Indian Traces in Korean Culture

The Legend and Beyond

Renata Czekalska

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Chapter 5

Curry Up! Indian Themes in Korean Popular Culture

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5 Curry Up! Indian Themes in Korean Popular Culture

The creators of Korean pop-culture follow an extensive range of inspirations, the traces of which are clearly visible in their productions. Along with Korean folk traditions, the Bible, ancient Greek culture, or the American influences, etc., also the associations with Indian civilisation found in K-pop a prominent enough place.

This relatively recent cultural phenomenon treated as a boundless sphere of cultural diffusion is probably the only area of contemporary Korean culture with such powerful presence of elements from various different cultures and traditions. In fact, it is possible to talk here about a cultural diffusion process by which discrete culture traits are transferred from one society to another, through migration, trade, war, or other contact[1], where this "other contact" (such as the transfer of visual culture through electronic media) is probably the most effective. Additionally, the phenomenon of K-pop is also an embodiment of cultural globalisation, as it accepts foreign influences as well as spreads its own across the modern world and, in this way, adds to all other global phenomena which – as Marshall McLuhan assessed already in the 1960s[2] – transform the world into global village.

The phenomenon known as K-pop, which partly draws its powerful appearance from cultural inclusiveness, is also an area where the idea of "global ecumene"[3] introduced by Ulf Hannerz finds its practical representations as a concept which was to capture the idea of a complex, interconnected, and culturally diverse global system. The global ecumene represents the various ways in which people and cultures interact, mix, and influence each other. Hence, Hannerz's idea is not merely about interconnectedness but also encompasses the coexistence and mutual shaping of different cultures in the global context. In contrast to McLuhan's "global village" which might suggest a homogenised, unified world, Hannerz's "global ecumene" highlights the ongoing diversity and pluralism in a globalised world. It acknowledges the coexistence of multiple cultural forms, expressions, and identities within a dynamic network of interactions. It also recognizes that globalization does not lead to a single, uniform global culture but, rather, fosters a complex and interconnected mosaic of cultural practices and ideas.

In this chapter an attempt is made to portray the level of attractiveness of Indian culture for the artists involved in productions of the twenty-first

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century Korean popular culture, as well as to determine a general approach to the treatment of Indian themes in K-pop.

Hindu Gods Adapted for K-pop Songs

Due to reasons presumably impossible to define – apart from being examples of cultural diffusion as well as a strong indication of changes happening in the globalised world – the Indian themes in Korean popular culture quite often can be received as examples of cultural appropriation or, as Susan Scafidi sees it, as

> [ta]king intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission."[4] The same scholar also specifies the areas in which this process usually takes place, such as "unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc.[5]

Only in recent years, the media reported several cases where a K-pop artist or group was accused of committing an act of cultural appropriation either using clothes, make-up, music and dance components, or by disrespectfully adapting an Indian religious image as an element of scenography. One of such examples, and perhaps the most vividly discussed on Indian and Korean social media, was the video clip to the song "How You Like That" by the famous girl group, Blackpink[6].

The lyrics of "How You Like That" convey the message that "karma" is but the means of gaining satisfaction in life (or the means of revenge on those who wronged us) – hence being true to yourself is the source of strength, whereas the way people behave towards you affects only them. Overall, the song is about strength and overcoming difficulties and reaping the fruits of one's own deeds (both in the positive as well as negative way). "How You Like That" was released on June 26, 2020, and its message along with the artistic merit of the entire production brought the group a most impressive reception by audiences – currently, the music video has over 1,3 billion views on YouTube.[7]

In the original video clip produced for this exceedingly popular song, however, appeared an image of a statue of the Hindu god Ganesha. And, even though Ganesha was onscreen for just a few seconds, the glimpse of the statue was enough for many fans, especially in India, to express their distress. Very soon this reaction spread across social media, and the group was widely accused of cultural appropriation, of using a sacred object as a prop and of showing disrespect. The members of Blackpink apparently did not get into any dispute about the issue, while YG Entertainment edited the music video, and the statue was permanently removed.[8]

As a component of the scenography for the video clip, the statue of Ganesha was placed on the floor, in the vicinity of the Aladdin's lamp, in a room filled with objects characteristic for various cultural traditions of the Middle East as well as South and Southeast Asia. This "cacophony" of non-related objects

could be read as a symbolic depiction of what the song's lyrics refer to – all the life choices we can make which can take us either one way or another – to the point of extreme. However, even this way of understanding the visual message of the video does not explain the presence of Ganesha's statue in the background, placed rather unfortunately at the foot of the golden throne, on which Lisa, one of the Blackpink singers, seated herself comfortably.[9]

According to Hindu mythology, Ganesha is the elephant-headed son of the god Shiva and his female consort, Parvati. In some versions of the Ganesha myths, it is said that his divine parents conceived him while being inspired to make love by a pair of elephants mating. In other versions, Ganesha is born in the form of a human boy, however, his head either gets destroyed by envious gods, or burned in anger by the fire from Shiva's third eye. In such versions, the replacement of his son's original head is done by Shiva as an act to console Parvati. Since the action was necessary to be taken rapidly, the replacement was made with the head of an elephant, which happened to be the first living creature that came along. In Hindu iconography, Ganesha is depicted as a pink, corpulent, round-bellied god, with human body and the elephant head, riding on or being attended by a rat (in Hindu mythology a symbol of cleverness and resourcefulness).

Ganesha is characterised by both high intelligence and wisdom that comes from learning. Even in the attempt to win the hands of his three brides, he chose to use wisdom and cleverness over physical abilities and was successful. Perhaps due to the qualities associated with wisdom which causes a sober perception of the world, he was originally treated as a deliverer of disaster, madness and misfortune, who was to be feared, but with time these properties developed into positive ones. The transformed understanding of Ganesha's qualities brought the vision of him as a god of good luck and wisdom, a remover of obstacles and a patron of learning. For many centuries since, and also today, the name of Ganesha "is invoked at the commencement of all undertakings and is found inscribed at the beginning of all literary works by the devout. (…) If a merchant gets into financial difficulty or goes bankrupt he shows his annoyance by turning Gaṇeśa image upside down."[10] Ganesha as the patron of new endeavours, is very much appreciated by children on every first day of school, by artists and artisans, as well as by thieves (who with every new task constantly need not only wit but also perfect luck to survive in the world).

Even this brief account of Ganesha's qualities shows that in the Indian tradition he is a well-liked and extremely friendly god, however, like every deity he also requires appropriately respectful treatment. Since with the song "How You Like That" the Blackpink were making their comeback to the world of entertainment after a break and, what is more, the song is about being brave to make new choices and changes in life, the presence of a patron of new beginnings, cleverness and wisdom in the video could have been quite easily justifiable. What upset the Indian fans, was the statue of Ganesha dishonoured by not being elevated to some higher surface but placed at the foot of the singer. To make things even worse, the singer was wearing boots, which by the Hindus (but also by Buddhists or Muslims) is seen as further

disrespect, as shoes are strictly not allowed in sacred spaces and in the vicinity of sacred objects such as statues of deities, temples, etc.

