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Inko Centre gives Korean pop music the attention it deserves, with a special academy and a month-long programme



K-POP'S TAKEOVER



OR a city with an increasing Korean population (4,000 and counting), Chennai's engagement with Korean culture has now grown beyond taekwondo and *bibimbap*. It now includes K-pop, too. And riding this wave of popularity — the Koreans call it *hallyu* or the Korean wave — is Inko Centre, which is launching an academy to polish the dancing and vocal skills of K-pop enthusiasts. "The academy is in response to the growing popularity of K-pop in the city, with people showing interest to learn it first-hand" says Rathu Jafer, director of Inko Centre.

City centre

The annual K-pop contest, which was launched in New Delhi in 2012, expanded to the city in 2014, and saw 45 participants that year. In the following edition, the number rose to 50. For this year's edition, to start next week, Chennai is poised to host, for the first time, the country's final round. And it doesn't



from the Sejong University in Korea. "The idea is to create a crew of professionally-trained performers at the end of the course, who can perform the opening acts at the upcoming semi-finals and finals of the K-pop contest," Jafer states.

The course on vocals will impart the basics of vocalisation, diction and breathing techniques, says 37-year-old Dong Sik Kim, who has 15 years of experience in vocal training. Boy band SHINee's *View*, *Alinny*s by Yoo Mi-Rae — a rapper of American and Korean descent — and star vocalist Gummy's popular ballad, *You Are My Everything*, are some of the songs the students will be trained to sing, he says.

Jung Jiwon, a 37-year-old dance instructor and choreographer, who will train the students in movement, says the course will train participants in the basics, teaching them the vocabulary of dance for K-pop, attitude and body language, besides imparting lessons in body alignment and body isolation.

stop there. "There is also a vibrant online community in South India, well-versed in K-pop, which meets on a quarterly basis at the Inko Centre," she adds. Around 60 enthusiasts from the city participate in every meet, with the demographic usually within the age group of 18-35.

Camp time

At the K-pop Academy, participants will be trained for two weeks, in vocal and movement, with experts being flown in

Open for up to 30 participants, from April 25 to May 20, at Inko Centre. Register for free. Details: 26361224

— Sharadha Narayanan



K-POP contest is here again!

The K-POP contest 2016, which gives fans the chance to show their dancing and singing skills to Korean Music has been announced last month

It is the time of year eagerly awaited by K-POP fans in the city! The Korean Cultural Centre India (KCCI) had announced 'K-POP Contest 2016' last month, generating a lot of excitement with the many K-POP fans in India. Now, they have announced the regions for the preliminary rounds. Online video submissions for the contest began on April 15, and will continue until May 25.

After the participants are shortlisted from online entries, they are called to specific regions to compete. After that, the winners of each region will compete against each other in the grand finale, which will be held in Chennai this year. From the time that India started participating in the K-POP Contest, the finals have always been held in Delhi.

This shift in venue to Chennai is a surprise for



Pictures from previous year's contest

the fans, but for those fans that have been asking for a change, this is happy news!

KCCI, which has been working for the promotion of Korean Culture, is bringing K-POP closer to other parts of the country as well letting them experience the excitement and

joy of meeting their favourite K-POP idols! Winners at the grand finale will then represent India at the 'K-POP World Festival' in Changwon, South Korea.

The K-POP contest is part of the K-POP World Festival that is held every year in

Changwon, South Korea, and is organised by South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with the support of many other organisations. It is a festival bringing in K-POP lovers from all over the world to showcase their love for K-POP through dancing or singing.

Korean pop music finds growing following in Chennai

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From learning the flashy, fast-paced choreography to conducting regular meet-ups to discuss their favourite band or hosting the finale of the national K-Pop (Korean pop music) contest – the city's K-Pop scene is only getting bigger and better.



Participants at the K-Pop Academy conducted by the InKo Centre in the city (Photo: Justin George)

Chennai: Way back in 2008, while randomly channel surfing on the television, Chennai resident Sreemeera Sampath stumbled upon *Music Bank*, a programme on *KBS World*. Listening to the popular K-Pop tracks on the show, this youngster recalled falling in love with this particular brand of music. "I discovered Shinee, a popular South-Korean band, and their dance moves were fantastic. I started exploring other K-Pop songs by bands like Big Bang, SS501 and many others. I have a lot of friends who are hooked to K-Pop and we have regular meetings, where we discuss about our favourite artists, have a fun quiz or just do some karaoke," said Sreemeera, who is pursuing her M. Phil in English Literature from Madras Christian College (MCC).

Sanjay Ramjhi, a 33-year-old Korean language interpreter, pointed out K-Pop's popularity in Chennai grew exponentially over the last five years. Sanjay, who runs 'The Drama Club', a

Facebook page on K-Drama, said, "Gangnam Style definitely got a lot more people hooked to K-Pop. There are private fan club meetings in the city for bands like Shinee, Super Junior and Ex/o."

This year, K-Pop fans in the city have an additional reason to be excited! The final round of the national K-Pop Contest will be held in Chennai and the guest judges are Eddy and Simba from the band JJCC, formed by Jackie Chan. Sanjay added, "Fans here are excited to get a glimpse of their favourite band."

Diehard fans are also trying to master the nuances of dance and music from skilled instructors from The Sejong University, Korea, at K-Pop Academy conducted by the InKo Centre. Jiwon Jung, one of the instructors, said he was quite touched to see the dedication towards K-pop. "One day, a student who was new to dance (of any genre) asked me a lot of questions and took effort to get the moves right after the class. I could see how much they love K-Pop music and dance. It was awesome because she choreographed the moves perfectly the following day," he said.

Jung felt that the close connection between Indian and Korean cultures may account for K-pop's rising popularity here. "I think that there will be K-Pop market soon in India and it will grow really fast," he said.

The K-Pop Contest, organised by the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea, has been witnessing a steady rise in the number of participants every year. Korean Consul Joongsuk Park said, "Earlier the finals took place in Delhi but we have received many requests from South Indian K-Pop fans for the event to be held in the South. Also, the aim of this festival is to spread K-Pop across India. Hence, holding the national finals in Chennai would create more awareness as well as increased participation from southern states."