



Namasutra

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Anything Korean caught your eye?
Do share with anantha@albertdali.com

Seoul curry

WE'RE so ignorant about South Korea that some of us may even assume Charles Correa to be a Korean architect. No, I kid you not. Beyond the usual stereotypes of dog meat and *Gangnam Style*, we know next to nothing about them.

Did you know that they are the world's most innovative economy? More innovative than Germany, Japan or the United States. Do you know that everyone has a broadband connection there with internet speeds faster than the fastest?

I bet you're not even aware that the South Korean language has at least 500 words in common with Tamil. Which includes, shockingly, nouns, pronouns, verbs and interjections like *appa* (father), *amma* (mother), *na* (me), *ni* (you), *naal* (day), *va* (come), *anbu* (love) and *acho* (ouch). They even have a 60-year calendar like us and celebrate their *Sashtiapdapoorthi* (60th birthday).

Cultural similarities



aside, there's a lot that's unique about the South Koreans. Newborn babies turn one the day they are born, unlike other societies where the age-clock starts ticking only after 12 months.

Even their names are very different from the Chinese and the Japanese. They usually follow a three-syllable nomenclature with the first being the surname and the other two being the given name. And Kim happens to be the most popular surname. A recent study concluded that there are close to 10 million Kims in Korea alone. Park and Lee took the second and third spots in the surname sweepstakes. That could be because Kim and Park were names of royalty that still command respect in the land of the morning calm.

The current president Park Geun-Hye's name literally means

'gentle like a hibiscus'. An odd rule that the country still follows: people with same surnames cannot marry each other. Some say it's necessary to retain the purity of the gene pool.

The most famous South Korean names we know are obviously brand names. Samsung literally translates to 'three stars'. Hyundai works out to 'modernity'. Daewoo, meaning 'Great Woo', is an ode to the chairman Kim Woo-Jung. The 'Kia' in Kia Motors is a portmanteau standing for 'rising out of Asia'. Lotte has an interesting etymology. Its founder Shin Kyuk-Ho was into Goethe. He liked the character Charlotte in his novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and as a tribute he called his company Lotte. There's a lot more to learn about Korea. We'll reserve it for another day. Till then let me take leave with an *annyeong* (goodbye).