Images bearing a resemblance to some Hindu deities appear also in the video clip to the song "Your Fortune"[11], released in 2015 by the duo known as Norazo[12]. The playful and humorous track has been produced to illustrate the song's lyrics, filled with comedic and absurd elements. While the specific meaning behind the lyrics can be subjective and open to interpretation, the overall theme of the song revolves around having an enjoyable time and letting loose. It encourages listeners to enjoy themselves, dance, and have fun without worrying about social norms or expectations. In this sense, the song and the video are characteristic of Norazo's dynamic performances, catchy melodies, and funny lyrics. Nevertheless, even though the entire video centres around mind-puzzling optical illusions and is very confusing to watch, the attention of a listener/viewer is caught several times by a rapidly transforming images of two deities. When both appear together, they are portrayed in their most auspicious aspects, symbolised by their hands in the gesture of fearlessness, the *abhaya mudra*, which brings the reassurance of safety, dispels fear, and gives divine protection and bliss.

One of the two figures quite often suddenly grows several pairs of arms and remains engaged in a most energetic dance, as well as has abundance of curly hair with a small tiara attached on top of the head and – which is the most appealing – features a third eye. These characteristics make it possible to relate the image appearing many times in the visual background of the song to one of the most important and powerful Hindu gods – Shiva (already mentioned above as the father of Ganesha, whose third eye might have been the direct cause of the need for the elephant head).

As one of the major gods of the Hindu pantheon, together with Brahma and Vishnu, Shiva forms the great triad of Hinduism. He is recognised as "a god of who is the director of destinies"[13], and as the "dance-king" (Nataraja) who has the power to create as well destroy the universe with his cosmic dances. Feared as the god of destruction, Shiva is a personification of both the disintegrative cosmic forces as well as regeneration and sexuality. Another aspect of Shiva's nature makes him also the god of asceticism, and many a time he is portrayed naked, wearing only snake-earrings and a garland of skulls around his neck and, with his body smeared with ash, hair dishevelled, and sitting immersed in meditation on a tiger skin. In iconography, Shiva is "usually represented with either one or five faces, and four arms (…) His whole body is encircled by the blazing *toraṇa*, an arch of flames. Frequently, Śiva is shown with a third eye in the middle of his forehead."[14]

In the visual background of the discussed music video, the character who resembles Shiva not only features a third eye, has more than one pair of arms, and dances with great vigour. He is also clad in red – the colour associated with Shiva's name which, according to Walker, means the Red One[15]. His head also appears surrounded by what might be perceived as a circle of fire, with his own hands resembling golden flames as well. The visual associations are subtle enough not to have caused any discomfort to Norazo fans, yet at the same time

they are noticeable enough to indicate a possible relationship with the image as well as the cosmic powers of Shiva. Also, the meaning of the lyrics could justify the presence of this particular deity in the video. Shiva, as the ruler of everyone's destiny, is also responsible for our fortune and misfortune, which apparently makes him a perfect symbolic impersonation of the idea behind the song.

Apart from the supposed Shiva, in the "Your Fortune" video features one more deity, also endowed with several pairs of arms, dressed in white, wearing thick gold necklaces and a comparatively large, golden tiara on his head. These qualities could be pointing towards Brahma as Shiva's companion in the video, although there is no evidence enough to be convinced of this association as strongly as in the case of Shiva, whose iconic third eye together with the other attributes make it reasonable to consider a possible parallel. However, since Norazo often incorporate various visual elements and cultural references in their music videos, it is possible that they also included some associations to Brahma, even if only as an artistic choice or a friendly gesture towards the Hindu mythology. Nevertheless, without further information – perhaps best from the creators of the video themselves – it is difficult to definitively determine the resemblance.

Comparatively similar observations can be ma de in the case of the music video of "Fire," the song performed by the girl group 2NE1[16]. It was released in 2009 and became an instant hit. The lyrics convey a message of (female) liberation and empowerment. The members of 2NE1 express their desire to live freely and passionately, not caring about the opinions of others. They encourage listeners to let go of inhibitions and dance instead, enjoying life without hesitation. The song emphasizes the idea of embracing one's unique qualities and not conforming to social standards. It encourages individuals to stand out, be confident in themselves, and embrace their own style and personality.

Among the symbols enhancing the strong and empowering message, appears an image of a multi-armed woman, wearing clothes, jewellery and make up that resemble these worn in the Northern parts of India. Since the lady, therefore, appears to be Indian, the multiple pairs of upper limbs immediately trigger an association with goddess Durga, always portrayed with eight or ten arms to symbolise her strength and determination to fight for the right cause, and to win. This goddess is sometimes described as an aspect of another, the fearful Kali, one of Shiva's wives. In Hindu iconography, Durga is usually portrayed riding on the back of a tiger or a lion, in company of eight demonesses, who complete her work in combat and chew the bones left over from her battles.[17] According to Wendy Doniger,

> Durga is depicted as aiding the male deities, energizing them for the task of slaying the demons. She is also active in her own right (…) Although a conquering warrior, Durga is also portrayed as beautiful and sometimes referred to as 'Mother,' which displays the many-sided nature of this goddess.[18]

The supposed Durga, impersonated by one of the 2NE1 singers and closely resembling stereotype depictions of the goddess, in the music video of "Fire"

not only fits the message of the song, but also possesses the qualities commonly associated with the deity. Hence, Durga appears in this K-pop production not only as a mighty warrior endowed with ten arms, but also as a charming lady of calm and delicate features, with motherly approach urging listeners to embrace their inner fire and live their life to the fullest. In this way, "Durga" in the music video plays the customary role ascribed to her, which could be the reason this appearance had caused no distress to the fans, particularly to the Hindus.

Bindi, Mehndi, Curry… and Bollywood-ish Choreography in Korean Video Clips

The supposed image of Durga in the music video of "Fire"[19] is also an example of some aesthetic play on traditional Indian face and body adornments, which are an area of interest to K-pop producers. The stylish *bindi* on "Durga's" forehead is a direct reference to Indian tradition.

The *bindi* is an ornamental dot traditionally worn by women in South Asia, particularly in India which, as a part of cultural tradition of that region, is a symbol of cultural or religious significance. For hundreds of years this traditional mark has been worn by Hindu women, placed centrally between the eyebrows. Its name comes from the Sanskrit word "bindu," a drop, whereas its symbolic interpretation is neither clear nor easy. It has been associated with Shiva's third eye, with a point marking the centre of a human being, as well as understood as the means of balancing human inner energy. The traditional *bindi* is usually red or maroon, and it indicates the marital status of a Hindu woman. In recent decades, the conventional *bindi* painted with vermillion or sandalwood paste, has been replaced by stick-on *bindis*, made of felt, and either plain red, maroon or black, or decorated with coloured stones, zirconia, glitter, or beads.[20]

Its origins are also linked with the *tilaka,* the mark worn in the middle of one's forehead and associated closely with spiritual practices. Traditionally, the form and the colour of the *tilaka* differed according to religious choices. For instance, the Vaishnavas still make vertical lines across the forehead and wear a yellow mark between the eyebrows, whereas the followers of Shiva draw the lines on the forehead horizontally and paint a black dot, or a crescent moon in the middle.[21] Women who traditionally wear the *bindi* in the form of red or maroon dot may be symbolically declaring their dedication to the Hindu goddess Shakti. The *bindi* is also one of the symbolic signs of a woman's marital status, indicating the auspicious state of her being wed.

