

INDIAN K-POP LOVE AND THE POSTHUMAN CONDITION: TECHNOLOGY, DESIRE, AND THE CRISIS OF HUMAN BELONGING

Sanjaya Jani

MA in English,

Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

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Abstract

The Hallyu, is the dramatic rise in global interest in South Korean popular culture led by K-pop, K-dramas, and films. Hence the Korean wave has also encapsulated the Indian female audiences. But it's not just entertainment but a window into how technology reshapes intimacy and belonging in the posthuman age. Many fans describe K-pop stars as helping with emotional care, sensitivity, and romantic devotion; qualities often absent in patriarchal expectations of love within Indian society. This paper will examine how these longings are mediated through technology, where fantasies of perfect idols and virtual romances meet the realities of cultural desire. Dramas such as My Holo Love and Are You Human Too? illustrate this shift, portraying heroines who fall for holograms and artificial beings. N. Katherine Hayles's idea of the "virtual body" in How We Became Posthuman, explains fan's extend intimacy into digital environments, while Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality in Simulacra and Simulation, shows idol perfection blurring fantasy and reality.

This paper also highlights critics such as; Jürgen Habermas's The Future of Human Nature, arguing technological redefinitions of love undermine human dignity. Francis Fukuyama's Our Posthuman Future calls posthumanism "the world's most dangerous idea." L. Kass's Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity and Michael Sandel's The Case Against Perfection, warns the pursuit of perfection erodes the humility and imperfection that give love meaning. Even Hayles, in her Afterword: The Human in the Posthuman, explains that human life cannot be completely separated from its biological grounding.

By bringing together Indian female fan practices with these theoretical debates, this paper argues K-pop's love as a paradox. It opens new possibilities of intimacy and global belonging, but it also exposes the crisis of human love itself; where empathy, vulnerability, and authentic relationships risk being replaced by simulations of desire.

Keywords: Korean Pop, Virtual Intimacy, Cultural Posthumanism, Hyperreality.

Introduction

In recent years, South Korean popular culture has a significant impact across the world, reshaping entertainment industries and transforming the desire of millions of fans. India has been no exception. From K Pop music, videos and idol merchandise to Korean dramas streamed on digital platforms, young Indian audiences- especially women are increasingly drawn to the aesthetic, emotion and intimacy offered by Korean cultural production. This is not only a matter of consuming foreign media but a reorientation of desire, belonging and identity itself. When Indian women express affection for a k Pop artist (idol), they may never meet and they immersed in to fictional romances between hologram and humans, they reveal a profound feeling in how intimacy and love are experienced in twenty first century. This change can be understood through the framework of posthuman condition.

This condition is a state in which technology, media and digital simulations increasingly mediate human relationships, destabilizing distinction between real and artificial, unnatural and natural presence and absence.

This paper argues that Indian k Pop love has both the promises and dangers of the posthuman condition. It shows drama consumption opens spaces of new intimacy and belonging, where Indian women were imagining relationship beyond the patriarchal constraints and cultural traditions. But at the same time the other side, artificial mediate desires eradicating authentic forms of human relationship and connection, when human intimacy becomes extremely tied to simulation, digital images, and perfect idols rather than vulnerable or imperfect human being. The central research problem lies in this paradox. How both the perspectives - Indian k Pop love express the opportunities of posthuman connection, in contrast to it exposing the crisis of human love to an artificial object.

The significance of this paper lies in its focus on Indian fans especially woman, whose participation in global fandom has been overlooked in scholarship. In contrast to their male counterparts' Indian women expectations heavily shaped by cultural expectations of modesty, duty and marriage. So, we cannot simply dismiss the attraction towards K Pop idols as mere entertainment. Usually the K Pop idols are carefully constructed through cosmetic surgery, digital editing, and through other advance technologies, by doing this they represent an idealized lover, one who personify sensitivity, beauty and attentiveness that Indian women may want but rarely they encounter in everyday life. Through digital fandom, translating lyrics or participating in online networks which are basically created by K Pop fans, these women forge form of affective belonging that transcend national and cultural borders.

The emergence of this fandom in India is visible in multiple real-world incidents. In the year 2021, While BTS was delivering a speech at the UN. Indian BTS fandom flooded Twitter with millions of tweets, there were many trending hash tags like #BTSatUN. It was at very top of Twitter feed of India for many days. Again in 2022 one of the members of K Pop group (EXO) Chen announced his marriage, few fans publicly broke down on social media, and they were confessing feeling of betrayal like their won partner had abandoned them, In India especially in Northeast area, where Korean Culture has had a strong hold since the early 2000. In this region hairstyles, clothing and Korean speech patterns are copied by young audience in their everyday life.

