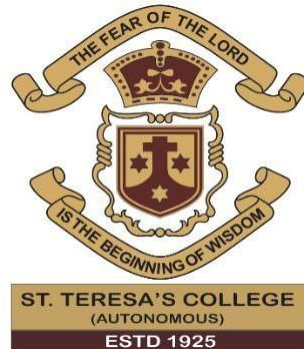


**ROLE OF KDRAMA IN SOUTH KOREA'S SOCIAL
REGENERATION: AN ANALYSIS OF *TOMORROW***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of
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I hereby declare that this project entitled “Role of Kdrama in South Korea’s Social Regeneration: An Analysis of *Tomorrow*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Tania Mary Vivera, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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Introduction

Korean drama has been taking the world by storm ever since the beginning of time. But in recent times, it is becoming one of the most acclaimed forms of media with the popularity of Kdramas like *Squid Game*, *Goblin* and the like. Korean Drama as a genre has always held a special place in the hearts of drama lovers. One can say it has achieved this level of regard with the public due to its excellent portrayal of human emotion and its ability to evoke a myriad of sentiments in its viewers. Although Kdramas deal with a variety of genres that grasp the attention of the general public, many people fail to see through its agenda to popularize South Korean Culture and bring to light just how much South Korea has successfully evolved through the years of its inception.

Although South Korea has come very far in the industrial and economic sector, the social issues that plague the nation from its origins to this day, stand in stark contrast to its antecedent. This project analyzes in depth the present cultural scene in South Korea, the social issues that its citizens are plagued with on a daily basis and how Kdramas play a huge part in helping to alleviate social tension.

The Kdrama used to dissect the social issues present in South Korea is the 2022 Korean drama *Tomorrow*, ranking #1 on Netflix. The study tries to identify why it is as popular as it is with both the South Korean public and international audiences.

The first chapter introduces the Historical background of South Korea. It helps to answer the question of why South Korean culture is the way it is.

“Studying history helps us understand how events in the past made things the way they are today. With lessons from the past, we not only learn about ourselves and how we came to be, but also develop the ability to avoid mistakes and create better paths for our societies. Events in the past have displaced families and groups, changing the makeup of regions and often causing tensions” (*Why Is It Important to Study History*).

The history of South Korea is quite a turbulent one and the after effects of the ‘Korean War’ still plague the citizens of Korea and give rise to many social issues like the forced military enlistment of men and the irreversible damage towards comfort women.

The second chapter analyzes the different cultural norms that exist in South Korea and uses Culture Theory to gain an in-depth understanding of the ingrained societal norms. Korean culture has long been used as a tool by the South Korean government to sway the opinions of Western Audiences. It is sugar coated and made to seem like a respectful and alluring part of Korean society, often trivializing the extent of the harm it afflicts on the citizens of Korea. Korea uses ‘Soft Power’ as a tool for the propagation and promotion of Korean culture while simultaneously expanding the hold Korea has on the citizens of other countries without the use of military power and political threats.

The chapter analyzes South Korean traditions and social issues based on the Culture Theory put forward by Paul K Ryu to substantiate the claims of glamourising South Korean Culture. While the West seems to stray further and further from Tradition, South Korea remains rooted to its traditional beliefs to

this day. Going so far as to date back to the Joseon Era. The chapter debates the validity of traditionalism over modernity.

The aim of the third chapter is to analyze the Kdrama *Tomorrow* and disclose the trauma and distress of the South Korean people that normally go unnoticed beneath South Korea's 'progressive' banner. While analyzing each episode, the study seeks to help viewers gain an in-depth understanding of the plights of the common folk by highlighting cases of bullying, sexual assault, neglect of older citizens who served in the War, society's pressure towards men and eating disorders.

The analysis centers on the ability of the Kdrama *Tomorrow* to expose South Korea's cultural issues and social conditioning. The chapter helps us understand how a seemingly simple Kdrama like *Tomorrow* can raise awareness for social issues, provide adequate solutions for those problems and act as a medium of respite and visibility for the ones affected by societal injustices.

Chapter 1: A Historical Analysis of the Social Issues in South Korea and the Origins of Korean Drama

Although South Korea is a hot pot of many social issues mangled together in a capitalist broth, the results of the seemingly “perfect” cultural ideology gives rise to major social discrimination in the community. South Korea has a very rough past, racked with mistreatment, exploitation and experimentation. Its history is similar to the traumatic rendition of German history due to the division of Korea into two occupation zones, akin to the four occupation zones in Germany. Both the nations were ravaged by the Second World War.

Korean independence did not come easy to the citizens. In 1945, after the end of World War II, Korea was administratively partitioned. Since Korea was under Japanese rule, they were deemed to be the foes of the “Allies” which include The United Kingdom, The United States, The Soviet Union, and China. When Japan surrendered, Korea was forced to be governed as a single body by the Allies until a single government could be arranged for the peninsula. But in 1948, due to disagreements on who would govern Korea, it led to the establishment of two completely different governments with two opposite ideologies. Korea was officially split into the West-aligned First Republic of Korea and the Communist- aligned Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Korea was still not able to do away with wars because in June 1950, the devastating 'Korean War' broke out. The Korean War was a result of immense political unrest in both North and South Korea. Although both the countries claimed to be independent, the governments just could not let go of the legacy of a 'united Korean nation'.

Although negotiations for peace would have worked much better than outright brute force when dealing with a nation that has unstable political boundaries, North Korea launched an attack on South Korea with its military. This was one of the most brutal wars launched on the Korean nation as it led to the citizens themselves trying to take back their rights.

After immense destruction, it came to a close on 27 July 1953, with the 1948 status quo being restored. Even after all their efforts, neither DPRK nor the First Republic could take total control over the divided Korean Nations. The peninsula was hence divided by the Korean Demilitarized Zone and the two separate governments that were stabilized into the political entities of North Korea and South Korea. The Korean War was now seemingly over, but tensions still brewed at the borders of the Demilitarized Zones. The effects of the Korean War still have a choke hold on the government and the citizens of South Korea.

During the war, proper protection was never offered to the citizens and all the young men were drafted into the front lines of the War. We see the impacts of this even today, with able bodied South Korean males aged between eighteen and thirty-five being forced to serve term and enlist in the Korean Military. These soldiers undergo military training for two years after

which they can retire from the military and return to their normal lives, or place an application to serve as part of the paramilitary force in South Korea.

Although much can be said about needing the youth of a country to step forward and be the torch bearers of change by submitting to the enlistment laws, it is quite strange, the impact that this law has on their lives. Some men dream of going to the military. But most men simply want to make money, get married and live a peaceful life. The enlistment laws pose a threat to these men as male students are encouraged to take two years off of university to serve in the military, ruining their chances at building a better life at a younger age.

Young women also fail to depend on the man in this instance as they never know if their boyfriends will be able to get financially stable jobs when they return from the military into a world which always seems to move at a rapid pace when it comes to jobs and trends.

South Korea ranks first in fashion, food and even celebrities. This rapid change of trends could be attributed to the fact that although homogenous in society, South Korea has emerged as a trend setter in the new world by influencing heterogeneous societies and capitalizing on South Korea's 'homogenous' aspect as their selling point. But unlike what people think, South Korea did not simply rise to power and influence the minds of the young and the old alike from all over the world because of its brute military strategy. South Korea instead used something called "soft power."