In modern-day India, especially in big cities, the *bindi* became largely a make-up accessory, and the choice whether or in which form to wear it can be an indication of a person's attitude to tradition, to religious rules, to family expectations etc. The *bindis* come in all shapes and colours, to match outfits, fit special occasions or simply the mood of the lady wearing the ornament. They can also indicate the financial status of the woman, for they can be designed and crafted by master jewellers with the use of precious metals and gemstones.

According to Minakshi G. Durham, due to the growing international presence of Indian models, Bollywood actresses, and Indian female movie directors, the feminine ways of Indian women became the object of exceptional interest among the non-Indian audiences. Thus, also *bindi* became popularly known outside the borders of South Asia, and has been used by some celebrities, but also among the general public, as a fashion accessory.[22]

This is why, the above-mentioned example of a *bindi* in "Durga's" image in a K-pop music video is not the only one among K-pop productions. In fact, perhaps following the international trend, there have been also other instances where K-pop stars have been seen wearing the *bindi* on their foreheads, apparently treating it purely as an element of make-up. Some would wear the *bindi* also off the stage, while some have incorporated *bindis* into their performance look, as a form of aesthetic expression, or as part of their stage outfits. However, the choice of K-pop stars to wear *bindis* has sometimes generated discussions and debates among fans and observers regarding cultural appropriation or the respectful representation of cultural symbols. These discussions highlight the complexities and sensitivities surrounding the adoption and use of cultural elements by individuals from diverse backgrounds.[23]

One specific example of a K-pop star wearing a *bindi* on their forehead is the case of G-Dragon, a member of the popular South Korean group BIGBANG. G-Dragon has been known for his unique fashion sense and experimental style throughout his career. During some of his performances and public appearances, G-Dragon has been seen wearing a *bindi* as part of his stage outfits. He has incorporated it as a fashion accessory to enhance his visual presentation and create a distinct aesthetic image. The *bindi*, in his case, is used as a decorative element to add an extra touch to his overall look.[24]

The *bindi*, as an "ethnic dot"[25], was also worn by Sunmi, a Korean female solo singer known for her unique style and captivating performances. In her music video for the song "Gashina" released in 2017, Sunmi can be seen with a *bindi* adorning her forehead as part of her stage image. The overall message of the song is to remain strong and assertive also in the face of a failed relationships. Throughout the performance, Sunmi displays her self-assured and bold attitude, emphasising that she has moved on and is no longer affected by the past. She sings about being confident in her own skin and not needing anyone else to define her worth. The lyrics also touch upon themes of liberation and breaking free from societal expectations or limitations.[26] Considering the traditional social connotations of the *bindi*, choosing it as a part of an image of a liberated woman could be a little puzzling. This is why it is possible to assume, that Sunmi's usage of the *bindi* in this music video was primarily for artistic and visual purposes.

A different variety of Indian forehead ornament was worn by another K-pop solo singer, Chung Ha. Promoting her song "Stay Tonight,"[27] she released some concept photos and a teaser clip featuring jewellery accessories inspired by Indian culture.[28] The piece of jewellery on the artist's forehead bore a resemblance to the *maang tikka*, the Indian female head adornment of

significant religious and societal meaning in Indian culture, being a traditional part of bridal and formal jewellery sets in various regions of India.

The *maang tikka* typically consists of a pendant or ornament that hangs down from a chain or a string and is attached to the hair above the centre of the forehead. The chain (or string) is positioned on the vertical parting in the hair (or the *maang*), which is considered auspicious for a woman in Hindu tradition, and the pendant dangles loosely on the forehead. The design and style of *maang tikka* can vary across different regions and cultural practices in India. It is often adorned with intricate patterns, gemstones, pearls, or other embellishments. The size and shape of the pendant can also vary, ranging from small and delicate to large and elaborate. Regardless of the regional and social differences, the ornament in question holds cultural and symbolic significance. It is traditionally worn during weddings, religious festivals, and other special occasions. It is believed to enhance the beauty and grace of the wearer, symbolize marital status, and signify the union of the bride with her groom.[29]

Chung Ha's use of a *maang tikka*-like head ornament in the teaser for "Stay Tonight" can be seen as a stylistic choice to enhance the visual presentation of the music video and create an aesthetic image perhaps quite unique in Korea. The decision, however, triggered a heated reaction among the fans[30] which, most probably, was the reason for the singer to give up on the idea of using this ornament in the official version of "Stay Tonight" music video.

Similarly, a reference to Indian bridal traditions could be seen in the video produced for the K-pop song *Latata* by the girl group (G)I-DLE. It was released as their debut single on May 2, 2018, under Cube Entertainment. The song quickly gained attention and helped (G)I-DLE establish themselves as a promising newcomer in the K-pop industry.

Latata is an upbeat and energetic song that blends various musical genres, including pop, hip-hop, and EDM. Its lyrics portray the excitement and allure of falling in love and express confidence in pursuing one's desires. The music video for *Latata*[31] features vibrant and visually appealing images, among which the hands of the singers decorated with *mehndi* patterns also appear.

Mehndi, also known as henna, is a traditional cultural practice that involves applying intricate designs on the skin using a paste made from the leaves of the henna plant (*Lawsonia inermis*).[32] The designs are usually floral, geometric, or paisley motifs, and they can vary depending on regional and personal preferences. Though used also in other parts of South Asia, the Middle East or Africa, in India *mehndi* holds deep cultural significance and, being primarily associated with marriage celebrations, is considered auspicious. It is commonly applied to the hands and feet of the bride, other ladies of the family, and sometimes the groom. Additionally, *mehndi* is also used during festivals such as Eid, Karva Chauth, Diwali, and other joyous occasions. It is considered a symbol of prosperity, beauty, and joy. The deep red or orange-brown colour that the henna paste leaves on the skin is believed to represent love and heavenly blessings. The application of *mehndi* is seen as a way to invoke positive energy, ward off evil spirits, and – when used for marriage celebrations – to

bring good luck and fortune especially to the couple. *Mehndi* holds a significant place in Indian culture, reflecting beauty, tradition, and celebration. It is a cherished art form that has been passed down through generations and continues to be an integral part of various cultural festivities.[33]

It seems apparent in the case of *Latata* that the group used *mehndi* simply to enhance the visual experience of the public as well as to add a unique element to their stage image. Upon its release, *Latata* received positive reviews from both critics and fans. The song achieved commercial success, peaking at high positions on various music charts in South Korea. It also helped (G)I-DLE gain recognition internationally and build a solid fanbase. The use of *mehndi* in the music video had not disturbed the sensitivity of Indian, fans however, for some the idea appeared not too appropriate.[34]

Along with Indian beauty accessories, Indian cuisine is a relatively well-known area of Indian culture as well. Perhaps even the first association most Korean people would have with India is *curry*, a dish which over the last few decades won a considerable popularity in South Korea, especially among the younger generation. It is therefore not a surprise that *curry* found its way to Korean popular culture, the most spectacular example of which is "Curry" – the K-pop song by Norazo, released in 2010.

