, and lifestyle, which can be collectively termed K-Culture. This ongoing phase is spread worldwide, and the facilitators have been all media types, but the most predominant one is OTT(Netflix).

FIRST PHASE or PHASE OF K-DRAMA(1997-2000's)

The popularity of certain television dramas, like What is Love, Dae-jang-guem, and Winter Sonata, which were particularly popular in China, Taiwan, and Japan, with varying degrees of interest elsewhere in Asia as well, marked the beginning of the Korean Wave, which lasted from 1997 to the 2000s. In this period, the popularity of South Korean culture was geographically limited to Asia, including Southeast Asian countries. During this period, the main content focused on TV dramas, which were popular especially among certain fan groups(Kim, 2022).

K-DRAMA primarily entered the North-eastern region of India, and the state of Manipur specifically, through the trade of pirated CDs and DVDs via the Indo-Myanmar route (Moreh), which was

made possible by the Indian government's Look East Policy. The state's population, particularly the youth, was so enamored with these dramas that some even opened CD parlours where they exclusively sold Korean films, dramas, series, songs, and other media. Unexpectedly, these stores also proved popular since they offered other services like renting these goods, which undoubtedly helped everyone access them (Kim, 2022). Along with this, the Korean TV channel Arirang, which is an international channel founded in 1996 in Seoul, South Korea, is very popular in Manipur. Another popular channel is the KBS World, a South Korean TV channel operated by the Korean Broadcasting System. It was launched by the Korean International Foundation in 1997 as the only international English-language broadcasting company in Asia. The Korea International Broadcasting Foundation runs the channel, which features a wide range of exciting programs about South Korea, including news, sports, entertainment, documentaries, films, and cultural and linguistic aspects of daily life. It sought to advance trade and tourism and strengthen ties with other countries (Reimeingam, 2014). These two particular broadcasting channels have been the main facilitators of this phase in the initial days, and these channels were broadcasted in the state through the local cable providers, particularly ISTV Network.

SECOND PHASE or PHASE OF K-POP (2000s-2010)

The second phase of the Korean wave was different from the first in several ways, such as the range of popular content, the geographic growth of fan bases, the use of social networking services sites (Facebook, Twitter, SNS, etc.) by artists and fans to communicate with each other, the use of popular video websites like YouTube, and a notable rise in the exports of related goods and cultural products. Around the world, viewers were particularly interested in South Korean pop groups around this time. K-pop was regarded as a distinct genre since it combined elements of hip-hop, rock, pop ballads, rhythm and blues, and electronic music with skilfully choreographed dances that spread from Asia to other continents (Kim, 2022).

The second phase of the wave intensified in Manipur, especially among the youth, with the advent of reliable internet connectivity. Circumstantially, it has become more accessible for the people and particularly the youth to have one-click access to all Korean things, be it dramas, movies, fashion, lifestyle, etc, which has helped them adopt the Korean culture even more conveniently. During this phase, a new trend started emerging that is young people speaking specific common Korean words and phrases such as ne(yes), aniyo(no), annyeonghaseyo(hello),mianhe(sorry),gamsahamnida(thankyou), cheonmaneyo(welcome), saranghae(I love you), sengilchuka-hamnida(happy birthday),eonni(big/elder sister), annyeong(bye), juseyo(please),etc.

THIRD PHASE or PHASE OF K-CULTURE (2010-present)

'K-Culture' is a term used to denote a wide range of items such as traditional culture, art and culture, popular culture, and lifestyle. The very evident and popular craze or trend for Korean beauty care, or more specifically, skin care products, is one of the main characters of this phase. Additionally, this phase evidently shows the trend of South Korean movies and dramas being aired through global OTT(Over-the-top), television and film content that is streamed via a fast internet connection as opposed to a cable or satellite connection) streaming services or applications such as Netflix. At the same time, new production mechanisms are being implemented, such as direct investment in South Korean content and involvement in the drama production process. For instance, 'Squid Game', a Netflix original series from 2021, was just given the go-ahead for a second season due to its enormous success worldwide. The world's adoration for K-pop artists is another feature of this phase. The BTS ARMY, a transcultural worldwide fan base, is one of the main reasons BTS became the most successful pop group in the world. While utilizing social media to promote oneself has become standard, BTS members actively use the platform to interact with their fans by sharing details of their everyday lives, which helped build a foundation of loyal fans (Kim, 2022). Popular K-pop groups such as BTS, EXO, Black Pink, etc also indulge in charity work; even their fan communities worldwide do the same. The fan groups in the state of Manipur also follow these trends. There have been many instances where they mobilized funds to donate to certain social causes, for example, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are certain other aspects of this ongoing phase of the Korean wave, such as:

1. Numerous Korean eateries and cafes are opening up around the state. Some of them are Bubbles Cafe, Seoul House, Cornerstone Cafe, Asian Bowl etc.
2. The state capital is seeing the opening of showrooms for numerous Korean companies, including Mumuso and Ximi Vogue.
3. Several physical and online skin care retailers are opening up, including Paint Your Soul and Kbeauty.
4. Manipur University, under its Department of Foreign Language offers One Year Certificate course in Korean language, BA (Hons) in Korean Language, and 5(five) Years integrated MA in Korean Language.
5. Chopsticks, eating rice in bowls, and boiling foods are a few of the Korean-inspired dining customs that Manipur's populace, particularly the young, have embraced. Slumbering on mattresses or floors instead of beds is also becoming very normal in some of the state's households.
6. The state's youth are incredibly attracted to the hairstyles, minimal makeup, and fashionable clothing of Korean actors, actresses, K-Pop stars, etc.; a significant level of imitation is quite evident.
7. Preference for English subtitles over Hindi. In reality, not only young people are obsessed with Korean culture; middle-aged individuals and older age groups, such as housewives and grandmothers, are also impacted.
8. In the past few years, there have been many Manipuri-Korean marriages taking place.

IMPACTS OF THE WAVE ON THE YOUTH

The impact of Korean culture and customs on our society is profound and pervasive, which owes primarily to the entertainment networks. Northeast India, particularly Manipur, is gradually assimilating Korean culture and traditions, much like Southeast Asian countries (Sathi, 2015). This paper demonstrates how easily this foreign wave penetrates our society. It is only natural for a culture to contain aspects that individuals from other cultures may find difficult to adjust to. Nonetheless, most of the elements of Korean culture that appeal to our youth are more positive.

There are several positive impacts of the wave; some of the prominent ones are the impact of Korean pop music, more popularly known as K-pop, on the state's youth. Listening to music has numerous benefits, including lowering stress levels, elevating mood, and fostering creativity. Furthermore, the intense training that K-pop idols undergo in preparation for their debut imparts valuable lessons about discipline, diligence, and teamwork, which are inspiring to the young fans of K-pop. K-pop fans contend that because the genre introduces Korean culture to a worldwide audience and frequently combines aspects of other cultures into its songs and visuals, it also fosters variety and cross-cultural interchange. Numerous fan clubs in the state have been participating in various charitable endeavors in the name of their favorite K-pop singers or bands as a part of the global K-pop fan culture. Such a step might be considered a way to unite individuals who share similar values on one platform to promote positivity throughout society.

While interviewing a 17-year-old Bidyaluxmi, a class 12th Science student, she said, "Everything about Korea, be it Korean music, dramas, singers, dressing style, makeup, their lifestyle is just so fantastic". Her dream is to visit Seoul, South Korea once when she becomes financially independent, she is a huge fan of K-Pop artist Lisa, an artist of the Black Pink an all-girls K-Pop band. What was even more surprising is that she even knew the lyrics of almost all the songs of her favourite band. This indicates how impactful the Korean Wave has been (Personal interview, 15-10-2023).

While interviewing another 20-year-old girl, Rojita Samjetsabam, an Aviation student, she said, "I started watching K-Drama ever since I was in 7th standard (13 years old), and the first series I watched was 'The Heirs' through CD cassettes I made my brother borrow from our locality's CD parlour. What I like about K-Dramas the most is their respect for everyone and their humility. I love watching K-Dramas in my free time; some of my favourites are The Legend of the Blue Sea, Stairway to Heaven, and Descendants of the Sun. And because the subtitles are in English, watching these TV shows and films helps me acquire a lot of new vocabulary in the language and increases my reading speed"(Personal Interview, 17-10-2023).

A 27-year-old student, Sonibha said, "I adore watching Korean dramas in my free time. Some of my favourites are Full House, Heirs, Vagabond, True Beauty, and the list goes on and on. The reason is because their plots are so original. Full House was the first Korean television show I ever watched on DVD. The majority of the popular series are now available on Netflix, making it much easier to watch the newest K-Dramas these days. I prefer Netflix over other streaming services or websites because, even though I have to pay a subscription fee, there are no commercials between episodes, unlike other apps like Hi-Tv" (Personal Interview, 19-10-2023).

Korean skincare is another crucial element that must not be disregarded. Young people started using this type of skincare because of its remarkable effectiveness, use of traditional and natural components that Koreans have used for decades, and cruelty-free. And the benefits of such products are immense, which is why it has been viewed as having an impact. Some of the benefits are antiaging elements, protecting skin from the external environment, and skin nutrition. The ongoing trend of applying sun cream is also a part of this impact as it is something that most people do, as applying sun cream protects our skin from harmful UV rays.

A 30-year-old Government Employee, Sonia Chanu said, "I first learned about the South Korean cosmetic brand "Innisfree" back in 2015 when I was a college student. I have been using its skin care products because they are much gentler and environment friendly than those of other brands, and they also work well for my sensitive skin. Because all of its products are created with organic materials, they offer numerous nutritional benefits for the skin. The Green Tea Seed series of Innisfree products is one of my favorites. For me, Korean skin care products are always preferable to other brands. I believe the growing demand for Korean skincare products is why so many brands like Cosrx, Face Shop, Klairs, etc. and its products are readily available today" (Personal Interview, 1-11-2023).