"South Korea's global cultural clout is no longer in question.

This year alone, the world has seen the popular boy band BTS smashing records and snatching awards around the world, the critically

acclaimed movie *Parasite* carving out a space for Korean cinema after becoming the first foreign language film ever to win the top prize at the Oscars, and Korean domination in the production of video games and, increasingly, in the popular esports arena” (Gibson).

South Korean pop culture’s global domination used to include an array of video games, television dramas and pop music but has now diversified into books, movies and even sports. This phenomenon is called the Hallyu wave or the Korean Wave. It is important to note, that being home to popular Kdramas and Kpop bands is not in itself a soft power. Soft power takes the appeal of soft resources like tourist attractions, attractive pop icons like movie stars and Kpop idols and a welcoming environment for study abroad programs—and integrates them to create and establish new long-term changes in how the people think about or interact with the country in question (Gibson).

Although it may seem as though South Korea’s soft power comes from the ‘Kpop idols’, Korean dramas have infinitely more influence when it comes to influencing and changing public opinion. Dramas in general are very influential in both skewing public opinion and reinforcing previous beliefs. Although Korean dramas do not have as many censorship issues as other countries, the Korea Communications Standards Commission issues a censor for anything that might cause excessive shock, anxiety or disgust to viewers. Due to this, large swords in ancient dramas are not blurred but small knives used as weapons are blurred in certain scenes. This is very interesting because as mentioned before, the South Koreans, namely elders, value their traditions excessively.

Historical dramas/ancient dramas are produced to evoke a sense of belongingness, love and respect for South Korean traditions. But the government takes a clever stance. While the censorship boards agree on showcasing old heroes of Korea with broadswords murdering the enemies, they do not allow for small knives to be shown without a blur when someone backstabs someone or does petty theft/crimes. This helps us understand that although the government wants to honour the past, they do not want to inspire crooks in the present to pull the same stunts as the crooks of Ancient Korea.

Through this we can understand that the government treads a narrow line between inspiring people with stories while safeguarding culture and breeding honesty and integrity within citizens by not encouraging petty theft and betrayal.

Funnily enough, censorship was not a huge issue back in the day. The first Kdrama that was released in a televised form was *Death Row Prisoner* by Choi Chang Bong in 1956, three years after South Korea's supposed independence. The drama dealt with isolation and loneliness. As it had just been three years since the war, it is expected that isolation, abuse and loneliness would be the prime aspects of one's life. This begs the question, is that why Korean Dramas were made? Most definitely so. Korean Dramas came into being as a sort of acknowledgement and source of education and acceptance. News articles simply relay facts without the addition of an aesthetic element or satisfaction. But dramas touch the hearts of the people and help them become part of a community where they can be heard and seen.

Korean dramas portray many different genres. All of these Kdramas serve to create a tight knit community with their own values and traditions.

Children to this day bow to their elders and have immense respect for their fathers. The way people live is a result of their 'ideal selves' as portrayed by the Kdramas. Although there are many Kdramas that talk about heavy topics like violence, harassment and death, most Kdramas published in the 2010's were soap dramas for the 'housewives' and were broadcasted during the afternoons when the housewife was mostly likely to watch it. Family dramas were broadcasted at night so that the whole family could come together and bond, creating a happy society willing to put in the work to maintain their family with adequate finances.

“K-dramas have a multitude of different genres such as action dramas, historical dramas, school dramas, medical dramas, legal dramas, or even horror comedies. While most dramas carry romantic elements and deep emotional themes, some even carry a tragedy and slice of life theme. there are various styles and tones” (Casus, Sara).

The main themes of Korean televised dramas are friendship, family values and love and blending traditional values of Confucianism with Western materialism and individualism (Kim,Kyong-tae).

Although there was always horror and gore portrayed in Korean Dramas, the recent dramas between 2014 and 2022 have increasingly been addressing issues of social turmoil in Korea. More so than before. It seems that the citizens have finally had enough with the government refusing to speak up and address the issues. People have taken to resorting to television to broadcast their troubles. But with news channels unable to broadcast the social issues without strict censorship, Kdramas can mask the harsh words of reality under an excitable plot by using the power of script writing and production.

That is when Kdramas come into clutch and exercise their liberty to play around with certain topics sans censorship.

South Korea is a country with the highest suicide rate, namely students with school and college pressures amounting to most of the cases. Yet the government does not seem to be doing anything to help reduce the number of suicide victims. Be it by changing the education system, offering more job opportunities or spreading awareness through the help of awareness rallies and the like. It is almost as if the government seems unbothered that half the population is dying. Suicide is used by people as their last resort when things go unbearably wrong in their lives. It is seen as a tool to escape and seek respite from the piercing eyes of the society. This is not limited to poor people per say. Many young and rich Kpop idols have resorted to committing suicide because of the innumerable death threats issued by the society. While people may not understand the effect their words may have on people, it is necessary to inform the public that words indeed do hurt and cause leads to effect. The innumerable death threats and scrutiny from the public eye, push people to commit acts that cannot be taken back. This is where Korean Dramas come in. By highlighting these issues and talking about them while at the same time also providing aesthetic satisfaction to the viewer, Kdramas do something other forms of media cannot.

“It is an emerging trend amongst Korean dramas to showcase ongoing societal issues of Korean society such as stigma of mental illness, gender inequality, suicide, classism, bullying, spy cameras, corruption, homophobia or racism”(Ong, Jasmine).

The Kdrama *Tomorrow* helps to identify the reasons as to why people commit suicide and why it is the wrong choice to make, namely because the people who commit suicide are pushed to do so because the society and the government do not treat them with respect and act as if their life has no value. *Tomorrow* does not constantly shift the blame around as to who was in the right and who was in the wrong with regards to the bully and the victim, but instead shows us a holistic point of view. Where the audience themselves automatically understand the reason why someone resorts to suicide even if they are opposed to the idea themselves. In this society, understanding the other is of utmost importance and *Tomorrow* helps the viewers do just that.

Chapter 2: An introduction to Cultural Studies Theory and the Social and Cultural Scenario of South Korea

According to one of the earliest cultural theorists, Edward Tylor, culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871). It is essentially a way of life. According to the Korean-American cultural theorist Paul K. Ryu, in his *Philosophy of Criminal Law*, "In contrast, subculture is understood as a culture possessed by a class that opposes the mainstream class. Here, mainstream culture is sometimes used in the sense of a culture that is superior to subculture, but more often both are understood as cultures with different areas of application or value orientation" (235)

South Korea is largely homogeneous in nature and hence does not have the issue of having multiple subcultures within its national bounds. A culture facilitates a sort of mob mentality reaction to certain problems that exist in the society. And although culture seeks to protect and preserve a people, it often fails to see the small picture and just how affected individuals can be because of the "norms" put forth by societies on how to behave and act towards certain people.

Culture and social structure are often thought of as one but in reality, they differ quite a lot. Culture is what people believe, while social structure is what members of a social system collectively do. While the social structure does motivate people to act, the voices of the outcasts in society are never heard, resulting in their urge to commit suicide.