It is a playful and light-hearted song that displays Norazo's comic flair. The lyrics and music video feature humorous and whimsical elements, vaguely related to the most stereotype features of Indian culture. The actual meaning of the song, however, is rather difficult to catch, making the listener feel that the various words and expressions associated with India are being loosely thrown together only to create a bizarre but pleasant aesthetic experience, as in the following sample of the lyrics:

> It's yellow, spicy,
> and although does not smell nice, TAJ MAHAL
> add onions and potatoes
> but not beef, NAMASTE (…)
> SHANTI SHANTI Curry, it's Curry
> it's so good, ah real good
> SHANTI SHANTI YOGA FIRE
> I love hot curry!
> India India Indian cider – (…)[35]

The inexplicable combination of words creates a completely abstract aesthetic experience with the desired comic effect, taking the listener into the land of almost psychedelic associations and wild overtones. However, the Indian fans felt offended by Norazo stereotyping their culture, as well as by the reckless attitude of the duo while referring to key concepts of Indian civilisation, such as yoga or shanti or the inner peace – a term closely related to various Indian spiritual practices. In reaction, the duo prepared a lengthy

apology, explaining that they had "no intentions of committing racism or religious mockery at all," they "did not check the facts before creating this song," and "did not realize that several words (…) [used] in the song to accentuate the 'feel' of India were actually very spiritual and important words to the native speakers of this language."[36]

The lyrics, even though balancing on absurdity, include a line – "Don't mix with your left hand,/ do it with your right hand"[37] – directly referring to an Indian social custom of not touching food or eating with one's left hand. The left hand is considered impure and is traditionally associated with activities considered unclean, such as personal hygiene. Hinduism places a strong emphasis on purity and cleanliness, both physical and spiritual. According to Hindu beliefs, the right hand is considered pure and auspicious, because it is traditionally associated with performing rituals, offering food to deities, giving and receiving, and engaging in other sacred activities. Whereas the left hand is regarded as impure, for it is associated with tasks considered less pure. It is believed that using the left hand for eating can contaminate the food and disrupt its purity.

It is, however, important to note that while this custom is followed by many Hindus, it may not be strictly adhered to by everyone in modern times. Cultural practices can vary among different regions and communities within Hinduism, and individuals may choose to follow or disregard certain customs based on personal preference or practicality. For some people, especially among the emancipated upper middle class educated rich, the custom can even be perceived as backward and embarrassing.

The direct references to Indian culture in the lyrics were additionally intensified by the choreography of the "Curry" music video, proving once more that one of Norazo's defining characteristics is their dynamic and comic stage presence. The dance movements closely resembling those typical for Bollywood productions, seemed to have fitted well into the Norazo typical, playful, and over-the-top performance.[38]

The Bollywood-like choreography attracted also other K-pop artists, and not only on stage but also in other circumstances, such as reality shows, musical contests, etc. For example, a boys K-pop group Super Junior produced a video performing a dance choreographed to an Indian pop song, using stereotypical scenography as well as clothes (such as dupatta or turban) and objects (such as a snake) belonging to the popular image of Indian culture. The choreography was also echoing the performances typical for group dances performed in Bollywood movies[39]. The reaction of Indian fans, however – as can be judged by the comments under the video – was generally positive and sometimes even enthusiastic.

An adventure with Indian-like choreography was shared also by the girl group Oh My Girl. On the release of the promotional video of their song "Windy Day," the group have been faulted for using South Asian musical influences in the song. Moreover, even though the dance performed for the

music video did not contain notable Indian or South Asian elements, fans picked up on the musical influence and labelled Oh My Girl as "curry-dols," referring to their dance as "the Aladdin dance" (despite the fact that Aladdin is not a character from Indian culture). The group, however, might have given the fans a few reasons for this kind of a reaction, as there have been video clips available on the Internet, some of which have since been removed, showing Oh My Girl members engaging in imitation of Bollywood choreography in a humorous way, including wearing a fake turban.[40]

Discussing Indian associations in the activities of Oh My Girl as well as of other K-pop artists, it is important to recognize that cultural appropriation is a sensitive and complex issue, and discussions surrounding it can vary depending on individual perspectives. The concerns raised by fans and critics appear to centre around the potential misrepresentation, stereotyping, and insensitivity towards Indian culture, however, these instances can also be interpreted as the results of inspiration by or fascination with Indian culture, opening diverse perspectives of perception, and promoting cultural understanding.

Curry Is So Delicious! – Manhwa "Kubera"

"Kubera"[41] is a South Korean manhwa (webtoon) series created by an artist using an alias name – Currygom. It was first serialised online in 2010 and has gained a significant following over the years. The manhwa falls under the fantasy genre and combines elements of adventure, drama, mystery, and mythology.

The story of "Kubera" is set in a world where various beings, including humans, gods, and suras (powerful supernatural creatures), coexist. The protagonist, Kubera Leez, embarks on a journey to uncover the secrets of her past and seek revenge after her village is destroyed. Along the way, she encounters different characters, gets entangled in a complex web of alliances and conflicts, and discovers the true nature of the world she inhabits. The manhwa is known for its intricate plot, rich world-building, and well-developed characters. It explores themes of identity, destiny, power, sacrifice, and the consequences of performed actions.

The Indian associations in the manhwa begin right from the alias of its creator, Currygom, by which on the English website of the webtoon there is a pop-up informing a reader that "Curry is so delicious!". Additionally, the manhwa's title and at the same time the name of the main character, Kubera, carries powerful connotations linked to Indian cultural tradition.

