

Binge Watching, Binge Eating: Popularity of K-Dramas and the Emergent Korean Cuisine in India

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Introduction

PSY's famous '*Gangnam Style*' took the world on its feet with the 'galloping horse dance' in 2012. The song transcended language barriers and the whole world resonated with the spirited beats. Indians, too, grooved along with the rest of the world and little is known about the official Indian version of the Gangnam style launched by Jacky Bhagnani in 2013 (DNAIndia). Almost a decade later and after a global Pandemic in 2020, there has been a burgeoning interest to acknowledge and celebrate the Korean popular culture that is raging within the global consumption sanctuary. The surge was also noticeable in the consumption of Korean food. In a report published online by The Ministry of Commerce and Industry in India, there has been an unprecedented rise in the consumption of Korean noodles in India. It is also reported that a rise in the viewership of K-dramas and K-pop on the popular streaming site Netflix is proportional to the sale of Korean noodles in India. Based on a year-over-year (YoY) analysis, there has been a 370% jump in viewership in 2020, and the import of Korean noodles shot up by 162% in 2020 (*The Times of India*). It can be, thus, rightly inferred that there has been a development of fandom of K-dramas in the Indian urbanscape, which has created significant ripples in consumer practices.

The permeable nature of media with increased global accessibility, enabled by its connecting links with one another and newer trends of collaborative practices between brands, influencers, and celebrities, enlarges the reception of Korean culture. It is now ascribed to the status of global culture breaking stereotypes and standards set by American Pop-culture. In this paper, we look at the Korean *Hallyu* or Korean wave sweeping over Indians, in the urbanscapes, as an alternative to American popular culture. Among many material practices, we have used the lens of food and its associative practices to analyse the reception of Korean culture in Indian urban societies and we aim to highlight the politics of taste in constructing identities as shaped by mundane practices. By looking at food consumption through cultural lens, we aim to highlight how popular culture and media can be a critical site of inquiry when it comes to defining trends in material practices of our everyday. The mundane materiality of food is often associated with several prejudices, mandates, and recommendations that are expressed in cultural exchanges. Historically, many food items have entered the Indian kitchen due to Columbian Exchange, as potatoes came through Portuguese sailors in the 17th century. Later on, we have well adapted to the Mughlai taste and food habits of the colonisers. Indianising 'foreign' food has been imperative in the play of flavours often leading to the invention of new dishes while bringing up debates about authenticity. Thus we see how food-related debates are a versatile site both in terms of their materiality and in terms of larger connotations related to society and culture.

In a country like India, where food is prescribed with ritualistic value, with purity-pollution binaries, and issues of vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism, it is interesting to see how there has

been a sudden popularity in food consumption which is 'foreign' and from non-dominant racial geography. Since we are talking about the relationship between food and popular culture, our focus is to look at how popular culture is influencing and aiding when it comes to transcending prejudices. A simple reason for the popularity of Korean food in this context, can be attributed to the explanation that popular culture is something of a temperament that is "well-liked by many people" (Storey 237). The definition and perception of popular culture have always trod on disputed ground. By discoursing about food and popular culture, this paper aims to highlight the material aspect of food entangled with the cultural aspect of 'the popular'. Stuart Hall writes about popular culture as a modern phenomenon in industrialised countries. Popular culture is believed to be an entailment of the masses and their consumption pattern, the commercial aspect attributed to such practices reflects the exploitative aspect of it. Hall deconstructs such views and argues more dynamically that the site of popular culture is spontaneous and it's a site of contestations between differently working social forces and their respective perception of "the popular". He argues how popular culture shapes the dreams and desires of the 'collective will' and subjectivity of the people. Fabio Parasecoli's writing on food and popular culture consolidates how it is also "built on dream and desire, making it a spectacle" (4). For this paper, we have looked at select and popular Korean drama series known as K-dramas and K-pop or Korean pop music, Korean mukbangs¹ on communication and internet media sites like YouTube, online blogs and Over The Top Platforms (OTTs).