But in the real world of human these kinds of relationship and intimacy raise philosophical and ethical questions. Dramas which captivates Indian Fans such as *My Holo Love* (2020) where a woman falls for a hologram, *Are You Human too?* (2018) where heroin loves an android, makes visible the technical redefinition of love. These fans often experience and emotional bonding through digital means rather than through face-to-face interaction and genuine emotional bonding.

Critics of posthumanism N Katherine Hayles describe this as an emergence of "virtual body" a form of subjectivity that is getting expanding in to digital space and throwing in to confusion humanist idea of selfhood, Human dignity and meaning of their life getting undermined by this redefinition of love.

Jurgen Hebermas shades light on a critical dimension of the technological encroachments into the human sphere, describing how it challenges the very foundation of ethical life. Francis Fukuyama further shades light on how branding posthumanism as “the world’s most dangerous idea” in his essay titled *Transhumanism* (2004). Michel Sandel and Leon Kass caution that how the pursuit of perfection, whether through genetic engineering and idealization of idols can destroy the humility.

In opposite to this context K Pop love of Indians can be seen as double edged and paradoxical. It has two ways of possibilities in one way it highlights the liberating potential of posthuman belonging; desires now flow freely beyond borders and cultures, transported by digital networks and preserved by fantasies of perfection. On the other way it exploits the vulnerability of human intimacy in a world where technology increasingly mediates relationship.

This paper will therefore examine how the K Pop love explains the posthuman condition, by delving into theoretical perspective of Hayles, Baudrillard, Braidotti, Ahamad, Hebermas, Fukuyama, Kass and Sandel. It will analyze the case studies of dramas and fandom practices to show how technology shapes desires.

Posthumanism and Technology in Cultural Studies

When we interpret the definition or concept of posthumanism, it defines posthumanism as a challenge to the traditional boundaries of the human by emphasizing the entanglement of human beings with technology, network and artificial constructs. For example, we can bring theoretician they are Braidotti and Haraway. Braidotti (2013) highlights how the posthuman subject is no longer defined by fixed human ideals but by constant connectivity and technological mediation. On the other hand, Haraway in *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) anticipated this shift by positioning the cyborg as a figure that destabilizes “natural” human boundaries, blurring the line between organic and mechanic existence. In cultural studies, posthumanism often points toward a desire for connection beyond flesh, and mediated by screens, algorithm, and virtual presence.

K Pop’s Global Popularity and Digital Desire

In 2011 Sun Jung’s book *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain Oldboy, K Pop Idols*, analyzes how South Korean actors influenced different fan groups across Asia. Jung used this research to explore the concept of soft masculinity and the global spread of popular culture. He explains how it creates an “imaginative community” beyond their natural borders. Fans are not just consuming the music but actively participating in online networks, creating memes, streaming parties, and fan fiction that sustain intimacy with distant idols. In the context of digital desire various online platforms act as technological bridges that eliminate the geographical distance’

K Pop in Indian Context, Women and their Love Expectations

Few Scholars has examined on Indian context how women negotiate love and desire within the patriarchal expectations. Indian women often find themselves within traditional ideal of romantic love such as marriage, familial duty caste expectations, but in contrast to it K Pop with technology brings the modern desire for autonomy and affective choice because K Pop offer a fantasy choice where desire can be imagined outside rigid local constrains.

But this is not really a simple kind of liberation, rather K Pop fandom reveals it as a shift towards posthuman desire, where intimacy mediated through digital technology. We can consider many examples that many young Indian girls say idols represent their aspiration partners are at the same time unattainable yet affectively present through livestreams and it illustrates how their obsession destroying them.

Few examples or incidents-

1. In Ahmedabad eight teenagers were hospitalized due to excessively obsessed with BTS, one refused to eat or sleep properly, spending all her time for BTS. Koreaboo. (2025, January 30). How a love for BTS landed 8 Indian teenagers in the hospital.
2. Three minor girls from Maharashtra staged their own kidnapping to meet their idols, they were intercepted by police in Pune and counselled about the ill effect of excessive social media exposure.
3. A teenager in Kerala became so obsessed with BTS that she accused her father of sexual abuse when he forbade her from following the K-pop group. The girl's intense fandom led to strained family relations and legal complications. The father had to approach the High Court seeking bail to come out of impresionment.
4. K-pop Addiction several Cases in Kerala which of extreme addiction to BTS and other K-pop bands were reported in Kerala. Teenagers were reportedly spending excessive time watching K-pop videos, leading to academic decline and social withdrawal. Around 15 cases requiring therapy and intervention were reported in Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital in the past year. The New Indian Express. (2021, December 15). In K-pop frenzy.