According to Benjamin Walker, in Hindu mythology "Kubera (or Kuvera), 'ugly-body'" was a "late Vedic lord of evil spirits whose abode was in the shades," "represented as a white man with eight teeth, three legs and a misshapen body covered with ornaments, (…) often shown riding a man."[42] He is, however, a revered deity associated with wealth, prosperity, and abundance, often regarded even as the god of wealth. He is also the king of the Yakshas, a class of usually benevolent (though sometimes vicious) nature spirits (which also appear in the

discussed manhwa). Besides, Kubera is considered one of the guardians of the directions and is particularly associated with the northern direction. He is also regarded as the treasurer of the gods and handles distributing wealth and prosperity among the deities and humans. As a result, Kubera is worshiped and invoked by individuals seeking financial success, material well-being, and the removal of financial obstacles. In later iconography, Kubera is depicted as a stout and pot-bellied deity with a dwarf-like appearance. He is often shown adorned in luxurious clothing and jewellery, holding a mace or a money bag, and sitting on a throne made of precious stones. Kubera is believed to have ruled the kingdom of Lanka, until his demon brother, Ravana, deprived him of his rightful place. Ever since, he resides in the mythical city of Alaka, located in the Himalayas.[43]

Kubera is also an important figure in Buddhist mythology, and iconography. However, there are some variations in his representations and role in Buddhism, where he is considered one of the Four Heavenly Kings who protect the world and guard the four cardinal directions. The Four Heavenly Kings are often depicted in Buddhist temples and are revered for their protective and benevolent qualities. Nevertheless, also the Buddhist version of Kubera is associated with wealth, prosperity, and abundance. Additionally, he is revered as a *dharma* protector and a guardian of Buddhism and is often depicted holding a mongoose that vomits jewels, symbolising his role in bestowing wealth and abundance.[44] Overall, Kubera holds a significant place in Indian mythology as a deity associated with the material aspects of life.

Even though naming a girl after a male deity might seem a little peculiar, the female protagonist of the manhwa, Kubera Leez actually did get her name after Kubera, as the story draws inspiration from various mythological and cultural sources. As the plot unravels, she embarks on a journey filled with mystery, magic, and challenges. While her character's name pays homage to the Indian deity, her actions as well as the storyline deviate from the original mythological context.

From the very first chapter of the manhwa ("A Girl with a God's Name"), Kubera Leez discovers her connection to the deity Kubera through various events and revelations. Throughout the manhwa, some associations to Indian mythological characters and concepts, including Kubera, are incorporated into the storyline, providing a rich backdrop for the events that unfold. For example, in chapter three, Kubera Leez encounters an ancient weapon, the Sword of Return, which has a special connection to the deity Kubera. As she touches the sword, she experiences a series of visions and memory flashbacks, including a glimpse of Kubera himself. This encounter with the Sword of Return acts as a catalyst for her journey and sets her on a path intertwined with the deity. Furthermore, throughout the series, there are various moments where Kubera Leez's encounters and interactions with divine beings and mystical elements reveal more about her connection to Kubera. These instances gradually provide insight into her lineage and the reasons behind her involvement in the key events of the story.

Also, other characters of the manhwa have been given meaning names associated specifically with the Hindu pantheon, but also with Indian culture

in general. For example, Agni – who in the story serves as a protector and mentor to Leez, and who possesses immense power and plays a crucial role in the unfolding events – gets his name from the ancient Vedic "god of fire, a deity of Indo-Iranian origin worshipped in antiquity by Aryan nomads of Central Asia."[45] As Walker claims

> [m]ore hymns are addressed to him in the *ṛig-veda* than to any other god. (…) Agni was the personification of the three forms of fire, namely the sun, the lightning and the sacrificial fire (…) possessing and knowing all created things, the mediator between men and gods, the protector of men and their homes.[46]

The role and competences of Agni in the discussed manhwa in some way reflect the prominent place that god of fire, Agni, held in the Hindu pantheon since its beginnings.

In the "Kubera" story, a reader also meets three characters bearing names of the Hindu principal trinity – Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma, who in Hinduism is considered the creator of the universe, in the manhwa is depicted as a female character – though being able to change her appearance, gender, and age at will – who is one the "primeval gods," responsible for jurisdiction and order. Vishnu, in the Hindu tradition associated with preservation and maintenance of the universe, plays a prominent role in "Kubera," as his relationship with Leez is a crucial aspect of the plot and has a profound impact on her life and destiny. Also Shiva, who in Hinduism is worshipped as the lord of destruction, transformation, and renewal of the world, performs a prominent role in the "Kubera" story. His connection with the main protagonist is a central element of the plot, and his involvement shapes and influences the events in Kubera Leez's life. It is also worth noting that also other names from Hindu mythology, such as Kali, Ravana, Garuda, Gandharva, Surya and many others, feature in the story.

However, there are also characters having Indian names which do not originally belong to mythological beings. For instance, Asha Rahiro – a talented magician, one of the central characters in the series, and Kubera Leez's companion in her quest for revenge – was given an exceedingly popular Indian girl's name, Asha, of an attractive and auspicious meaning – "hope." Similarly, the name of another female character, Ratri, is coined from a common noun, meaning "night."

The names used in "Kubera" also prove some level of its author's fascination with Sanskrit literary classics, as in the third season of the manhwa a female character, Shakuntala, the daughter of Menaka, is introduced. The appearance of both these names in the manhwa leaves no doubt about a symbolic connection to the story of Shakuntala, the daughter of the sage Vishwamitra and the apsara (celestial nymph) Menaka, a well-known tale from the *Mahabharata*, later adapted by the famous Indian dramatist, Kalidasa, as the theme for his most famous work, *Abhijnyanashakuntala* (The Recognition of Shakuntala). In "Kubera," Shakuntala is still the daughter of Menaka, though Gandharva is her

father. Just as her legendary protagonist, she is a gentle woman, who has a pacifistic and modest personality. She seems to be affectionate and selfless, but up to this point of the manhwa's development she does not seem to show any other distinctive similarities to her Indian namesake.

In addition to proper names, the creator of the manhwa, Currygom, has infused into the story some artifacts and concepts, and named them using Sanskrit words or derivatives. These words are often chosen to enhance the atmosphere, symbolism, and depth of the story. For instance, "ananta," a term derived from Sanskrit, meaning "infinite" or "endless," in "Kubera" is used as the name of a powerful entity associated with a powerful artifact; "bhavati," which in Sanskrit means "becoming" or "being," here is a term used to refer to a specific power or state of existence; "mantra," a Sanskrit term which refers to a sacred chant or phrase often used in meditation or rituals, in the manhwa means a powerful incantation that characters use to channel their abilities and perform various supernatural actions; "shakti," a Sanskrit term denoting feminine divine energy, in "Kubera" denotes a set of the characters' abilities and forces; "prana," a word which in Sanskrit refers to the life force, vital energy or simply a breath, here becomes a term used to describe a type of energy that characters can manipulate and utilize in their supernatural abilities; "karma" a widely known concept in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, in "Kubera" plays a significant role, emphasising the idea of actions and their consequences, which can shape the destiny of the characters through the outcomes of their deeds; "lila," a word which in Sanskrit refers to divine play or cosmic drama, here is a term used to describe the intricate workings of fate and the intertwined destinies of the characters; and "samaya," a Sanskrit word meaning agreement, commitment, or vow, is used in "Kubera" to describe a sacred promise or oath taken by certain characters, often binding them to specific duties or alliances.