“Culture theory is the branch of comparative anthropology and semiotics that seeks to define the heuristic concept of culture in operational and/or scientific terms.” (Serrat)

South Korean culture has been propagated largely through a phenomenon called the “K Wave” or “Hallyu Wave”. South Korean culture has been propagated largely through “K Wave” or “Hallyu Wave”. The ‘K Wave’ or Korean Wave is defined as the rise in global popularity of South Korean culture since the 1990s. Kdramas and Kpop acted as catalysts for its spread across different countries. The K Wave has since evolved from being a regional development in Asia into a global phenomena with the advent of social media and advanced technology.

Although the K-Wave essentially began in the 1990’s with the Korean Drama ‘*My Sassy Girl*’ making an international breakthrough and bands like Shinhwa and Baby V.OX. topping Chinese music charts, the real breakthrough happened in 2010 when Kpop became more popular than ever with South Korean companies pushing out more and more Kpop idols with stunning visuals, dancing abilities and vocal prowess combined into one supergroup, something other nations had not achieved to that level of perfection before (Hampp, Andrew).

This sudden upsurge of Korean content being broadcasted in 2010 is akin to the first ever K-Wave, also known as Hallyu Wave 1.0. The second K-wave, also known as Hallyu Wave 2.0 took place around 2007 where Korea used advanced technology to further the impact of Kpop in the International Market.

“Hallyu 2.0 is larger in scope than the first Korean wave, and is also differentiated by the increased role and popularity of Korean pop music and other Korean exports like video games and animation. This in contrast to the importance of the Korean television drama during the first wave that was more geographically focused in East Asia. However, at the center of Hallyu 2.0 are the Social Networking Sites (SNS) and User-generated content (UGC) sites such as YouTube that enable fans across the world to interact with South Korean pop culture. Overall, Hallyu 2.0 refers to different means (technology) to reach far beyond the Korean Peninsula and the continent of Asia” (Jin, Young).

Kpop dance competitions and the advent of free music platforms like Spotify helped further the second K-Wave, Hallyu 2.0. With respect to government policies, the government stressed the importance of integrating culture and economy. YouTube itself has also played a huge role in the international propagation of Korean culture. YouTube has single handedly “enabled fans to connect with K-pop through their own content such as dance covers and reaction videos/channels” (Oh, C).

YouTube channels that create content that include K-pop skits and reactions amass massive numbers of subscribers without having to spend the money to formally produce original content by actually going to Korea and taking new shots.

“Hallyu 3.0 refers to the ‘third generation’ of the Korean Wave beginning in the mid-2010s” (Song, Sooho). Hallyu 3.0 was a key indicator of just how much South Korea grew since the start of Hallyu 1.0. With the boy band BTS winning awards from American Music Award shows and breaking

Justin Bieber's long running streak of 'Top Social Artist,' a record that was yet to be broken for six years. This 'third generation' also gave rise to the Mukbang trend that led to South Korean food becoming more popular than before.

K-beauty, although successful before, reached new heights with export rates shooting through the roofs. This was largely due to the promotion of these products by K-pop Idols and K-beauty influencers. The makeup artists of K-pop idols were also in high demand, with foreigners coming to South Korea solely to get their makeup done by them. Netflix, also started investing in South Korea by increasing the studio space present in the country and facilitated in the productions of shows that highlight Korean culture and comedy.

The project seeks to focus on the Cultural theories of two cultural theorists, Stuart Hall and Paul K.Ryu. Stuart Hall is a Jamaican-British Sociologist. In essence, he is a Marxist Sociologist and cultural theorist.

Hall was a founder of the influential *New Left Review* in the 1950s. He joined the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University in 1964 at Hoggart's invitation. He took over as acting director of the CCCS in 1968 and remained there till 1979. Hall is credited with playing a role in expanding the scope of cultural studies to engage with race and gender and with helping to incorporate new ideas derived from the work of French theorists such as Michel Foucault (Schulman, Norman).

Hall theorizes that both South Korea and the U.K witnessed a sort of Neo-liberal reconstruction due to the varying political structures present in the nations. Both the conservative ideologies and the progressive ideologies lead

to the manipulation of the ordinary people's minds. The neo-liberal disciplinary power dismembered society and fragmented people into isolated customers.

Korea achieved rapid industrialization through 'onrush modernization', seeing only growth and blind to social costs. This quick and large-scale industrialization and modernization results in a generation gap between the children and the adults. Although the adults follow the ancient customs, the children are more open to change. But the large scale gap that exists between the power of the Korean youth and the Korean adults in society, the former being weaker, results in traditions being enforced into the society, causing the outcasts in society to deal with the issues that come with the banner "traditional norms". Therefore, exponential changes in the way of thinking have not come about due to the presence of a homogenous society and standoffish nature towards outsiders.

To analyze South Korean culture through the South Korean lens of objectivity, the second theorist is used. The project uses Korean-American cultural theorist Paul K. Ryu's approach towards Cultural Theory. "Paul K. Ryu (also known as Ryu Kichyun and Ki-ch'ŏn Yu) is a South Korean-American legal scholar. Ryu served as the ninth president of Seoul National University and the sixth dean of Seoul National University School of Law" (University, Seoul National).

Paul K. Ryu is author to many major publications, but for the purpose of this study, two of his publications are used, one of which is "Field Theory" in the *Study of Cultures: Its Application to Korean Culture* published in the journal *Philosophy of East and West*, Vol.9. Pg 81-83 and the other being

Ryu's *Philosophy of Criminal Law* published in the year 2019 by the Korean Journal of Law & Society. In his publishings, Ryu makes it known that he seeks to “interpret traditional Korean culture in terms of the causes which generated it and the casual consequences it produced, as specifically operative in the field of law” (81).

Ryu’s studies on law ties into this study about Korean culture and its extensive focus on suicide in Korea. What one fails to see is just how intrinsically culture and the law are connected. Laws are made in accordance with the culture of the people they serve. This is especially the case with respect to suicide. Suicide laws in Korea are not as stringent as other countries. Although suicide is used as a means of combatting social injustices in Korea, the law seems to turn a blind eye to its existence, resulting in the decrease of suicide prevention centres or therapy for the ones affected.

In fact, mental health is seen to be taboo in South Korea with a majority of the general doctors unaware of its existence. Therapy, much less a diagnosis itself, is expensive to the point of the middle-class society being unable to access it. The law fails to see that suicide is seen as a recluse against surviving and getting justice for the wrongs that were committed against one’s person. The expensive court fees and the manipulation of the courts with respect to the high society always winning cases and allegations against them does not help either.

Being a legal scholar, Ryu is extremely aware of the different social injustices in Korea and how the law uses its power to evade certain sentences. In “*Field Theory*” in *the Study of Cultures: Its Application to Korean Culture*, Ryu says that in law, one is not concerned with meaning. According to Ryu,

in *“Field Theory” in the Study of Cultures: Its Application to Korean Culture*, “Identical meaning may operate differently in different environments and disparate meanings may reach a substantially identical result” (82). Ryu believes “field” to be a means of reference for a study of the meaning of a culture. Field means “a given space in a given unit of time” (82).