Critical Voice against Posthumanism

Being a theorist of posthuman theorists celebrates hybridity and technological mediation. In *Afterward: The Human in the Posthuman* Hayles cautions that uncritical celebration of posthumanism risks flattening the embodied, historical and affective dimension of humanity. For Hayles the danger is imagining the human only as information, as digital signal, or as technologically augmented subject, so losing sight of vulnerability mortality that define human existence.

This criticism is relevant in Indian K Pop context. Authentic intimacy neglected by technologically mediated affection. Here is risk is that young fan may negate embodied forms of connection and love. Where face to face romance will be replaced by screen based parasociality, it reflects not merely a shift in fandom but a boarder cultural anxiety about what counts as real "love" in posthuman condition.

Posthuman Condition

The term applied to number of states in which cultural, philosophical, and technological fields are include. In which the limitation of human subjects is destabilized by digital media, AI, and biotechnical transformations. N. K. Hayles to view a posthuman condition as a shift from embodied subjectivity toward an understanding of human as information dispersed across networks and virtual environment.

In the posthuman (2013) the feminist theorist Braidotti arguing that posthuman is not simply about machines replacing humans, but about a new ontology of the self. It is fluid, hybrid and interconnected, in which “love”, “intimacy”, and “belonging” are no longer limited to interpersonal, physical relationships, but extend into mediated and artificial domain. In Indian context the K Pop love manifest about its posthuman condition, how young fans develop intimate attachments to idols, or their digital representation in livestreams, dramas, or holographic concerts. This kind of emotional investment reveals the symptom of posthuman intimacy.

The Virtual Body

In his treatise entitled *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) Hayles gave the concept of “virtual Body” he illustrates how human subjectivity becomes extend into cyberspace. The virtual body is more real than their physical presence. For K Pop fans in India the idol’s virtual body is more real than their physical presence. Fans are allowing themselves to experience through integral selfies and Waveverse livestreams. This re configuration of body highlights the paradox of posthuman desire. Where a fan feels personal connection when BTS’s V says “Namaste” is responding to the biological body of the singer but to his “virtual body”.

Hyperreality and Simulacra

In his *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) Baudrillard provides another important concept, the idea that in twentieth century, signs and images no longer refer to reality but create their own self-sustaining hyperreality. But you might be thinking how it is connected to posthumanism. In K Pop ideals are not simply musicians or actors meticulously curate simulation, their appearance and sculpted through plastic surgery, digital filters, performance personas, and careful controlled social media exposure.

The hyperreal image becomes the very center of their longing and emotional attachments. In everyday sense the ideal does not need to be real. In fact, it is a perfection created by simulation. It attracts people, here the line between real and fantasy collapse, and fans start to create an imaginary world where the idol is both human and more than human – in fact a hologram of idealized masculinity which is an incarnation of love without flaws.

Therefore, Baudrillard’s concept of “Hyperreality” explains why fans are so deeply invested in virtual concerts, or dramas featuring artificial boyfriends *My Holo Love* or *Are you human Too?* These stories bring to life the logic of *Simulacra*. A digital lover may not be real yet he feels more authentic than an imperfect partner.

Artificiality as Central tension

Going through all these concepts is the problem of artificiality in emotion where embodied love and technologically mediated intimacy occur and Collapse between "natural" and "unnatural" makes posthuman desire success. In K Pop context Fans adopt artificial connection as authentic, it is also undeniable that simultaneously fans sensing the absence of embodied vulnerability, imperfection, and human reciprocity.

Intimacy is both expanded and at the same time endangered in artificial intimacy. In absence of love and attention fans can imagine loves from these idols beyond this national and cultural boundary. Entering to the spaces of fantasy and hybridized belonging, this substitution of human love with simulated intimacy raises the dangers highlighted by critics like Hebramas, Fukuyama, Sandel, and Hayles.

Here the risk is technology is eroding empathy, humility, and human connection itself. So, from the above analysis we can say the theoretical framework of this paper defines Indian K Pop as a living laboratory of post human condition. Here hybrid belonging takes place through "*virtual body*" and "*hyperreal idol*". Affective circulation takes place in paradoxical field of intimacy. Two possibilities can be occurred that is desire fulfilled by fantasy simultaneously exposing the crisis of human authentic condition.