These few examples of Sanskrit-derived words used in "Kubera" only indicate the multitude of cultural references in the story. Additionally, one of the cities in the world of "Kubera," Atera, draws architectural inspiration from South Asia, specifically India. Also, the entire planet Willarv is portrayed as a vast and diverse region with its own kingdoms, landscapes, and societies, which could be an echo of the ancient political organization of the Indian Subcontinent. In general, the architecture, especially some local temples (like the Temple of Water in Mistyshore – the name somewhat resonating that of Mysore in the Indian state of Karnataka) clothing styles, and cultural references within the part of the story taking place on the Willarv planet often suggest South Asian influences, however the coherence with their actual meaning or role in Indian tradition would be rather impossible to establish.

Back to the Legend. Indian Associations in the Historical Drama, *Kim Suro, the Iron King*

The legend of Kim Suro's supposedly Indian wife, in twenty first century (2010) was brought back to life as one of the themes of the 32-episode MBC TV drama,

Kim Suro, the Iron King, directed by Choi Jong-su. The production incorporates historical events, fictional elements, and a considerable number of characters – some arriving all the way from India – to create a compelling narrative of the origins and growth of the Kaya Kingdom. The drama was a large-scale production, with a substantial budget, allowing for elaborate production design, intricate costumes, and extensive use of computer-generated imagery to recreate historical settings and battles. The scale of the production aimed to bring the ancient world of the Kaya Kingdom to life. The filming took place at various locations in South Korea, mainly in Kyŏngju, Busan, as well as in Cheju Island, with the use of existing historical sites, natural landscapes, and specially constructed sets, which provided picturesque backdrops for the story.

The MBC introduce their production as a unique and monumental reminder of both the nation-building and uniting importance of the Kaya Confederacy, as well as of the ancient roots of the Korean iron manufacturing techniques, crucial for the civilisational development of the region:

> After being hidden in history until the 1970's, the Gaya Dynasty started receiving attention when many historical relics from this era were found. Legend has it that about 1/3 of Koreans are descendants of Gaya, but it has never been used as a background for a TV show in the past. Gaya, a progressive and liberal dynasty full of beauty. Gaya, the dynasty that conquered overseas trade and increased their influence not only to Asia, but to the Middle East by exporting their iron products. In that place, there was Kim Suro, a man who ruled Gaya with autonomy and competition instead of centralization and control, and Jeonggyun Moju, the mother of Gaya. It's no coincidence that Posco, the company often called king of iron manufacturing, is one of the world-leading companies, and the fact that our country has one of the most competitive shipbuilding industries. This is all due to Gaya, the Iron Dynasty, and the king of overseas trade. As a TV show, 'Gaya' is still like a barren ground. But that's why we have to keep on pursuing it so it can open a new chapter. It is now more important than ever to integrate classes, regions, and generations, and we want to learn about Kim Suro's life, the man who was responsible for founding Gaya, and how he brought the country together in his own way. Additionally, this will be a TV show that recreates the symbolic and mythical characters of Kim Suro, Seok Tal-hae, Yijin Ahshi, Jeonggyeon Moju etc. and portrays their progressive and liberal nature.[47]

The drama's title hero, Kim Suro, a legendary figure in Korean history, is believed to have been both the founder and ruler of the Kaya Confederacy, which was a collection of city-states in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, from around the first century BC to the sixth century AD. The drama explores his personal growth, struggles, and ambitions, portraying him as a skilled warrior, born of a celestial intervention but brought up in modest circumstances, who rose from these humble beginnings to become a central

figure in the formation of the Kaya Kingdom. The narrative includes themes of leadership, loyalty, sacrifice, and the responsibilities that come with power. It examines how Kim Suro's actions shape the future of the Kaya Kingdom, and the legacy he leaves behind. Besides portraying the process of establishing the new state, highlighting the political alliances, conflicts, as well as territorial expansions that contribute to its growth, the drama explores various romantic relationships that impact the course of events. Among them, Kim Suro's relationships, at first with Princess Yŏn, and then with his future queen, the legendary Indian Princess Hŏ Hwang-ok, as well as the rivalries and alliances formed through this marriage, certainly add complexity to the story.

As for the main dramatic personae, Kim Suro (played by Ji Sung) as of course the central character of the drama, is depicted as a perfect ruler. His Queen, Hŏ Hwang-ok (played by Seo Ji-Hye), a princess from the kingdom of Ayodhya who came to the Korean Peninsula destined to marry him, is portrayed as a wise and influential woman who contributes to the growth and prosperity of the kingdom, whereas Princess Ahyo of Saro State (played by Kang Byul) is a character in the drama who triggers a romantic interest of Kim Suro, and their relationship becomes one of the driving forces behind the plot. Similarly, the correlations and conflicts between Suro and his two main male counterparts, Ijinasi (played by Go Joo-won) and Sŏk T'alhae, fourth king of Saro (played by Lee Pil-mo), trigger the development of dramatic events.

The pivotal story of the drama, however, evolves around Kim Suro's dealings with his personal and political rivals, as well as his relationship with Princess Hŏ Hwang-ok, whose origins in the drama are doubtlessly and definitely Indian. The Princess's roots create a possibility for the producers to include some associations with Indian culture in the production. They begin in episode seven[48], when a foreign ship with a set of red sails arrives at the Kimhae harbour (52:25'), bringing from India Princess Hŏ Hwang-ok, accompanied by her father (Maharaja Hŏ) and a group of courtiers and ladies of the court, dressed in red sari-like clothes and carrying musical instruments (which, unfortunately, bear no resemblance to those used in India). The men of the delegation wear turbans, and the ladies have their heads covered with *dupattas*. The Princess arrives with both her head and face covered with a veil, fashioned in a manner of a Turkish *yashmak* or an Arabic *niqab*, which she unfastens while meeting her future husband and his parents, in a gesture that defeats the whole point of the custom preventing modest women from letting their faces be seen by strangers. Moreover, even though the princess arrives unmarried, she is already wearing a *maang tikka* on her forehead. By the end of this episode, Kim Suro lays his eyes on Hŏ Hwang-ok for the first time, when – in the Bollywood manner – a purple *dupatta*, torn by the wind off the princess's head, falls on him by chance. It is also worth noting that in the drama, the princess comes to Kimhae to marry Ijinasi, Suro's rival at first, but then his loyal companion and the future founder of Tae-Kaya (and, according to the legend preserved in *Samguk yusa*, one of the six princes born – just like Kim Suro – out of a golden egg). The

circumstances of the arrival of the Indian delegation create an impression that Kaya has already established good business relations with Ayodhya, through which Ijinasi's mother has already met Hŏ Hwang-ok when she was a young girl and thought her suitable as a daughter-in-law.

