

Lessons for Bollywood and Indian Regional Cinema from Korea's Global Cineverse: Cinematic Soft Power Beyond Entertainment

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Abstract

This research paper investigates how the global rise of South Korean cinema is the result of deliberate strategies rather than coincidence and examines the factors that have contributed to Korea's cinematic success, including robust government support, groundbreaking genre innovation, and the cultivation of a distinct cultural identity. Through an analysis of these elements, the research seeks to identify actionable lessons for the Indian film industry spanning both mainstream Bollywood productions and dynamic regional cinemas. The study argues that India can benefit from adopting aspects of Korea's approach, beginning with fostering stronger collaboration between Bollywood and regional filmmakers, who often operate in isolation. By leveraging this unity and embracing the nation's vast cultural diversity, Indian cinema can aspire to extend its influence beyond mass-market entertainment, establishing a more authentic and impactful presence in the global film landscape.

Keywords: Korean Cinema, Cultural Identity, Film Industry Collaboration

South Korea's film industry, once overshadowed by Hollywood imports, has emerged as a global powerhouse. South Korea's cinematic revolution, recent Oscar winning movies like *Parasite*(2019) [1] and record breaking series like *Squid Game* (2021) show how strategic investment, calculative risk taking and government support [1, 3] can transform a national Film industry into a global soft powerhouse. For India, which possesses a comparably diverse and fragmented cinema ecosystem spanning Bollywood and regional industries like Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam cinema.

This essay explores how India can adapt Korea's models of Institution-industry collaboration, genre innovation and evolution, and cultural branding to amplify its cinematic influence across the world while integrating the regional diversity of different Industries.

South Korea's film industry changed because of planned policies starting in the 1990s (Jimmyn Parc, et al., 2013) [2]. At that time the Korean Film Council played a big role in this shift, acting as the main agency. This government backed council worked to help Korean cinema grow by giving funds, training filmmakers and technical staff, and promoting films worldwide.

They are very distinct from India's highly decentralized and highly fragmented filmmaking support systems. Regional filmmaking industries usually rely on private investments or crowdfunding campaigns. The Malayalam film industry of Kerala, for instance, usually manages to survive on bottom-up funding, limiting scalability and broader access. A centralised funding system such as KOFIC would democratize without sacrificing creative control [5].

South Korea's Screen Quota Law [4], which used to require cinemas to show local movies for a particular period each year, helped revive its local film industry. The policy gave local filmmakers a consistent platform throughout the year to work and evolve and they were encouraged to come up with new visions and entertain audiences during the limited screening period. On the other hand, India's screen quota policy, especially for regional films is unclear and poorly followed. Many local-based film industries are not properly represented, even though they are rich in storyline and quality. A well-planned and strictly followed quota system in India could make a big difference. By saving screens for local films like Tamil, Marathi, or Bengali movies in their home states as well as other states, India can give fair exposure and protect its cultural variety. Following Korea's example, such a policy would not only support local cinema but also push it to grow creatively in a competitive market.

Since 2016, Netflix has spent over \$500 million on Korean movies and TV shows [7]. This spending has driven a global obsession with Korean culture often called the "Korean Wave" or Hallyu (Jiyoung Kim, et al., 2016) [3] and because of this, Netflix has created popular superhits like Squid Game that fans worldwide enjoy. In 2024, people spent an incredible 1.65 billion hours watching Squid Game and this part of the success comes from giving Korean creators the freedom to tell their vision and stories how they want. This helps them create relatable stories for audiences everywhere from Korea to India. At the same time, they avoid the trap of making Asian cultures look weird or exotic, which Western shows often do. India's collaborations with major streaming platforms like Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ Hotstar haven't created the same worldwide interest [2, 3]. While movies like RRR (2022) have earned worldwide praise and positive reviews, much Indian content on these platforms mostly interests people connected to India. To fix this gap, Indian filmmakers as well as the government could follow Korea's example of taking local stories to the world. By giving more creative freedom to local writers and directors to create stories people connect with, they can make content more genuine and attract broader audiences. Movies can shape how people view and understand various cultures, societies, and challenges. Promoting regional films is necessary to show the wide variety and social richness of India's many traditions and languages. Take the Bahubali series as an example; it earned over Rs 1,800 crore worldwide showing how much regional cinema can achieve.