Indian Women's Desire and K Pop Love

Historically we have seen Indian women's desires following a patriarchal framework that priorities family honor, caste boundaries, and marriage alliance. In many regions of India in fact in world, women are taught to see themselves as good "*daughters*" or "*beautiful wives*" rather than an autonomous desiring subject. The concept of "*other*" given by Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* remains liable in India where female desire is often either silenced or over surveilled. We have many examples young couples shamed or even assaulted for violating cultural norms. The supreme court of India in 2017 has acknowledged that "honor killing" still occur when women chooses partners from outside of caste or community. In this context desire not only personal but political. The rise of K Pop culture provides a space to these fans where they can express their desire and feel the pleasure, outside the rich of patriarchal control. This online fandom of Indian fans is allowing to imagine alternative masculinities and romance. The attraction to words this K Pop ideals and dramas lies not only in music or plot but in cultural codes they embody. A few fans describe these idols "soft", "caring", or "perfect". K Pop idols are crying openly on stage, writing heartfelt letters to the fans and discussing mental health struggles. In contrast to it in the Indian cinema the male hero is frequently portrayed as aggressive, dominant or stoic. For these Indian women who rarely encouraged to expect tenderness from male partners, this kind of sensitivity feels revolutionary for them.

Another reason which also attracts these fans is idols aesthetic labor such as fashionable outfit, flawless skin, carefully choreographed gestures makes them idealized version of man who always attentive and attractive.

In addition to it, idols are seen promoting gender neutral massages, bowing, addressing fans respectfully, compared to patriarchal models in India where men expect women to serve them, these respectful postures feel them liberating.

For example, dramas like "*Crash Landing on You*", and "*Goblin*" further idealized this through storylines where male leads protect without controlling, love without demanding possession,

Together these elements are producing an image of an "*alternative masculinity*" that redefines what women can desire. We have many examples where Indian fans articulating in social media platforms that they say-"Korean boys are different"; "they respect you" or "I wish Indian boys are like them".

Social media also played an important role of driving machine of emotion, various online networks such as Twitter hashtags, like #BTSIndia or #IndiaNeedsBTS trends with thousands of tweets, creating a collective affection. Ahmad in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) affective circulation explains how emotions do not remain private but increase as they circulate. For instance, when one fan posts a crying emoji over a BTS livestream, others echo it, generating shared intensity. Instagram pages like "Banton Bharat" remix idol images with Hindi captions, Odia poetry, or Bollywood dialogues, hybridizing global and local cultural forms.

Collective online groups during COVID19 lockdown became crucial, fans organized birthdays celebration for idols, coordinated virtual concerts, and even raised funds for Indian charities in the name of BTS or EXO, blurring the line between fantasy love and real-world activism.

These kind of fandom practices not only preserve idol love but also alternative publics where women desire are validated rather than suppressed.

Comparison with Traditional Love Expectations

Arrange vs chosen Love

Traditional love chosen completely and mediated by families in case of marriage which often based on religion, caste, or class, here romantic choice is secondary, Idol love, by contrast, is fully chosen: women select which idol to "bias" (favorite), which drama to watch, and how to express desire.

Patriarchal Service vs Reciprocal Affection

Especially in middle class marriages in India women are expected to serve in-laws. Love is framed as duty, idol love, however is experienced as reciprocal; idol thank fans, express vulnerability, and presented themselves as dependent on fan support.

Hyperreal Perfection vs Imperfection

It is undeniable that human partners come with flaws and emotions such as anger, neglect, betrayal. Idols crafted through media simulating which makes them appear perfect. As Baudrillard (1981) would say, they are simulacra images which makes them more real than the real, but this is an artificial perfection. It sets a new standard of desires for Indian women.

Conclusion

This paper is not just about fandom or Pop culture; it is about how Indian women's K Pop love dramatizes the shift from human intimacy to posthuman intimacy. In posthuman condition posthuman intimacy is not without risk. We cannot dismiss Indian women's K Pop love as mere teenage fantasy. In search of by decentering human, rise of technology in posthuman, hybridization makes human fragile. While resisting the limits of local paratracheal through embracing the posthuman condition of technology mediated intimacy K Pop fandom provides Indian audience especially women (teenage) with sense of global connectivity that transcends local constraints, social norms, geographical norms, geographical limitations. In engaging with K Pop content Indian women participate in transnational affective community that reconfigures conventional notion of desire, devotion and relationality. Fans are negotiating this paradox by creating microcosms of affective authenticity within online spaces. Yet these experience remains contingent on vitality mediation and affective labor embodied in fandom infrastructures. Looking forward, several ways of research emerge from this study. First the dynamic of digital intimacy and parasocial relationships in India warrant further investigation, particularly regarding how cultural expectations shape the affective engagement with virtual figures. Second, the rise of AI Idols and virtual influences raises critical questions about the future of mediated love; how might algorithmically generated personas transform emotional expectations, attachment, and relationality for audiences navigating similar socio-cultural constraints?

Third, the global fan economy itself In conclusion Indian women K Pop love becomes a hybrid technologically mediated, and culturally negotiated experience, reflecting the posthuman condition of twenty first century. For a success posthuman dream, it might be not the appropriate way to blending technology with natural emotion of human.

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