In episode eight[49], the connection between the Kaya Kingdom and Ayodhya, and the friendly relationship between the rulers of both the states become even more plain. The visitors mix freely with the citizens of Kimhae; however, the "Indian" people are easily recognizable due to their "exotic" clothing, especially the veils covering women's heads and the turbans worn by men. Besides, the colours of their clothes are much brighter and colour combinations a lot more outlandish than those worn by the locals. Hŏ Hwang-ok's father, referred to in episode seven as "maharaja," now is being described as "an aristocrat from India" conducting powerful business enterprises around the world, who had left his country for a reason not known to anyone (02:46'). In this episode, there is a definite domination of Indian pink, and the viewers' attention is also caught by sets of bangles worn by the ladies who accompany Princess Hŏ, typical jewellery accessory of all Indian women, regardless their cast, religion, or social status. The clothes, and especially the headwear of Hŏ Hwang-ok's father, however, appear to be a bizarre mixture of exotic elements of men's clothing worn in Persia, India, and the Middle East.

In the first ten minutes (7:50') of episode nine, the princess refers to "my India" while choosing a pair of embroidered shoes which her intended husband, Ijinasi, wishes to buy for her, following – as he explains – a Korean tradition. Further on, the episode features several references to India, mostly rather peculiar when confronted with the cultural background they are to represent. For example, the young couple discuss a supposedly Indian tradition, according to which tea leaves are given to the bride as a wedding gift. Such a gift, according to the princess, has an auspicious meaning for the newly married girl, as it symbolises her becoming well rooted in her new home. However, the earliest estimated time of the beginning of tea culture on the Indian Subcontinent would be most probably the seventeenth century A.D., which excludes the possibility of the custom being Indian already in the first century, when the story of the Indian Princess reaching the Korean shores takes place. Nonetheless, it is confirmed by academic sources that in China "[d]uring a wedding ceremony, the bride's dowry often included tea"[50], and it was also a means serving diplomatic purposes in settling negotiations, as well as a royal gift (often of a similar purpose). For example, "[w]hen Emperor of Tang Taizong sent one of his daughters to marry the ruler of Tibet, this cementing a diplomatic alliance, the Tibetans presented China's monarch with a large quantity of Tibetan style tea as part of the betrothal gift."[51]

Similarly, later in the same episode (from 29:04'), the sound of sitar can be heard, and then it is revealed that the sitarist is Princess Hŏ herself. The instrument heard is definitely a sitar, however, neither the string instrument Hŏ holds in her hands even vaguely resembles sitar, nor does her technique of playing match the one typical for the sitarists. Moreover, the neck of Hŏ Hwang-ok's instrument happens to be in the shape of a dragon's head, overall

bringing associations mostly with the Chinese *pip'a* (known also in Korea as *pip'a*, a lute, but only from approximately eighth century). However, the viewers are let off any doubts about the type of the instrument by Kim Suro himself who, while praising the sound, repeats the name "sitar" twice.

Episodes ten and eleven are dedicated to internal matters regarding succession of the throne of Kaya, revelation of the prophesy naming the rightful successor, and intrigues that lead to riots and disruption, as well as force Princess Hŏ and her father to save themselves by escaping the Kaya Kingdom. This is why, some Indian associations can be seen only in episode twelve[52], coming as Suro's memories of Hŏ playing the "sitar" (21:25' and 50:00'). Episode thirteen[53] brings the viewers a quick glance at a medallion bearing a symbol of twin fish, previously lost by Suro and then found by the princess (08:24'), as well as at the instruction of how to build a ship (51:00'), described in the dialogue between Suro and his mentor and fencing master as written in the "language of Ch'ŏnch'uk-kuk." It is possible to notice that the drawings of the instruction are marked by a number of words, all in Devanagari script, however the language used seems to be not the ancient Sanskrit, but a modern Indian language, Hindi, which at the time of the story had not yet existed (though among the words presented in their Hindi forms there are those of Sanskrit origin, such as "pīṭh," the back, or "pṛṣṭh," the side, there is also for example the noun "taḳhtā" – meaning a wooden board – a late, Perso-Arabic influence).

Episodes fourteen to twenty-eight portray a series of events leading to Suro gaining the position of a great Kaya ruler, some local controversies and pursuits for power, further development of iron manufacturing, as well as the strengthening of a romantic connection between Kim Suro and Hŏ Hwang-ok, who – determined to become a deserving queen of Kaya – dedicates her full attention and plenty of effort to win also the hearts of the common people, as well as begins to dress in the fashion of native noble women. The culmination of Suro's struggle comes in episode twenty-nine, when he makes a momentous speech announcing the birth of Kaya Confederacy, with him as its king.

Princess Hŏ gradually comes back to limelight in episode thirty, in which Suro manages to overcome the elders' opposition and finally proposes, asking her to become the first queen of Kaya and his wife. Subsequently, episode thirty-one in some way recapitulates the story of the royal marriage from *Samguk yusa*.[54] To be able to commence the legend from the start, the princess must first travel back to India (09:49'), only to return to Kaya as Suro's intended with her bridal party. The date of Suro's coronation is conditioned by Hŏ's return.

Approximately half-way through the episode, appears a sequence of events known from the *Samguk yusa* legend, starting from the storm encountered by the ship carrying the princess and her party (26:05'). Then, the Kaya watchmen notice a ship with red sails approaching their shore (48:24') and deliver the news urgently to Suro, stunned by hearing it. On seeing the royal ship waiting near the shore, he sends a party of court officials to welcome the princess, who is dressed all in red and gold – the marriage colours typical for an Indian bride, with her face once again half-hidden under a *yashmak*-like veil. With the princess this

time comes her royal brother, who happens to be also a Buddhist monk (dressed in a rather peculiar manner, with a hat somewhat like the one of a Tibetan lama). It is he, who makes sure that the wedding follows the Indian tradition, and therefore he insists for the groom to come and escort the bride from her "home" (in this case, her ship) to the place of the ceremony. Finally, a compromise is found, and a pavilion is set up right on the shore, for the royal couple to meet – just as in the legend. Suro rides on horseback surrounded by his party (just as it happened in ancient Korea but also still happens in India), and Hwang-ok, arriving in her bridal attire, stops by a hillock, takes off a pair of red trousers (here worn conveniently under the skirts) and offers them to the spirit of a mount, with a twice repeated, most elaborate bow. Then, she goes ahead to meet her future husband and king, admitting to herself that she "wanted to become the queen of Kaya coming as a princess form India."

The final, thirty-second episode of the drama brings a closure to Kim Suro story.[55] It provides a fabulised narrative illustrating the life lead by him and his Indian wife, based mainly on the vague and incomplete information gathered in *Samguk yusa*. In this part of the drama, Suro defeats his greatest rival, Sŏk T'alhae, and established himself as a powerful and just king. In addition, also the issue of the names of royal offspring is resolved according to the Queen Hwang-ok's wish, therefore some of the children are to inherit her name and some the one of their father. The episode closes with images of the tombs of Kim Suro and Queen Hŏ Hwang-ok in modern-day Kimhae (55:47'), accompanied by a reading of the final part of the legend, narrating the circumstances of death of the royal couple.