"I have been running this online based store since 2020 and I am not that interested in turning into a physical store because instead of investing large amount of money in it, it's better to invest in bringing more varieties of products for the customers. There is a huge market for Korean skin care products, with most of the buyers being in the 18–25 age range. Indian skin care brands are more cost-effective, however some consumers like Korean products because, in contrast to Indian brands, Korean products carefully formulate their ingredients. The general public's perception of Korean skin care products is greatly influenced by K-Drama, as many believe that if Korean celebrities use a specific product, it must be as good. This perception drives demand for Korean skin care products. Thus, consumers typically want to give these things a try," stated Gyanshree Ahanthem, a 22-year-old MBA student and also the owner of 'K-Beauty' Imphal (Personal Interview, 06-11-2023).

In addition, K-pop's passionate fandom may sometimes be solitary and obsessive. K-pop enthusiasts are renowned for their ardent dedication to their preferred idols, exhibiting their devotion through hours of daily video watching, merchandise purchases, and concert attendance. Although this type of fandom can be enjoyable and fulfilling, pursuing it excessively may also result in social anxiety and loneliness (Chen, 2023).

While interviewing a 24-year-old Glory Yumkham, an Agriculture student, she said, "I just love Korean food items, and my favorites are Bibimbap and Kimchi fried rice. Watching K-Dramas, I used to see many mouth-watering Korean dishes or food items that compelled me to try for the first time at Busan Restaurant, a Korean Restaurant in Majnu Ka Tilla, Delhi, and I have loved it since then. Nowadays, various ready-to-eat Korean food item packets can be found at many stores, making it much more convenient for students like us. Many Korean Cafes have also opened up in our state (Manipur), and my go-to cafe is 'Bubbles Cafe' as it serves the most authentic Korean Cuisine" (Telephonic Interview, 07-11-2023).

It is evident from the above expression that some youths of the state have started preferring Korean food items such as Kimbap, bibimbap, tteokbokki, kimchi, ramen, samgyeopsal, etc., over the traditional Manipuri food items such as Singju, bora, paknam, etc. And it seems like this trend is something which will continue in the long run. Due to this shift in eating preferences, many Korean cafes and restaurants are

popping up around the state. This has positive as well as negative impacts, as traditional or domestic restaurants are becoming less popular or in demand due to the rising popularity of Korean cafes.

"I don't know why youngsters these days are so crazy about everything Korean; there is so much imitation among our society's youth, be it in hairstyle, dressing style, food, and even songs and all. Surprisingly, despite the language barrier, people cry uncontrollably while watching Korean films or television shows because of the evident emotional connection and audience gripping capacity. There is a growing concern that, given the rate at which the wave is spreading, our youth are gradually turning away from our own culture and towards Korean culture.", a 29-year-old research scholar said during an interview.

We can get a general idea of the extent to which the Korean Wave has impacted many facets of the interviewees' lives from the statements above, which were gathered through personal and telephonic interviews. Even when the impact's intensity is inexplicable or impossible to quantify, it is clear that there is an impact.

CONCLUSION

The advent of the Korean Wave in Northeast India, specifically in Manipur, indicates the rise of a cultural power, a type of soft power dominating the global scenario. We can say that there is a fear of the emergence of a cultural turning point in our society as there are evident changes in lifestyle, dressing style, eating habits, music, language, etc., especially among the youth. The driving force behind this change is New technologies or the advancement in the field of ICT that offers a culture of information, pleasure, and relative autonomy, all of which are of particular appeal to the society's youth. The emergence of streaming services such as Netflix is expanding opportunities for international content distribution and creating new realms for cultural disposition. This has implications not only for young people themselves but also for their relationships within the family and between generations. We live in a hyper-interconnected world, a global society of communicative interactions and exchanges that stimulate profound cultural transformations and realignments. The increased hyper connectedness that has resulted from this has facilitated the movement of cultural objects across international borders. As a result, cultural assimilation has emerged in nearly every society on the planet. Generally speaking, people choose to keep the parts of a certain culture that they find appealing and discard the ones that don't. Regarding the Korean Wave specifically, it is quite clear that there is some degree of cultural blending with other facets of our culture, but not to the extent that will cause cultural alienation. But if the wave's penetration continue in the same pace as the present one than there is a fear that it might lead to the very nightmare of abandonment of our own unique cultural values. The changing global media landscape shapes young people's socialization process, values, and beliefs. It influences young people's decisions in areas such as educational choice, employment, leisure, and life in general. The socio-cultural similarity or closeness that the people of Northeast India generally have to the people of South Asian countries stems from their shared mongoloid features. Additionally, the feeling of isolation that the people of this region have from the rest of the nation due to the various forms of discrimination they encounter daily has made it even easier for the wave to reach this region. Though change is necessary for all evolution and development, a community must always maintain its ancient, rich cultural values to maintain its distinct identity.

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