“The dynamic phase of human values can be understood only by the use of such a method. Japanese Shintoism had its roots in Shamanism, which also served as a basis of Korean Culture” (82). Ryu explains that with the help of the field theory, one can identify how the same core can be interpreted in different ways in different societies. He uses the example of Shintoism which was prevalent in both Japan and Korea. Although both countries gave importance to Shintoism, Korea gave extreme importance to shamanism. Shamanism is not a dead tradition of the old. It is prevalent in Korea to this date, although it has lost its ‘absolute truth’ factor. We can see just how important shamanism was in Korea with the help of its portrayal in period K-dramas and historical K-dramas and how big of a say the shamans had in the lives of the Korean people. If a shaman deemed someone dead, they would be killed and if a shaman deemed a disease incurable, the cure was not to be searched for and a person’s fate was simply sealed for life.

Shamanism was held in high accord even in the times of the Japanese and Korean War. Comfort women, who were the Korean women, captured by the Japanese soldiers every time they destroyed a city and used as sex objects were shunned by the Shamans. The Shamans called them cursed and encouraged the society to boycott the women as well. This resulted in large rates of depression in comfort women who managed to escape from the

Japanese camps and come back to their homes in Korea. This norm of vilifying comfort women and deeming them unworthy of love and compassion lead to many of the women committing suicide. Ryu encourages lawmakers to be efficient in law making by thoroughly analyzing cultures and their political and social contexts when making laws. Almost as if in response to Ryu's bold statements, Korean Dramas themselves have begun to evolve over time. Kdramas appeal to the general public due their fast-paced plots and concise episodes. They are a medium of social change and can hence lead to a cultural shift. Although we do get the occasional Kdrama full of Korean stereotypes of women not being able to work, cultural appropriation and the seemingly "harmless" blackface, nowadays Kdramas seem to focus on progress and try to inculcate western ideas of feminism and liberalism into their plots in a positive light.

South Korea may seem like a diamond in the rough to many people. A heavenly and untainted place. Tourism has seen a steady increase from 2013 due to South Korea's application of the "Soft Power" strategy. International students flock to South Korea to study and tourists from all over the world visit South Korea to experience the culture and the food. But upon seeing the lamentable reality of how the society actually functions, they return back disillusioned. Behind South Korea's Kdramas with flowery language and themes that promote homosexuality, feminism, and freedom of expression, lies the web of societal stigmatization. And the key culprit of all these issues is 'South Korean Cultural Bias.'

Although the Kdramas are becoming slightly more open to the Western theories of Liberalism, the South Korean society does not mirror the situations

in the dramas. In reality, it is the exact opposite. To this day, homosexual people are shunned by society and must keep their sexuality in the closet.

“While male and female same-sex sexual activity is legal in South Korea, marriage or other forms of legal partnership are not available to same-sex partners” (Rich, Eliassen).

“South Korea also does not provide any anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, nor does it prohibit hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Homosexuality remains quite taboo in South Korean society. Homosexuality is not specifically mentioned in either the South Korean Constitution or in the Civil Penal Code, although article 3 of the *National Human Rights Commission Of Korea Act* includes sexual orientation as one of the protected classes” (Mitsanas, Michael).

Although it appears as though the women in the Kdramas always come up on top and are treated like “queens” by their boyfriends and well respected in their workplace, it is disingenuous to Korean society. While South Korea deems it safe for women to go to clubs late at night and walk around alone, the consensus of women being assaulted and raped on their way to the club or even inside the club is in blaringly high numbers. These women do not even get required legal support as the society tends to blame it on the woman more times than not.

Workplace violence towards women is another serious issue that is often trivialized. Unlike the Kdramas, women are not respected in the workplace. Most South Korean workplaces are littered with sexist bosses.

Women get harassed, threatened and blackmailed by male co-workers in their workplace.

Bullying is a whole other ball game. One thing that can be mentioned is the fact that Kdramas do a relatively good job at portraying bullying. Bullying is one of the most pressing issues in South Korea. Kdramas show children being beaten up, being forced to drink alcohol, having their clothes stolen during P.E while in schools, getting toilet water poured on them and manipulating them into having sex. What is shocking is that South Korean locals have admitted that all the aforementioned bullying instances do not hold a candle to how bad bullying is in South Korea. They say it is worse. Much worse.

Domestic abuse is another issue that must be highlighted. The rates of domestic abuse in Korea are rising by the second. The availability of Alcohol and the widespread acceptance of men abusing wives after drinking is the root of this problem. And yet no one seems to be pushing against the grain and strengthening the laws pertaining to domestic abuse. The abused simply suck it up and accept their fate as the law refuses to grant them adequate protection.

With all of these social issues highly prevalent in society and nothing being done by the law to combat this, people have taken to the streets with nationwide protests in support of feminism and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. But the lamentable part of all this is South Korea's censorship and defamation laws. If someone speaks out against social issues regarding workplace harassment, abusive bosses and sexual assault, the victims are forced to either accept it as something that is common and hence does not need to be talked about or they are shut up by the aggressors with the help of

the laws claiming it as “defamation.” Sadly, South Korean laws allow for manipulations like these for the higher class citizens, the “chaebols” and mostly every man claiming to have been accused of sexual harassment.

Chapter 3: How the Kdrama *Tomorrow* Portrays the Pressing Social and Cultural Issues

Tomorrow (Korean: 내일; Hanja: 來日; RR: *Naeil*) is a South Korean television series directed by Kim Tae-yoon and Sung Chi-wook, starring Kim Hee-sun, Rowoon, Lee Soo-hyuk, and Yoon Ji-on. Based on Naver webtoon which was published in 2017, the series is about the lives of the Grim Reapers and the work they do. It was also made available for streaming on Netflix (Netflix).

The story presents two sets of narratives. Where one of the Grim Reapers makes it her life's duty to save people from death that comes about as a result of committing suicide while the other Grim Reaper shuns the people who commit suicide and escorts them to the deepest levels of hell. This is almost a tell on the two factions in society and how they respond to the topic of suicide. Where one end of the society tries to help while the other end tries to shun. But the real problem occurs when the bodies of power in society, side with the aggressors who shun the suicide victims, causing even more people to go down that path.

The Kdrama *Tomorrow* has revolutionized the way dramas deal with topics like suicide. Suicide in most Kdramas is portrayed as positive thing to do, a negative thing to do or simply presented as an account of what the people who want to commit suicide experience. *Tomorrow* has surprisingly taken a different stance. It shows three people who try their level best to stop people from committing suicide, it shows us the struggles that people who want to commit suicide go through, and it spreads awareness on the social issues that

prompt these individuals into killing themselves, all the while not trivializing the issue of suicide, helping the victims feel seen and comforting them at the same time.

The title “*Tomorrow*” itself is a metaphor for life. The fact that there will always be a tomorrow where things can change. A tomorrow where things will get better. A tomorrow where you will receive support. Viewers leave the drama with a sense of reassurance that everyone has their struggles and that tomorrow will be a new day.