Curious Case of the "K": Early Signs of Korean Influence in India

Scholarly work on popular culture focuses on the common folk's "agency in everyday life", recognising it as "a form of craftwork involving intimate collaborations among embodied humans and material objects" (Farquhar 146). Works of Parasecoli, Lebesco, and Naccarato particularly on food, popular culture and media, have been useful for the paper to foreground the intersections of food with culture and consumption of both the material and the cultural. In his article on the changing nature of the popular culture of Indian food and its turn towards globalised modernity, Ashis Nandy emphasises how the ethnography of food has merged with the more fluid politics of food in India (Nandy 2004), and how self-awareness influenced eating practices that extended to influence the political economy in public and private eating spaces (10). Taking cues from here, and reflecting upon the politics of food, the paper analyses what leads to an openness of food culture beyond colonial, western or American or even Indo-Chinese influences and makes a case for the Korean incorporation which is interestingly correlated to the consumption of visual media. The methodology would focus on a qualitative analysis of primary sources like Korean dramas, Korean music, and food media like mukbang (translates to 'eating broadcast' in Korean) series form the basis of such analysis and would be augmented by sources like blogs on social media, newspaper entries and fan bases. The paper applied the discourses of cultural consumerism influenced by popular culture and extends the discourses to sites of contestations of memory working in the plotlines and the affective responses that channelises "soft power". Soft power is inducted psychologically through everyday lived experiences that appeal to the consumers in their consumption patterns. It transmits through nostalgia, body consciousness, and sensory experience, which serve the purpose of mapping the emotional geography, considering how food is known to have a psychosomatic effect on the body. The association of the viewers to such emotional dimensions is crucial in understanding the expanse of such influences resulting from trends and shaping the everyday practices of materiality. Food constitutes to be important material practices that define the mundane, bound to be reappropriated by such influences. The underside of the study is that we have compiled data available on Indian media and could not get any substantial information from the Korean side and that aspect is open to further research.

Korean influences got into Indian urban culture in a roundabout manner. In India, Korean *Hallyu* entered the cultural scene through North East India, which is often considered a consequence of the

political affairs and policies that were reflected during the last two decades (Athiko 2017). Writing about the soft power proliferation, a newspaper report in Sikkim Express informs about how in 2000, the Revolutionary People's Front, a powerful local group, imposed a ban on Hindi films and such channels in Manipur to pull out the presence of "so-called Indianisation". Hindi movies were looked at as representation of the mainstream Indian media which maintained an imperialist stance. The only exception to the ban was made for the government-controlled Doordarshan (DD) channels which ran in multiple languages. The absence of Hindi movies as a result of the prohibition was compensated by the availability and access to Korean films. Movies like *My Sassy Girl* (2008), and the classic *A Millionaire's First Love* (2006) generated euphoria among the people. There grew a pirated chain to smuggle Korean DVDs and CDs in Manipur's market and soon penetrated the markets of Nagaland and Tripura. This piracy culture was bustling when the government of India under the Look East Policy, envisioned to enhance engagement with the South East Asian Countries, developed and enacted under the leadership of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991–1996) and successfully pursued thereafter, opened its borders to Myanmar and other neighbouring countries for trade relations (Korea and India's North East). Soon Korean movies and dramas started gaining fandom in the entire Northeast. It became so popular that it was dubbed in the Mizo language in Mizoram. The popularity of K-dramas lies in their family-oriented themes and characterisation, making them easier to watch with or among family and they perfectly synced with the family-oriented values encouraged in Indian society.

Brief History of Hallyu - The Korean Wave and its Unique Elements

Hallyu, literally translated as the 'Korean Wave' or the K-wave, describes the indisputable popularity of South Korean culture, which is defining global trends with its food, fashion, cosmetics, celebrities, locations, or practices. With its roots in the 1990s, Hallyu started expanding through South East Asia, gradually spreading to the Western nations through popular K-dramas, K-Pop groups, food, the beauty industry and such consumables. K-dramas and the K-Pop industry, with sensations such as BTS, have taken over the global entertainment and music industry in recent years with the help of social media, video streaming, and content-creating platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, Instagram, and so on. 'Korean glass skin' has been the talk of the town since Tik Tok and K-dramas popularised the concept. With the constant economic backing and renewed policies by the South Korean government, the country has dedicated itself to the growth and expansion of popular culture by portraying a desirable image of its culture to the world, thus, becoming a leading exporter of popular culture worldwide. With the effects of Hallyu, the world has developed a better understanding and perspective of Korean culture and has become more accepting of Asian people and culture. The online streaming giant Netflix, even created an 8 min short video to explain the phenomenon called *Hallyu*, showcasing the spread of Korean culture through food, music and even the 7-step Korean skincare routine. Korean phrases and words have also entered the parallel vocabulary. OED added 26 words, including K-drama, Kimbap, and Hallyu, to the dictionary. OED responded to the BBC by saying, "We are all riding the crest of the Korean wave" ("Why 26 Korean Words Have Been Added to Oxford English Dictionary").