We should address the overused stereotypes of India often seen in international films. Many of these films focus on poverty, crowded streets, cows wandering through cities, or portray Indians as call centre employees or spiritual gurus. They fail to show the reality of India's thriving urban life, its advancements in technology, and the incredible diversity of its people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Instead, they cling to outdated notions and romanticise poverty, as seen in films like "Slumdog Millionaire" and "The Darjeeling Limited." These restricted portrayals frequently result in misunderstandings and biased views of India masking the depth and complexity of its culture and society. India can look at how Korea portrays itself through its films. Korean filmmakers worked hard to move past basic depictions choosing instead to tell meaningful subtle stories about modern life and society's challenges. The Korean government played a big role by supporting smart policies and building a strong local market, which helped their cinema thrive. Now, their films bring out rich characters and narratives that question old notions and connect with audiences around the globe. Indian cinema could do something similar to reshape its global image. Telling more unique stories supporting smaller filmmakers, and amplifying authentic voices could help Indian movies rise above stereotypes. This approach could show the world a deeper, stronger, and more honest image of India

Like Korea launching film festivals or contests tailored to urban tales featuring smaller or upcoming cities outside the usual big names would open the door to fresh stories and perspectives. Adding interactive layers, like virtual tours or behind-the-scenes clips, could give global viewers a deeper connection to the real-world settings of these cinematic stories. Partnering with international studios to explore themes like smart cities urban diversity, or sustainable living could take India's stories to the world stage while spotlighting its cities as modern hubs of creativity and progress.

By creating characters that reflect the hopes and struggles of urban youth and professionals Indian cinema could paint a bold and relatable picture of a forward-thinking India. This approach mirrors how Korean films and dramas have transformed Seoul into a worldwide symbol of cool and modern living.

South Korea has built a network of Korean Cultural Centres in New Delhi and in other major cities like Pune and Bengaluru. These centres focus on spreading Korean culture by offering language lessons hosting movie nights organizing K-pop concerts, showcasing exhibitions, and running traditional art sessions. By setting up centres in different cities across India, Korea gives its culture a chance to connect with a varied and widespread audience. It brings in not diplomats and the Korean community but also grabs the interest of young cinephiles.

India can take ideas from this approach by building more cultural outreach programs within its borders. Though India already has many cultural institutions and events, it could set up Indian Cultural Centres in cities beyond the big metropolitan areas. These spaces could focus on hosting workshops, art shows, and movie festivals. They might also team up with local schools and universities. This would give people easy access to India's arts, heritage, films, and theatre. Developing such cultural hubs in different cities could help people value India's rich traditions and fresh creativity even more. It could also bring people together as a nation and encourage upcoming talent. Korea's active cultural centres provide a strong example India could follow.

Korean cinema has gained global recognition not just because of its storytelling but also due to its top-notch technical quality (Hyangjin Lee, 2000) [6]. People often praise Korean movies for their sharp cinematography creative editing rich sound design, and advanced visual effects. These elements come together to create films that are polished and ready to compete. Strong programs to train filmmakers ongoing skill-building opportunities, and teamwork with global experts have fuelled this technical growth. India, with its incredible creative minds and already flourishing film industry, can aim to improve by focusing on training technical experts, modernizing production facilities, and working with international studios. This approach could take Indian films to the next level in both quality and worldwide appeal.

Korea uses pop culture as a smart way to boost its influence on the global stage. K-pop artists and K-drama stars often represent the country in international events and cultural exchanges, and this has been a success in building its soft power. India can learn from this by using Bollywood and regional film stars to share its culture worldwide. Bringing Indian celebrities into global festivals, partnerships, and goodwill projects can help India show off a fresh modern image while building stronger cultural bonds across the world. Blending technical skills with pop culture brings a solid plan for India to grow its cinema's cultural impact and change how the world sees it.

Korea's impressive ability to share its cinema and TV shows around the world comes from making them easy to enjoy and creating loyal fan communities. Korean studios spend a lot of resources on making accurate subtitles and dubs that go beyond just translations. They make sure the content feels relatable and meaningful to people from different cultures. Because of this careful work Korean movies and shows reach audiences who might not know the language or culture. Meanwhile Korean filmmakers and

entertainment companies connect with viewers by fostering strong fan communities. They use social media, set up fan events, share exclusive behind-the-scenes clips, and sell official merchandise. These strategies help fans feel like they are part of something special turning them into passionate supporters who share Korean culture with the world.

To sum up, South Korea's rise from a local film hub to a global cultural phenomenon provides valuable insights to inspire Bollywood and India's varied regional cinemas. Korea didn't rely on just one big innovation to succeed. Instead, it applied a well-rounded approach that involved strong technical skills, freedom to create, help from the government, and keeping global audiences in mind at every step. By focusing on top-notch production quality, putting money into good translation and dubbing, and building lively fan communities, Korea has turned its movies and shows into strong tools of cultural influence. This has changed how people view the country while creating opportunities to exchange cultures on a global scale.

India needs to shape these strategies to fit its own realities. This means upgrading technical skills and facilities while also pushing for daring fresh storytelling that captures the struggles and dreams of today's Indian youth and society. Success depends on better collaboration among filmmakers, the government, and private businesses. Using India's vast cultural heritage with available and well-translated content can make a difference. By also fostering fan communities and blending film with other cultural areas like music, tourism, and fashion, India can build a global image that leaves a strong and lasting impression.

Our aim should not be to copy Korea. Instead we should look at Korea's example to create its own unique approach to cinematic soft power. This approach can reflect India's diversity, imagination and a fresh perspective. Through this Indian cinema can entertain people while also sharing knowledge, encouraging ideas, and building connections across the globe. It can help position India as a major force in the global cultural space.

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