Tomorrow begins its first episode by introducing the main characters Gu Ryeon, Ryong Koo and Jun Woong. Gu Ryeon is the team leader of the ‘Risk Management Team’ of ‘Jumadeung’, the Underworld that functions in a corporate company format, where the Grim Reapers work under the leadership of the ‘Jade Emperor’ to collect souls that depart from Earth. The Risk Management Team is a special team that is created by the ‘Jade Emperor’ in order to save the lives of the people committing suicide as there no space in Jumadeung to accommodate for deaths that are not a result of a pre-ordained fate planned by God. In the first episode, the audience watches as the main character Jun Woong, a common man tries repeatedly to land a job for the sake of his family but fails due to nepotism, ruling out his chances of a good life even with his stellar qualifications. Although Jun Woong loses out on a job, the Kdrama portrays it in a funny light by adding comedic elements to his ‘rejection from the company’ arc. But upon closer inspection, it is common in Korea for perfectly qualified youth to lose out on jobs due to nepotism and spiral into depression due to society placing a huge burden on the man to achieve for his family.

As Jun Woong walks back home dejected, he sees a man trying to jump off a bridge due to not being able to sustain himself, but the humanist in him rushes to stop the old man from forfeiting his life. This is the moment Gu Ryeon and Ryong Koo arrive on scene kicking Jun Woong away from the man. Gu Ryeon then proceeds to tell the man that nothing will change when he dies. And tells him that he will be even more miserable than he is now. To which Jun Woong yells at Gu Ryeon, questioning her sense of justice and morals. This scene captures the emotions of the society itself, where justice systems and awareness organizations resort to two types of therapy. One where they motivate the victim to live and another where they motivate the victim to die. The old man refuses to listen to either of them and jumps nevertheless, but is shielded from the fall by Jun Woong who jumps with him to protect him. This ends up throwing Jun Woong into a Coma. But ultimately, both lives are saved. This is where the Kdrama kicks off, with Gu Ryeon visiting a half-spirit, half-human Jun Woong in his hospital room, explaining that she's a Grim Reaper who saves lives. Jun Woong is unable to trust her at first but understands that her treatment of the old man was just her tactic of how to best deal with him. After understanding that she would have saved the man even if he did not interfere, Jun Woong gains trust in Gu Ryeon. Which is when she asks him to follow her to Jumadeung.

It is here that Jun Woong meets the Jade Emperor, the Director of Jumadeung who hands him an ultimatum. He can either work for Jumadeung and wake up from the Coma in six months or refuse to work for Jumadeung and wake up after three years. Jun Woong initially refuses to work for Jumadeung but when the Jade Emperor shows him the truth of what is

happening in his hospital room, he is shaken. He sees his mother crying over his comatose body begging him to wake up and even fainting from the exhaustion of overworking herself for the sake of her family. Jun Woong reluctantly agrees to work for Jumadeung but gets thrown into the severely understaffed Risk Management Team with Gu Ryeon and Ryong Koo.

As the drama progresses, the audience gets a glimpse into the workings of Jumadeung with the help of Jun Woong as a medium of introduction. The drama puts focus on Jun Woong's positive and idealistic side when helping suicide victims and contrasts it with Gu Ryeon's matter of fact way of dealing with the victims. Although she adapts her approaches as the cases change, through the completion of the Kdrama, the audience realize that Gu Ryeon was indeed the one that cared the most.

From the very first episode, *Tomorrow* addresses the highly problematic issue of 'bullying' in South Korea. School bullying in South Korea is unlike any and is one of the leading causes of suicide in the nation. School bullying in South Korea does not mean stealing lunch money or teasing children in class. Bullies go so far as to expose nude pictures of fellow students as revenge for simply existing. Bullies throw food wastes onto students, stab children with pens, throw juices and milk over the students' clothes, burn their skin and arms with hot hair straighteners, force feed them toxic substances and even peer pressure children into non-consensual sex. School bullying is downright human abuse but goes unnoticed as both teachers and onlooking students refuse to step up and defend the students.

Episode 1 and 2 of *Tomorrow* titled Fallen Flower 1 and Fallen Flower 2 respectively focuses on the long-term effects of bullying in children.

The episodes focus on a character named Noh Eun-Bi who works as a TV writer. With the help of an app developed by Jumadeung, Gu Ryeon is able to see the percentage of how likely it is for a person to commit suicide. And Noh Eun-Bi stands at a stark 80 percent negative energy. As Gu Ryeon, Ryong Koo and Jun Woong visit Eun-Bi's TV Studio to check up on her, they are shocked by how 'at ease' she looks. She smiles and does not seem to be suffering at all unlike what the app suggests. This proves that although people may seem to be fine on the exterior, their thoughts may beg to differ.

While at the TV Studio, Jun Woong and Ryong Koo converse about a popular webcomic that showcases the revenge story of a victim of bullying called 'Boksun' written by Kim Hye-won. This is when the scene cuts to Eun-bi reading the same webcomic with an anguished look on her face. As the episode progresses, Eun-Bi is asked to conduct an interview with the ever-popular webcomic writer of Boksun, Kim Hye-Won. During the interview, Hye-Won refers to herself by the titles her fans give her, "a protector of school bullying victims". But upon seeing Eun-Bi grow increasingly uncomfortable, Gu Ryeon decides to use a Jumadeung artifact and enter Enter Eun-Bi's memories to find out what the problem is. This is where the audience peeks into Eun-Bi's school life. Kim Hye-Won, the author of the webcomic Boksun is in fact, Eun-Bi's highschool bully. During her school years, Eub-Bi was repeatedly taken to the back area of the school and kicked around by Hye-Won and her friends. They empty her bag, kick at her face, pour drinks on her and alienate her from the rest of the class. But the most terrifying thing about the whole ordeal is how Hye-Won forces Eun-Bi into laughing every time she hears the clicking sound from a clicker pen. Hye-Won harasses Eun-bi and her

friend with threats of physical punishment if Eun-Bi refuses to laugh after hearing the sound. In the episode, there exists a scene where the class teacher yells at Eun-Bi but instead of seeming remorseful, she bursts out laughing as Hye-Won starts clicking her pen to purposefully subjugate her to the wrath of the teacher. When Hye-Won pours milk all over Eun-Bi's head, she is forced to laugh like a lunatic as soon as Hye-Won clicks her pen, causing the whole class to think of Eun-Bi as mentally unstable.

All these experiences lead to Eun-Bi having no friends and being forever terrified of the clicking sound of pens. When Gu Ryeon and Jun Woong come back to the real world, they understand why Eun-Bi is frustrated with Hye-Won getting fame for an anti-bullying book when she herself is a bully. Before the audience has time to imagine Hye-Won turning over a new leaf and regretting her actions towards Eun-Bi, the scene cuts to Hye-Won recognizing Eun-Bi's true identity and clicking her pen during the interview to bring back Eun-Bi's traumatic memories and 'have a little fun'. But is stopped by Jun Woong as he snatches the pen away from her.

Eun-Bi finally gets the courage to report Hye-Won's action to her boss, but is immediately shut down by him. He belittles Eun-Bi telling her that kids bully each other all the time and she should take it in good fun and leave the past in the past. While she breaks down, Hye-Won spots Eun-Bi exposing her misdeeds to the boss and rages at her. Hye-Won belittles Eun-Bi by recounting what happened back in school when she tried telling the teachers that Hye-Won had bullied her. Eun-Bi is then reminded of her past where the teachers asked Eun-Bi if she herself was the reason why she was getting bullied and blamed her for her weak 'victim mentality'. Hye-Won tells Eun-Bi that no

matter where she goes, she will not be able to escape her past, because be it at school or at work, no one will side with losers like her.