The Hallyu witnessed tremendous success and could sustain itself majorly because of the parallel growth of the Internet during the same period. With platforms like YouTube gaining popularity in the global communication and media market, the South Korean government found the right opportunity to tap into the potential of soft power². South Korean Government took the right initiatives, such as rebranding campaigns by leading South Korean companies such as Samsung and LG, to cater to the global population. There was also a substantial remodelling of the power politics by restructuring Korean Chaebols³ which helped create a conducive environment for foreign investors and foreigners to work in South Korea. Meanwhile, the South Korean government also lifted the travel ban on its citizens that forbade pleasure trips to other countries. Thereafter, the South Korean

nationals started exploring other countries and brought back the unique experiences of varied cultures and the knowledge of opportunities. Soon, the younger generation started opting to study in the US and Europe and naturally, they carried their native culture to the host nation. This led to an impactful exchange between citizens of South Korea and other countries not only through tourism but also via business. By the 2000s, South Korea had also become a hotspot for exotic shooting locations, with production companies like Marvel Studios shooting their films *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Black Panther* in different locations across South Korea. Another major step by the government that streamlined South Korea's cultural growth was the removal of censorship laws. Though the courts didn't explicitly ban the regulations, the relaxation helped many artists explore concepts that were not allowed earlier. Film-makers such as Bong Joon-ho experimented with impressive visuals and diversely offbeat topics in films such as *The Host*, *Okja*, *Parasite*, and others, bringing home three Academy Awards and wider accolades from the film fraternity around the world. Young Koreans also started experimenting with music, drama, and art choices. More South Koreans developed a burgeoning interest in entertainment, and music labels and casting companies grew their business by training and hiring these young and talented enthusiasts. Big Hit Entertainment, started in 2005 and rebranded under Hybe Corporation, is famous for producing and promoting talents like BTS. As a brand, its estimated worth is over 2 billion dollars with exponential growth. The economic impact of BTS alone on the South Korean economy is mind-boggling, with their contributions surpassing 5 billion USD in 2021. According to reports, BTS led to a 22% increase in Hallyu fans worldwide. Their popularity resulted in an incredible rise in consumer imports of Korean products. There was an increase in tourism as people started attending their concerts, which improved South Korea's relations with countries such as China and Japan. Collaborations with international brands such as McDonald's partnering with BTS and releasing a BTS-themed menu weaved the popular culture of music with that of franchise food. Thereafter, the K-Pop industry pioneered by the BTS has helped sustain the Hallyu, creating a more extensive awareness of Korean culture.

The popularity of K-dramas has not been far behind. The K-Drama phenomenon catapulted to global fame through dramas like *Winter Sonata* (2002). *Winter Sonata* garnered international attention, gaining millions of global views in the first few weeks of its release. The interest in K-Dramas grew worldwide and saw exponential growth during the pandemic. K-Dramas helped fill the gaps of insight into Korean culture, values, and ideals. Korean dramas gradually started experimenting with sensitive topics and taboos while maintaining a safe boundary of Korean values, gaining viewerships both in their own country and worldwide. Series like *Coffee Prince* (2007), *Descendants from the Sun* (2016), *Something in the Rain* (2018), *My Id is Gangnam Beauty* (2018), *Hotel Del Luna* (2019), *It's Okay Not to be Okay* (2020), *Squid Game* (2021), *Extraordinary Case of Attorney Woo* (2022), highlighted Korean society dealing with unconventional subjects such as mental illnesses, remarriages, class differences, and insights into the lives of army personnel while foregrounding Korean landscape, cuisine, fashion, and exotic locations, garnering an extraordinary amount of viewership and popularity. This phenomenon also generated a considerable frenzy over the celebrities and the products popularised through the dramas. While K-Pop merchandise and items personalised by K-Pop idols and celebrities have seen massive imports throughout the years, it still requires custom fees and has therefore remained affordable to limited sections. But Korean cuisine, on the other hand, popularised by the K-Dramas, has seen ascending growth in the market, with cafes striving to adopt authentic Korean recipes and average households recreating popular Korean dishes with ingredients available in their home. Popular and household food items in Korea, such as Kimchi and Ramen, have become staple food items globally. Authentic Korean dishes such as gimbap, japchae, tteokbokki, cold noodles, kimchi fried rice, and others have seen immense popularity among the people through the K-dramas, which not only show the characters relishing these dishes but also show the viewers how to make them and how to eat them the right way. The South Korean

