

Embracing a new culture

The emergence of K-pop and K-dramas in Bangladesh

“Ten years ago, we would be happy to just meet up at a restaurant and talk about our favourite Korean bands and K-dramas. Now, K-pop is so huge. There are events every few months, from competitions to fan interactions to merchandise shops.” – Imran Rahman

AYSHA ZAHEEN

The Hallyu Wave, or the increasing popularity of South Korea's economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas, and movies, has taken the world by storm in the last decade. Bangladesh has not lagged behind.

The prevalence of the internet and Korean channels have also contributed to the growing popularity of Korean pop music, simply known as K-pop, and Korean dramas, simply known as K-dramas. Groups like Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS), SEVENTEEN, BLACKPINK, Stray Kids, NCT, and GFRIEND are winning over audiences with their catchy music, complex choreography, androgynous style, music videos with incredible production value, and holistic form of pop entertainment that not many music industries have been able to pull off.

To paint a clear picture of the impact of Korean pop culture on people in Bangladesh, we spoke to fans to

understand their experiences.

Despite the language and cultural differences, fans have open-mindedly embraced Korean pop culture. When asked how she copes with the language barrier, 24-year-old Tasnim Tarannum Khan, a private university student from Dhaka, shared her insights.

“The lyrics of BTS talk about many alarming issues existing in the society, like mental health, politics, the education system, and self-assurance. They are very vocal about the struggles of life and inspire you to keep working hard, even if you do not have a set goal,” Tasnim said. “I find their lyrics truly consoling, especially when times seem dark. I can relate every line with my own life as if they are singing about my own happiness and struggles, so it is very easy to connect with them.”

Many have also turned to learning Korean through the Duolingo app, and have expressed genuine love for the language due to its simplicity. Moreover, the global impact of K-pop has made



▲ Performers at 'BD K-FAMILY BTS FEST'.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BD K-FAMILY

translations in several languages very easy to find.

“The community has dedicated fan accounts on every platform to translate any piece of Korean content, as soon as they are released. So, I don't find any difficulty keeping up,” Tasnim gushed. Fans also stream music videos and vote for their favourite songs and artistes consistently.

When 23-year-old Tina Zahan, a trainee lawyer and co-founder of BD K Family, was asked about the groups that made her fall in love with K-pop, she mentioned Kangta, TVXQ, BOA, and SES, K-pop idols from the late 1990s and early 2000s.

“K-pop is basically a part of my life now. The music and the artistes give us fans hope and help us with our lives when

it gets difficult,” Tina stated. BD K Family organises events and conventions in collaboration with the Korean Embassy. The BD Army Fest and Dhaka K-Meet are events fans of BTS, known as Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth (ARMY), and other K-pop fans, look forward to. They also have a YouTube channel where they post covers of K-pop songs, as well as dances and videos from their events.

K-pop fan communities are also known to be highly charitable. Smile More is a non-profit organisation run by volunteers of BD K Family, helping people deprived of basic necessities.

In addition, BTS ARMY of Bangladesh has arranged quite a few birthdays and anniversary projects on behalf of the popular band.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28



HopeWorld Group helped underprivileged children in Bandarban, by providing warm winter clothing.



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