Losing her last shred of hope, Eun-Bi decides to die. But as she reaches the rooftop, she is stopped and confronted by Gu Ryeon. Gu Ryeon asks her if she has ever thought of overcoming it. And tells her she is bullied because she is weak and never fights back, because she's an easy target. Eun-Bi finally snaps and starts crying. She tells Gu Ryeon that she tried her best to overcome her past. A past where even smiling was traumatic. She says she tried her best to smile. This is a reference to where she was practicing smiling in front of the mirror in the restroom in the beginning of episode 1. She breaks down in front of Gu Ryeon and confesses that she craves to live and that she does not want to die. Gu Ryeon then tells Eun-Bi that all the harsh words that she uttered towards her were the exact words that she told herself back in school. As Eun-Bi remembers her pride at entering the TV Studio, getting featured on TV as a writer and being accepted into her new friend group, she is grateful for the progress she has made, Gu Ryeon then asks her why she must suffer when it is the bullies that must suffer instead. She tells Eun-Bi that there is no salvation unless she saves herself. Jun Woong then swoops in and hugs her, thanking her for hanging in there for as long as she could. The episode ends with Hye-Won getting exposed for her crimes on national television. The catch is that Noh Eun-Bi is the one who contacts the news channels offering them an interview with herself, the real victim.

From this episode, it is evident that all the victim needed was someone to support her, believe in her and give her the courage to respect and trust herself. Kdramas like *Tomorrow* are crucial in helping people feel seen and

acknowledged. *Tomorrow* does not glorify the bully or the victim, but instead shows the victims that they should respect themselves and that they are worth it.

For the purpose of confirming fact from the fictionalized version of *Tomorrow*, a personal interview was conducted with Choi Sooyeong, a twenty-year-old native of South Korea. She confirmed that the Kdrama accurately depicted the bullying that takes place in scholarly institutions. She says, “Bullying is there in every school and it is a big problem. If I have to talk about a social issue that is highlighted in schools, it is the loss of respect for teachers from the point of view of students. Students tend to see their teachers as people who are just hired to get salaries from taxes paid by their parents. I feel ashamed to say it, but it is a huge problem.” When asked to give more context to the ‘loss of respect’ aspect with regards to bullying, Sooyeong says “The law says any student can report to the police with just one call and they threaten the teachers with it.” Sooyeong explains that if a teacher tries to reprimand a student for bad behaviour, the student threatens the teacher by saying “I feel like you hurt my feelings, should I report you?” This leads to the teachers ignoring the bullying in schools as they would rather not get involved with the childrens’ matters. And the students in turn ignore the teachers more. Sooyeong says that she herself has friends who have been victims of school bullying who end up choosing to bunk classes in order to escape the bullying. The teachers never ask her friends the question of why when they bunk. This most likely alludes to the fact that they know the child is getting bullied.

Sooyeong confirms that the teachers having no authority is one of the major reasons for a spike in bullying cases in Korea. Although victims should

receive support, the root of the problem must be snipped before providing the said ‘support’. The laws must change and the teachers must receive their rightful share of authority.

Every culture exists on a value system that is passed on from generation to generation. But by undermining the authority of the adults and giving children who are yet to mature, too many rights results in a crack in the cultural space and creates huge instability. It results in a loss of value for human rights and a change in morality. This authority given to the children results in the teachers and children having no value for human life as suicides due to bullying are swept under the rug and treated as if it is normal. The result of no law and order is the loss of empathy, love and respect. Due to this newfound distribution of authority, the fundamental values that hold society together, become non-existent.

Similar to bullying, sexual assault is a huge issue in South Korea. While most citizens, and the government themselves deem South Korea to be a safe space for women, reality begs to differ. South Korea is known for its nightlife and the subsequent safety it provides. It is said that women are free to go outside and enjoy themselves late into the night without anything ever happening to them as South Korea’s police force patrol the streets throughout the night, ensuring that no calamity takes place. But upon further research and interviews with foreign tourists, reality is a bit more skewed. The interviewees repeatedly said that South Korea was indeed not a safe space for women. There have been many cases of harassment and sexual assault that have been swept under the rug by both policemen and the harassers in the name of “being drunk”. While the society preaches for its women to relax and enjoy the night

at the many clubs and the night markets, the women who try to partake in these activities get coerced into non-consensual sex and get manipulated into believing that it is their fault.

Tomorrow brings awareness to this topic in episode 10: Breath. This episode follows the story of Cha Yun-Hui and her brother. Yun-Hui is brutally assaulted on the streets at night while she returns from clubbing. She is kicked and dragged around, but when news gets out, the assailant is given a trivial sentence of just two years in jail and a suspended sentence in the first trial. Cha Yun-Hui's brother Cha Yun-Jae is seen doing a one man protest on the streets with a sign board that says 'Revise sentencing guidelines for sexual assault offenders.' While her brother tries his level best to be noticed and press for another trial, Yun-Hui is utterly distraught by the affair. She constantly blames herself telling her brother that she herself is at fault for the sexual assault taking place. The Yun-Hui who loved to dress up, now wears oversized men's clothing in order to not attract male attention. Cha YunJae blames himself for the assault taking place as he believes that the assault only took place because he refused to walk his sister back home from her clubbing night.

Throughout the episode, the audience is made aware of the repeated precautions that Yun-Hui takes in order to ensure her safety. This is mentioned as a jab at the society that usually places all the blame on the women. Yun-Hi dressed in a way that fully covered her body and mostly travelled with a group of girls. On her way back home, she approached her brother to escort her back home, but upon his refusal, decided to go back home herself, which was when the assault happened. The episode tackles many of the problems women are

faced with dealing with assault. Yun-Hui's brother initially blames her for being assaulted, asking her why she had to stay outside late at night. He later regrets what he says but still does not understand his sister's emotions. He tries to publicize the issue when all his sister wants is for it to be swept under the rug as she does not want the society to know about her. Especially when the assailant only gets a measly two years in jail. Yun-Hui is also faced with symptoms of PTSD, repeatedly screaming when her brother holds her hands. Men send her into a screaming frenzy because it reminds her of her assailant.

Even during her trial, the opposing attorney repeatedly shames her for allowing the assailant to drag her away into a remote corner. He asks her why she did not move away when she realized it was not her brother who had his hands over her shoulders but a just random man. The attorney also asks her why she did not 'actively' resist. To which she has nothing to say. Women tend to freeze when faced with sexual assault, it is one of the body's coping mechanisms. But many people are unaware of this and tend to blame it on the woman for not 'escaping.' The attorney goes so far as to say, "if you really disliked it, wouldn't you have resisted?". This implies that she 'liked' being assaulted. Throughout the trial, the attorney screams at her and forces her to answer him, the same way the assailant treated her that night, causing her to break down in tears, ending in the trial favouring the assailant. The reason for the assailant's reduced sentence is because he is a young man with a bright future in the medical field.