government has also played a significant part by investing in the manufacturing and distribution of popular ramen brands in neighbouring countries and has helped set up manufacturing units in some countries. This has made the making of Korean food functional and popular. Korean food and its entry into popular gastronomic culture, by and large, has gained the maximum reach and attention in urban spaces. OTT platforms and YouTube have marketed the growing popularity by releasing food shows dedicated to Korean food and boosting the popular Mukbang¹ channels and Youtubers, respectively. Jane ASMR, Zach Choi ASMR, Hamzy, and Eat With Boki, are YouTube Mukbang channels with more than 40 million subscribers combined, consistently and successfully promoting Korean food through appealing visuals and sound effects. The K-Dramas and Mukbang shows have placed Korean food in ordinary kitchens and urban spaces.

Food in K-Drama: Playing a Character

Food plays a central role in K-dramas. Food preparation and presentation are a highlight in K-dramas and are often associated with the characters' daily lives and actions. Stuart Hall highlights culture as, "experience lived, experience interpreted, experience defined" or 'the relation between culture and hegemony' (189). Popular culture is often a medium that reflects our quotidian experiences. In our world today the way in which the popular is transmitted is often influenced by the nature of today's media. Deborah Lupton writes about how social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat and content-sharing sites including Pinterest and YouTube have large audiences for food-related practices where the compelling force of visual media that can be uploaded, shared, curated and tagged on these platforms (2018). Besides the visuals of food in K-dramas, other points of relevance for its easier acceptability in Indian society are the standard ideas of commensality, availability of ingredients through global online merchants and the idea of togetherness shared around television shows.

Fatima Bhutto, in her book *New Kings of the World: Dispatches from Bollywood, Dizi, and K-Pop* (2019) writes about the new arbiters of mass culture —India's Bollywood films, Turkey's soap operas, or dizi, and South Korea's pop music. She highlights how the representations in such content are not always secular modernity. They reflect traditional and native values in urbanised settings, and they have managed to create a new global pop culture that is more relatable than the American version, especially with those who are just inducted into the modern world and are still negotiating its overwhelming challenges and newer mass culture arising from the East (Introduction xviii).

The popularity of K-dramas lies in their family-oriented themes and characterisation, thus making them easier to watch with or among family. K-dramas let the population relate to the idea of retaining traditional values while simultaneously thriving in them. Bhutto highlights the departure points of an Indian film, a Turkish television drama or a Korean pop song from the entailments of American pop culture to have more universal appeal. Their presentation is modern and appealing in the same way that American film, TV or music is. They are set in ordinary values and rooted in their native cultures and focus on ordinary people and their daily struggles. In most K-dramas, there's no nudity and romantic relationships are portrayed tastefully. By this generalisation, she wants to imply how these forms of entertainment stick to family values and can be enjoyed comfortably in the presence of people across generations in a family. The indigenous features of K-dramas managed to negotiate with the widely popular American daily soaps and series that portrayed culture and ideals which, though liked, were not always adaptable by an ordinary man, even in America. Thus, Korean culture achieved a never before seen victory over American culture, albeit through dramas.

Kartazanya Cwierka's historical monograph, *Asian Food: The Global and the Local*, is about the increased popularity of Korean food worldwide, which brought into focus the South Korean government's project to globalise Korean cuisine launched in late 2008, has raised interest and visibility of Korean culinary culture (163). South Korean dramas have, over time, evolved as the absolute combination of emotional and visual appeal. The dramas revolve around themes of ro-

mance, nature, and culture, with underlying themes of family values, sexuality, and representation of Korean culture. These plotlines of the dramas often tread on terrains of nostalgia and reminiscing of the past, and characters are often influenced by their memories of the past in their present. Many of the dramas bear intersections of romance, food and memory, and explicitly showcase the nuances of South Korean culture. The food interjections in the course of Korean dramas interpret food and the act of eating beyond the mundane. K-dramas, through food, are redefining Korean culture for the world, and their influence is affective, and the repackaging makes it relatable. In Korean narratives, food is metaphorical in the presence of a cultural code and is also metonymic in expressing complex human aspects like memory, a journey of the self, and interpersonal relationships. The affective value of taste and smell associated with food and the process of recollection tinged with nostalgia often colours the memory of the subjects. Writing about the relationship between taste and affect, Ben Highmore states, “cultural inquiry turned towards a range of materialities that were finely interlaced with bodies. Emotions and affects signalled one line of inquiry; perception and the management of attention to another (2).