Needless to say, *Kim Suro, the Iron King*, just as historical film productions in general, incorporates creative interpretations and fictional elements for storytelling purposes, so the representation of Indian culture may not necessarily align with historical or factual accuracy. While the drama touches upon Queen Hŏ Hwang-ok's Indian origins and includes some cultural references, the primary focus is still of course on the founding and development of the Kaya Confederacy and the historical context of events leading to the creation of the first Korean nation state.

However, after watching the drama the viewer can be left with questions strikingly similar to those one asked oneself after reading the English translations of the original legend of Kim Suro and his Indian wife: why underline the (apparently uncertain) Indian origins of Hŏ Hwang-ok, and what are the probable reasons for popularising the legend in a form which departs from its original text (where just a toponym with no definite explanation is given as for the place of the princess's origin). And even though also this time no definite answers are possible, a supposition that finding justification for a theory of a direct transmission of Buddhism from India to Korea primarily comes to mind.

An even larger number of non-answerable questions about the drama would match those that could be addressed to the presence of Indian references in Korean popular culture in general. Why do the basic facts not really matter? Why the contextual details (such as clothes, jewellery, objects of everyday use etc.) are not important in creating a general image of

"Indianness"? Why are the Indian elements introduced often deprived of their symbolic depth or cultural complexity? Could it be possible that the only purpose they serve is creating the sense of the exotic?

In view of the generally syncretic nature of K-pop visual productions, any direct attempt to answer these questions proves futile. However, the purpose of creating images "out of this world" makes these productions somewhat akin to the ancient Indian aesthetic tradition, for

> [i]n purely Hindu and religious art (…) even portraits are felt to be lesser art than the purely ideal and abstract representations (…) For (…) realism which is of the nature of imitation of an object actually seen at the time of painting is quite antipathetic to imagination, and finds no place in the ideal of Indian art[56].

The author of this statement, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, further explains this phenomenon in more detail, saying that

> [t]he work of art itself is an arrangement of colours or sounds, adjudged good or bad according to whether these arrangements are pleasing or otherwise. The meaning of the work of art is of no significance; those or who are interested in such merely human matter are called philistines[57].[58]

Bearing Coomaraswamy's words in mind, it is possible to make a claim that K-pop artists, by freely taking and syncretising elements of various cultures, including the Indian one, to enhance the atmosphere of mystery and miraculousness of their fairy tale-like compositions, seem to follow the basic rule of Indian visual arts – to create a perfect image of a dream-like ideal, as the opposite to perfectly re-creating the real.

Notes

1 Robert H. Winthrop, *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, New York: Greenwood 1991, 82.
2 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1962; Idem, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* New York: McGraw Hill 1964.
3 Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (Routledge, 2002).
4 Susan Scafidi, *Who Owns Culture?: Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9–10.
5 Ibidem.
6 Blackpink is a South Korean girl group formed by YG Entertainment. The group debuted on August 8, 2016, and consists of four members: Jisoo, Jennie, Rosé, and Lisa. Despite being a relatively new, the group quickly gained immense popularity both in South Korea and internationally. Their debut single album, "Square One," was released in August 2016. It featured two tracks: "Whistle" and "Boombayah." Following their debut, Blackpink continued to release successful singles and

albums. They released several hit songs, including "Playing with Fire," "Stay," "As If It's Your Last," and "Ddu-Du Ddu-Du." Referred to as the "biggest girl group in the world," Blackpink is the most successful Korean girl group internationally. See i. e. Raisa Bruner, "Blackpink Is TIME's 2022 Entertainer of the Year," *Time*, December 5, 2022. https://time.com/entertainer-of-the-year-2022-blackpink/. (Retrieved 7 July, 2023); Haeryun Kang, "Rolling Stone," *Rolling Stone*, May 23, 2022, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/blackpink-lisa-jennie-rose-jisoo-new-music-1354784/. (Retrieved 7 July, 2023).

7 BLACKPINK. (2020, July 5). BLACKPINK – "How you like that" DANCE PERFORMANCE VIDEO [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32si5cfrCNc (Retrieved 25 June, 2023).

8 See i.e.: Janet W. Lee, "Variety," *Variety*, July 15, 2020, https://variety.com/2020/music/news/blackpink-hindu-deity-music-video-how-you-like-that-edited-1234707385/. (Retrieved 25 June, 2023), "Here's How YG Entertainment 'Fixed' BLACKPINK's 'How You Like That' MV's 'Disrespectful' Use Of Indian God Ganesha," *Koreaboo*, June 29, 2020, https://www.koreaboo.com/news/heres-yg-entertainment-fixed-blackpinks-like-mvs-disrespectful-use-indian-god-ganesha/. (Retrieved 25 June, 2023), Tiffany May and Su-Hyun Lee, "Hindu God in a K-Pop Video? Blackpink Runs Afoul of Fans," *The New York Times*, July 11, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/world/asia/blackpink-ganesha-kpop-cultural-appropriation.html. (Retrieved June 25, 2023), "BLACKPINK's 'How You Like That' MV Under Controversy For 'Disrespectful' Use Of Indian God Ganesha," *Koreaboo*, June 26, 2020, https://www.koreaboo.com/news/blackpink-like-mv-controversy-disrespectful-use-indian-god-ganesha/ (Retrieved 25 June, 2023).

9 The original video has been removed from Internet, however, a freeze is still available in an article discussing the controversy at: BLACKPINK's "How You Like That" MV Under Controversy For "Disrespectful" Use Of Indian God Ganesha – Koreaboo (Retrieved 13 December, 2023).

10 Walker, *The Hindu World*, Vol. 2, 377.

11 See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0UjELAUMjE (Retrieved 5 June, 2023).

12 Norazo was formed in 2005 by the duo of Jo Bin and Lee Hyuk. The two members had initially pursued separate careers in the music industry before coming together to form the comedic duo. Their debut single, "Superman," was released in 2005, and it quickly gained attention for its catchy melody and humorous lyrics.

Over the years, Norazo continued to release music and gain popularity with their comedic and energetic performances. They released several albums, including "Curry" (2008), "Gangnam Avenue" (2012), and "Woman Person" (2018). Each album displayed their creativity and ability to blend humour with different musical styles.

13 Walker, *The Hindu World*, Vol. 2, 407.

14 Walker, 408.

15 Walker, 406.

16 2NE1 was a South Korean girl group formed by YG Entertainment. The group debuted in 2009 and consisted of four members: CL, Dara, Bom, and Minzy. 2NE1 quickly gained attention and became one of the most influential and successful girl groups in the K-pop industry. After their successful debut single, "Fire," released in 2009, their subsequent releases, such as "I Don't Care," "Go Away," and "I Am the Best," solidified their popularity. "I Am the Best" achieved significant success and became one of their signature songs, earning them international recognition. In 2016, the group officially disbanded, citing differences in musical direction and individual career pursuits.

17 Walker, *The Hindu World*, Vol. 1, 509.

18 *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia*, 290.

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