While the assailant whiles away his time with volunteer work, Yun-Hui must suffer the mental trauma of being assaulted. Towards the end of the episode, Gu Ryeon solves the issue by making Yun-hui understand that it is

not her fault but the assailant's. Gu Ryeon acts as a stand-in Attorney for Yun-Hui during her second trial and wins Yun-Hui the support of the public and gets the assailant a life sentence in jail.

Among the many themes that *Tomorrow* tackles, the episode with the comfort women hits harder with the viewers as South Korea has a troubling past and present with respect to women. Episode number 14 talks about the story of two best friends, one living with the regret of accidentally selling off her friend to become a comfort woman, and the other best friend who suffers through the trials and tribulations of being a comfort woman during the war. Comfort women were the South Korean women who were kidnapped by the Japanese soldiers during the War and were reduced to sex toys. The episode focuses on a ninety-one-year-old lady named Yoo Bok-Hui who finds out that her best friend, Yun-i was a comfort woman, when she stumbles upon a picture of her friend that her grandson acquires while studying the Japanese Colonial period in university. A regretful Bok-Hui recounts her mistakes to Gu Ryeon.

Upon seeing Yun-i's father falling further and further into poverty due to being unable to work because of his sickness, Bok-Hui decides to find a job for Yun-i so that she, too, can provide for her family. But what seemed like a good job in a Japanese factory, turned out to be a scheme by the Japanese to kidnap Korean women and force them to become sex slaves for the pleasure of the Japanese soldiers. *Tomorrow* recounts the brutalities of war by showing the audience the struggles a young Yun-i goes through. She repeatedly gets beaten and sexually assaulted by the soldiers. She even risks her life, unlike

the other girls, to protect and help the sick girls knowing she would get beaten by the Japanese soldiers for doing so.

The mental and physical toll the assaults took on the girls are shown in gruelling scenes with the comfort women dreaming about being assaulted while asleep. Although the comfort women go through constant stress and pain, Yun-i is seen as a beacon of hope by the other girls for her cheerful personality. She repeatedly advises the girls to hope for a rescue. She says that spring will definitely come after winter. Even after a soldier breaks her hand, she is seen singing and taking care of the other girls with a broken arm. She helped the girls dream of “a tomorrow that was different from today.” Although Yun-I was branded and assaulted with hot iron, she still held on. In the end, when she finds out that the Japanese are planning on disposing of the women after destroying the evidence, she creates a plan that helps them escape. And they do, but at the cost of Yun-i choosing to sacrifice herself for the safe escape of the rest of the girls.

The next scene is of the girls that have returned to Korean territory, yearning for their families, only to find out that they have died after receiving news of what happened to their daughters. The rest of the villagers constantly shunned the comfort women for returning to Korea after what had been done to them. The women are questioned with ‘do you not have any shame?’ and the like. The Distraught comfort women then chose to either hide away from society forever or commit suicide to rid them of the haunting glances of the villagers. The trials of being a comfort woman are not easy. After being assaulted physically by the Japanese soldiers, upon return to their villages, they are assaulted mentally. It shows the audience, the companionship that

women have and the ability of the human mind to push through and survive as much as it can.

In the second round of personal interviews with Choi Sooyeong, when asked about comfort women, she said “I know the comfort women who are still alive are not living a happy life. The government is providing some money on a monthly basis, but it is not at all enough considering the prices in Korea” Sooyeong confirms that although there are organizations and brands that help them, the common folk are not interested in helping the comfort women that are alive. Sooyeong says “People are not so concerned about them. They are furious about what Japan did, but that does not bother their actual lives. So, when they see documentaries or movies about them, they do get angry, but very few people among them come up to actually help the survivors” (Interview).

Although the adults do not step up to enthusiastically help the comfort women, the youth are interested in political topics. Many companies have come forward to make bracelets and phone cases, wherein a percentage of the profits will go towards charities that help comfort women and the like. Although Korea seems to stagnate with respect to adults, the youth are taking great strides to right the wrongs of the past.

This episode talks about the struggles of being a woman in Korea and how women have always had it hard, be it in the past or in the present. With the onset of Feminism, South Korea is slowly but surely changing. But what is lamentable is the fact that feminism is only a hot topic within the youth. The adults refuse to acknowledge its very existence. Being a feminist is seen as a revolting thing in South Korea. Many Kpop idols have been shunned publicly

for being seen reading a book with the themes of feminism. And even wearing shirts with 'girl power' and owning phone cases with feminist slogans are prone to scrutiny. Many Kpop idols have been bullied on the internet for supporting feminism and has even led some idols to committing suicide due to the overbearing scrutiny.

Women in work spaces are forced to wear makeup and heels as company 'work attire' while men lounge around in their trousers. Sexism in the workplace is not a small issue either as women constantly get degraded by the male staff simply for being a 'woman'. With respect to women in work spaces, episode 7 of *Tomorrow* brings into light the complicated nature of women in the workplace. Although the episode largely focuses on Shin Ye-Na and her toxic boss, Gu Ryeon and her grim reaper team spend most of their time searching for who the suicide victim would likely be. They narrow it down to three women and one man. One woman is a mother and is constantly told by the boss to quit, saying, 'a mother has no place in a company because she can't focus on both her child and her work.' The second woman is deemed as fat by the society and is constantly fat shamed by her boss asking her to slim down for the sake of the company's image. The man who is doubted by the grim reaper team is simply sad that he cannot be a regular employee due to his ever-growing student loans and rent.

Ultimately, the team realizes it is none of these people, but the third woman suspect, Shin Ye-Na. The almost perfect Ye-Na almost slips their radar as being a suicide victim as she seems to be content with her life. She has attained the ideal beauty standard and has a wonderful personality. She also constantly gets promotions in the company. But under all that cheerful

exterior, lay a girl with acute bulimia. Bulimia is an eating disorder where the people affected by it tend to binge eat food and then immediately puke it all out due to their fear of being fat. The seemingly perfect Shin Ye-Na suffered from a terrible condition but the whole company was completely unaware. This shows how good people are at hiding their true fears. The boss does not help as he constantly sexualizes women and even goes so far as to tell women to include the fact that they have a 'hot bod' in their interview applications.

Later in the episode, the audience finds out that the reason Shin Ye-Na is so focused on losing weight even when she is skinny is because she was bullied by her classmates when she was fat. Losing weight was the only thing that bought her recognition and courage. But along with it, came the constant need to look thin and overanalyze everyone's words. South Korean society is known for its unachievable beauty standards. Women are expected to have a flat but built but, a thin hourglass figure, large doe like eyes, double eyelids and a V-shaped jaw. All of these are virtually impossible to be present in every single human being. But perfection does not stop at an ideal, the women of South Korea are expected to fit into these standards, often mutilating themselves by going under the knife for plastic surgeries. Plastic surgeries are not an anomaly in South Korea. Plastic surgery advertisement boards are placed all over the nation and double eyelid surgeries are even presented as graduation gifts for students in highschool by their parents. This constant scrutiny of appearances affects women and even leads to an increased amount of school violence.