Nostalgia, however, can colour the past in manners that can overwhelm the mind with a longing for the past. Memories of traumatic experiences, often repressed, resurface at different junctures in their lives, are triggered by various events and make one wish that they forget the past. The dilemma between remembering and forgetting is comprehensively expressed in K-dramas through the characters, and food, at most times, is shown to help them overcome the dilemma and create a bridge between the past and the present. In the K-drama *Chocolate*, food connects individuals from varied traditions with different experiences of life and the binding them together to experience the highs and lows of life. Cha-Young, a successful chef in Greece comes back to Seoul, South Korea when she gets to know that her ex-boyfriend Min-Seong, who is battling cancer at a hospice, has asked for her dumpling stew as his dying wish. Cha-Young’s dumpling stew is unlike any other, as is also described by Min-Seong, consists of pink, green, yellow, and white dumplings with shrimp filling in a rich broth. The visuals of the dumpling stew make it irresistible, and the audience is left with a roused appetite, the recipe, and the urge to try cooking it on their own. The story of *Chocolate* revolves around Cha-young, who was raised to become an actress but chooses to become a cook due to her vivid memories of Lee Kang, the son of a restaurant owner who made delectable local food in a small village restaurant. Lee Kang had treated Cha-young to a hearty and warm home-cooked meal when she had been searching for food for the whole day. Hungry and tired, Cha-young had not only relished the food but also the warmth from the little boy, which she treasured in her heart forever. The story is heartwarming and heart-wrenching at the same time, as we find patients battling death and depression at a hospice. However, warm and delicious food is something that they all look forward to, and Cha-young, who begins working at the hospice, works towards cooking them something that would give them their much-needed relief. The psychosomatic function of food has been medically researched. Food made by Cha-young provides momentary comfort to the patients of the hospice, catalyses their healing and fills them with hope, leaving them nostalgic, and creating a semblance of their own homes. In one instance, a patient named Mr Kim asks for Jajangmyeon, a noodle dish that is cooked in black bean sauce and is eaten on special occasions like graduation or birthdays. However, Mr Kim wants to eat Jajangmyeon only at a specific restaurant, not because he likes it there, but because he waits for his son, who had left him there during their last meal of Jajangmyeon at the restaurant and had promised to come back for him. Therefore the restaurant becomes a site of hope for a reunion with the lost son, while jjajangmyeon is a marker of the memory of when the son promised to return. In another scene, Cha-young makes a cherry blossom gimbap for a patient who has lost her eyesight. Though she cannot see, she can feel the gimbap and imagine the cherry blossoms of the season. Food in this Korean drama is used as a trope for the affective sensitivities of the dying. The affect of food is experienced through olfaction and taste, and it necessarily subverts the dominance of the sense of vision and strengthens and brings to the fore the

other senses involved in the process of ingestion (Martin Jay). They not only find solace in food but also use it as a means to experience the world on their own means and eventually to bring themselves out of misery. The role of food leading to convalescence through caregiving to the sick and debilitating is indispensable. Be it a child dying of terminal illness or an elderly man on his deathbed, this K-drama rightfully marks the role of food in their remaining days. As a hospice patient says, “A delicious meal cured me better than a shot”. This simple message propagated through the drama series amplifies their appeal to the larger audience who relate to misery and seek comfort in their everyday lives.

In modern society, our experiences are both built and drawn from the cultural mirror which in a metaphorical sense reflects what is in front of it but only as an image. A similar capitalisation of the image is promoted by the fads⁴. The current world trend is a rediscovery of indigenous diets with an increased focus on eating local. Parasecoli expresses the fear that these trends often could become fads in their own right which will be manipulated by the food industries to innovate ‘marketing strategies that translate into new communication, advertising, tastes, cultural and visual element’ (5). In K-dramas, such advertisements are frequent and there are often fast food chains that are shown to be frequented by the characters. Subway, the American multinational fast-food franchise, has seen increased sales in Korea post its glamorous representation in the K-dramas. K-dramas have portrayed Subway outlets as brightly lit eateries that cater to couples, school children, the elderly, and other characters relishing a hearty meal of footlongs. In the drama, *It’s Okay Not to Be Okay*, Moon Gang-Tae dreams of a meeting his love interest at a Subway outlet. He dreams of his autistic elder brother being normal and doting. The outlet’s presence might be simple, but the touching scene of Moon’s deeper and unconscious desires for normalcy represented in his dreams leaves us with an unforgettable image of the scene and consequently elevates Subway to an inclusive space for such commensality.

In another widely popular K-drama, *Crash Landing on You (CLOY)*, where the plot is imagined and set in North Korea, Yoon Se-Ri, the famous businesswoman from Seoul, gets stuck in North Korea following an accident. While being there, among the few things she misses the most are the big subs that she used to have in Seoul with her colleagues. Even men from North Korea are seen to be enjoying Subway sandwiches. It is not only the sandwiches but the entire experience of enjoying them with peers that makes the scenes endearing making the product placement much more subtle and the marketing ploy subtler. CLOY, as it is popularly called, has seen immense popularity, and so have the products advertised through the show. It has played a massive role in promoting the Korean wave across countries and led to significant gains for different companies. It is estimated to have over 1.75 billion views and was made with a budget of 20 million dollars (HanCinema News) in 2020 and counting. Another major fast food item that has been promoted through both these shows and in several others without fail is the combination of fried chicken and beer or *Chimaek*. It is ubiquitous in a party or a date, or even a night spent in solitude with the self. The popularity of fried chicken and beer among South Koreans has been widely represented with appetising visuals adeptly knit into the storylines. The female protagonist in *My Love from the Star* (2013) says that a snowy day is perfect for having chicken and beer, and the protagonists of CLOY are seen to be enjoying a dreamy date with fried chicken and beer while it snows. South Koreans enjoy the delectable combination as an evening snack or as a part of their drinking culture with colleagues and friends, and it is also served at restaurants. *Chimaek*, again, is a combination that is easily accessible and relatable to the non-Korean population, creating a connection with the global folk while maintaining the Korean character. One might say that is South Korea’s way of reaching out even to those audiences that do not necessarily take an interest in ‘other’ cultures *Squid Game* took the Internet by storm during the pandemic year. The dalgona toffee was perhaps the most favourite, and social media was rife with the easy-to-make dalgona toffee and the *dalgona challenge* during the Covid Lockdown. Fried chicken and beer can also be called comfort food as characters enjoy the combination even in

sadness. The comfort factor is imperative to the growing popularity of K-dramas. The plot also takes a break from the romantic storyline to show the characters enjoying a hearty meal of congee or a special bowl of seaweed soup. Almost every K-drama shows characters having congee for breakfast. Congee or rice porridge is a popular dish in Asian countries that is eaten plain or with various sides indigenous to the regions. Seaweed is traditionally made on birthdays by parents or a loved one, and there is a lot of nostalgia and emotions attached to the dish. It is not only a comfort food but a bowl of memories.

With South Korean food taking over the urban space, the urban population around the world, especially the youth, has been gradually drawn to the culture that is constituted by people who not only look and eat differently but also practice a different culture. In a country like India, where a jingoistic attitude towards people of varied cultural backgrounds is quite rampant, the Hallyu generated through food amplified by South Korean cultural exports has been able to generate tolerance and awareness towards other Asian cultures.

Reason for Popularity of Korean Food: An Inquiry into the History of Korean Gastronomy