Although the major reasons for bullying in South Korea are due to school violence, sexual assault and the ill treatment of both women and men,

certain other problems do contribute to the high social unrest. *Tomorrow* in episode 6 tackles the issue of neglect towards older citizens and War Veterans. Although soldiers give up their lives for the war, they are in return treated as killing machines and neglected by their peers. In the case of War Veterans, they are simply forgotten by society, and as they get older, are reduced to mere trash pickers or cardboard pickers and live off the money they earn from that job. They have no stable source of income and are constantly looking for ways to get over their PTSD. South Koreans and the military service tie into each other in a traumatic way.

As South Korea constantly prepares for an invasion, men are drafted into the military at the beginning of their adult lives to serve the government. Their futures are ruined and pleading for exemptions are all for naught as if not the government, society will shun them for something all men have to go through. They will be called 'lesser men' for not going through the mandatory military service. This puts a lot of pressure on the men to conform to the old school culture of Korea. High school students study for twelve to sixteen hours and later go to academies to prepare for the excruciating exams that South Korea provides. This exam decides their future and hence puts a lot of pressure on the students to do well. Most students who do not do well and get into good universities, are subject to stay in the middle class for their lives, sealing their future away.

With many such cultural issues as mentioned above, it is not hard to see why the suicide rates are so high. As a negative cultural shift occurs in South Korea, Korean dramas like *Tomorrow* help to raise awareness and make it available to a national and international audience to spike responsibility

within its citizens. Laws must be improved, living conditions must excel and support centers must exist for the betterment of life in South Korea. Korean Dramas like *Tomorrow* shine forth as a beacon of hope for the ones affected by the social injustices of South Korea and send a message to the government, asking them to improve.

Conclusion

South Korea is known to be a perfect nation with the popularity it has gained with the help of Kdramas and Kpop. The usage of “soft power” has helped South Korea establish itself as one of the top tourist spots, attracting many foreigners to move from their home countries and settle down in South Korea. But most of the tourists who visit are unaware of the stark differences between the magical world portrayed in the Kdramas and true reality. South Korea has had a tumultuous past racked with mistreatment, experimentation and exploitation.

The Korean war of the 1950’s stamped a mark on Korean tradition and changed the way South Korea functioned forever. The Korean War gave rise to many social issues including constant political unrest even after independence. Able bodied South Korean males aged between eighteen and thirty five are forced to serve term and enlist in the South Korean military to ensure the safety of the nation in the case of an attack by the North. These soldiers are subjected to military training for two years, after which they can retire from the military and return to their normal lives.

But in a country like South Korea, where trends and tastes change faster than the seasons, the men who are discharged from the military are often exposed to a very different world from the one that they left. Young women fail to depend on their boyfriends in this instance as they never know if their partners will be able to get stable jobs when they return to this constantly progressing world. This leads to breakups and consequently depression. Although depression is not the end all be all, South Korea is known to have

the highest suicide rate among all the other countries in the world. By looking deeper into South Korean Society and analyzing it with the help of the culture theory put forward by Paul K Ryu, this project concludes that the reason for South Korea having the highest suicide rate is due to the varying social issues that affect the nation and the society's responses towards the issues. South Korea uses the power of the media, or the aforementioned "soft power" to assert some amount of social control over the citizens.

This was evident even from the initial Kdrama series. The very first Kdrama that was televised was *Death Row Prisoner* by Choi Chang Bong. The drama dealt with isolation and loneliness and was a product of the Korean War that preceded the drama. Korean dramas came into being as a sort of acknowledgement and source of education and acceptance. News articles simply relay facts while dramas touch the hearts of the people and help them become part of a community where they can be heard and seen. The government, with the help of Kdramas, uses the themes presented in the drama to bring comfort to the citizens.

Although Kdramas largely cater to the progression of the pre-existing social norms of South Korea, some of them try different approaches by introducing Western themes of Liberalism and Feminism. But these flowery Kdramas about girl power and the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community are often used as a ploy to garner tourists because the South Korean society does not mirror the situations in the dramas. Homosexuality continues to remain taboo in South Korean society. Although same sex sexual activities are legal, same sex marriage in the form of legal partnership is not permitted by the law. Workplace violence towards women is another serious issue that is often

trivialized. Feminism is not encouraged and results in many celebrities who support the ideals of feminism committing suicide due to widespread hate from the public. Comfort women are also discriminated against by the society due to them being “used” as sexual objects by the Japanese soldiers during the war.

South Korea is also known for its treacherous school violence and its lack of response to bullying allegations. With all these social issues highly prevalent in society, nothing is being done by the law to combat this.

Although many victims try to approach news channels and conduct street protests to make themselves heard, South Korea’s censorship laws give these issues zero traction by simply shutting them down. The relevance of Kdramas play into the fact of the government being very lax with their censorship of Kdramas. While movies may be age restricted, OTT platforms help in the easy watchability of Kdramas and enable dramas that talk about victims and social issues to gain widespread traction.

Kdramas can mask the harsh words of reality under an excitable plot by using the power of script writing and production. With South Korea having an excessively high suicide rate, it is important for both the society and the government to be aware of the various social issues that are contributing to the high rates of depression and suicide. The study uses the Kdrama *Tomorrow* for a deeper understanding of South Korean society with the help of artful directing and insightful information.

The Kdrama *Tomorrow* strictly talks about the pressing issues faced by the South Korean community in the present scenario. As South Korea is known to have the highest suicide rate among all the other countries, it is of

utmost importance for largescale media to tackle topics related to suicide. *Tomorrow* addresses the topic of suicide and delves deep into the lives of the people who seek to attempt it.

Tomorrow as a Kdrama is very relevant in today's society, especially the South Korean society with its taboos and stigmatization against suicide, bullying and various other social norms. *Tomorrow* helps to raise awareness for suicide and victims of harassment. It brings to light a part of suicide that people who do not have suicidal tendencies are unaware of. It shows us that one does not commit suicide because they want to die. But because they have an overwhelming will to live yet see no light at the end of the tunnel. The study concentrates on the major issues faced by the South Korean Society, namely bullying and sexual assault. Bullying, also referred to as 'school violence' is one of the chief contributors to the high suicide rate and depression in children. With the huge disrespect faced by the teachers, it is necessary to forge new laws that place more importance on the synergy between teachers and students rather than prioritizing the rights of students. By placing so much power in the hands of underdeveloped minds, the very fabric of human society is prone to falling apart, leading to the loss of values, wisdom, empathy, respect and love. South Korea is presently going through cultural degeneration, wherein the traditions of the past still hold importance but are being overridden by customs that have even more negative effects.

With the conclusion of this study, it is evident that South Korea is slowly moving forth from cultural degeneration to cultural regeneration with the help of Kdramas like *Tomorrow* that help raise awareness. By adding elements of comedy to keep the audience entertained, but never trivializing the

seriousness of suicide and what the victims go through, *Tomorrow* as a Kdrama achieves the perfect balance of destigmatizing social biases and acts as a medium of respite for the ones affected. If used wisely, media can be used as a tool for progress. This study helps in raising awareness for suicide, tackling the various social issues present in South Korea and helps us realize the impact media has on both young and old minds alike. The study concludes that although a country may be facing the era of degeneration, the era of regeneration is never far behind.

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