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka uses food as a means of investigating how colonialism and the Cold War influenced and altered the culinary practices and dietary preferences of contemporary Koreans. She contends that in order to run the exploits of the empire, colonialism, modernity, and identity were cumulatively responsible for transforming the Korean agricultural economy and food manufacturing sector. Cwiertka asserts that the food policies pertaining to acquisition, rationing, and distribution were implemented during the American occupation. This was rather directly built on Japanese colonial strategies for food management (88–98). The author discusses how diets changed south of the Thirty-eighth Parallel with American military forces introducing new foods such as wheat, corn and Spam (93–8). Cwiertka uses poignant instances of food insecurity excerpted from sources like diaries and autobiographical novels (82–6). She analyses how the rise of consumer nationalism in Korea and the nostalgic commodification of Korean culinary heritage help in making a national cuisine. Cwiertka doesn't distinguish between North and South Korea. Instead, she imagines a composite national cuisine built from influences of Japanese, American and Soviet colonisation. She analyses the 'militarised modernity' (Seungsook Moon) to navigate the process of making a cuisine through analysis of famine and government campaigns with slogans like *sint'o puri* (literally 'body and earth are one'), a culture of eating out and economic transformation of South Korea from a poor country in the 1950s to an economic powerhouse in 1990s. The now globally favourite Korean beer and fried chicken has its history in this militarised modernity. Stuart Hall writes that popular culture is a modern phenomenon in industrialized countries. Popular culture is believed to be an entailment of the masses and their consumption pattern, the commercial aspect attributed to such practices projects something exploitative about it. Hall deconstructs such views and argues more dynamically that the site of popular culture is spontaneous and its a site of contestations between differently working social forces and their respective perception of 'the popular' and is "brought by a certain set of processes"(930). Foreign-style dining stood for affluence and sophistication; it signified the elevation of South Korean urban culture to the level of multicultural global gastronomy.

Cwiertka's historical monograph is apt to the times when there has been an increased popularity of Korean food worldwide. The effect is amplified by the South Korean government's initiative to globalize Korean cuisine launched in late 2008, leading to a rising interest and visibility of Korean culinary culture as a part of the *Hallyu* or the Korean Wave.

Conclusion

Popular culture being commercially driven, mass-produced, and geared towards consumption, has to relate to people's imaginations, to capture elements and transform them into new forms, to

spread or impose practices and discourses, and sometimes to simply generate and negotiate new meanings at an exponentially faster speed. One of the newer meanings that could be derived from the inclusion of South Korean dramas and food into popular culture, is the acceptance of the ‘other’. The ‘Army’⁵, the K-drama fans, the content consumers of ‘everything Korean’, the avid followers of South Korean celebrities, and even the reluctant viewers have embraced and adapted South Korean culture through entertainment and food. The break from monotonous entertainment has unconsciously led to a break from xenophobia or at least has managed to carve the right step towards achieving inclusivity. This is a rather distant claim, but K-Dramas have, to an extent, managed to soften the attitude towards citizens who look or speak Asian. Popular culture has the power to influence the mass, and communities can shape their image to the global watcher through popular culture.

In the portrayal of vicarious eating in the Mukbang series, it is argued that it extends a sense of the digital form of commensality (de Solier 54). Hanwool Choe, in her article *Eating together multimodally: Collaborative eating in mukbang, a Korean live stream of eating*, suggests isolated eating was getting increasingly habitual in many parts of South Korea and mukbang established an emotional connection that the viewers were dining with someone (4). In a world with growing social and individual isolation, imaginative forms of broadcast have become more relatable to youth across the globe. The aspiration to belong to the ever-increasing Korean fandom is likely a reason for the growing popularity of Korean cultural products, food is the most accessible of them to start with in that case. The multisensory affect of food extends beyond taste and smell. It transcends from the visual to the experience and is gradually practised to bring a modernity that suits the taste of time. In this paper, we speculated the process of Korean soft power gradually making its entry and gaining footholds in the entertainment industry and how the export of popular culture shares an exponential relationship influencing the urban foodscape in India. It defines how forms of leisure both entertainment and food can instrumentally define moments in the culture, slowly unfolding the politics laid in acts of everyday life.

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Notes

- ¹ Mukbang or Meokbang, also known as an eating show, is an online audio and visual broadcast where the host of the show consumes a variety of food while interacting and sometimes not interacting with the target audience.
- ² ‘Soft power’ is a term coined by the political scientist Joseph Nye in the year 1990. It refers to the abstract power wielded by a country through its image instead of brutal force. Modern foreign policy has invoked soft power through institutions, companies, culture, religion, values, ideals, etc., and has managed to secure the support of major investors and influential people worldwide. See more: *Soft Power* by Joseph Nye.
- ³ ‘Chaebol’ is a Korean term that refers to a big family-owned business conglomerate.
- ⁴ Fad can be defined as a momentary trend within a culture.
- ⁵ The BTS fans are collectively addressed as ‘army’ by the band members.

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