

## India in BRICS: The India-South Korea Cultural Perspective

Dr Nawnit Kumar<sup>1</sup>

BRICS has emerged as a crucial forum for cooperation among developing countries, encompassing nearly 40% of the world's population and contributing significantly to global GDP. India, as one of the founding members of BRICS, plays a pivotal role in influencing the direction of the group. While South Korea is not part of BRICS, it remains a significant partner for India, especially in the context of economic and cultural diplomacy.

### India and BRICS: An Overview

India's participation in BRICS serves its strategic interest of strengthening global south-south cooperation, promoting economic growth, and addressing common challenges such as poverty, climate change, and global security. India's goals within BRICS include promoting enhancing technology, multilateralism, and expanding trade collaboration.

**Table 1: Key Areas of Cooperation within BRICS (India's Perspective)**

Domain	Description	Key Contributions
<b>Economic Cooperation</b>	Trade and investment, promoting south-south cooperation	\$70 billion intra-BRICS trade target by 2025
<b>Political Collaboration</b>	Multilateral coordination on global governance issues	Supporting UN reforms, promoting multipolarity
<b>Cultural Exchange</b>	Leveraging cultural diplomacy for deeper people-to-people ties	Hosting BRICS Film Festivals, Academic Forums

India's cultural diplomacy has also been instrumental in BRICS cooperation. From BRICS cultural festivals to academic exchanges, India uses cultural diplomacy to strengthen ties with member nations and beyond.

### India-South Korea Relations: Historical Context

India's relations with South Korea has evolved significantly over the centuries, from ancient cultural exchanges to modern diplomatic ties. Historical interactions, such as the legend of Queen Heo Hwang-ok (Suriratna) from Ayodhya marrying a Korean king, symbolise long-standing ties. Diplomatic relations between the two nations were formally established in 1973, and in the decades since, these ties have expanded into robust trade, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange.

The two nations signed eleven Memorandums of Understanding/Agreements covering a wide range of topics, including biotechnology, ICT, and the Queen Suriratna Memorial Project. As an early harvest of the CEPA, the parties resolved to promote yoga and taekwondo in their

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Amity University Haryana

respective countries. Indians are now able to operate yoga studios in South Korea while Koreans are able to open taekwondo studios in India thanks to the Early Harvest Package (EHP). Thus, with both nations exchanging cultures through a free trade agreement (FTA), the historical and cultural links between the two remain significant in the twenty-first century.

### **Cultural Diplomacy: The India-Korea Connection**

Cultural diplomacy has emerged as a vital tool for both India and South Korea in enhancing their bilateral relations. This section explores the soft power tools both nations utilize and how these contribute to their standing in BRICS and the broader international community.

#### **India's Soft Power Strategy**

India has historically leveraged its cultural wealth to promote international diplomacy. Bollywood, yoga, and traditional arts form the backbone of India's soft power.

- **Bollywood:** One of the most significant cultural exports of India, Bollywood has a growing fan base in Korea, helping to strengthen ties between the two nations.
- **Yoga Diplomacy:** India's promotion of yoga as a global phenomenon resonates deeply with South Korea, as both nations emphasize wellness and mindfulness practices.

#### **South Korea's Soft Power**

South Korea's cultural impact on India is seen most visibly through its entertainment industry, particularly K-pop and K-dramas.

- **K-Pop & K-Drama Influence:** The Korean Wave, or "Hallyu," has swept across India, with a growing fan base for K-pop and Korean dramas. This cultural exchange fosters goodwill and enhances people-to-people connections.
- **Technological Diplomacy:** South Korea's dominance in technology and innovation, particularly in electronics, complements India's market potential, making both nations valuable partners within BRICS, even though South Korea is not an official member.

**Table 2: Cultural Diplomacy Tools: India vs. South Korea**

<b>Cultural Tool</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>South Korea</b>
<b>Cinema</b>	Bollywood	K-Dramas, Korean Films
<b>Music</b>	Traditional Indian Music, Bollywood	K-pop
<b>Soft Power Events</b>	International Yoga Day	K-Con, K-Culture Festivals
<b>Technology</b>	Indian IT & Software Expertise	Korean Electronics & Tech Firms

### **Economic Cooperation: A Foundation for Cultural Exchange**

Economic cooperation between India and South Korea has formed the backbone of their bilateral relations. Both countries are involved in various trade agreements and investment partnerships that support cultural ties and complement their global standing. Relations with

India have also considerably improved with the establishment of the NSP in 2017. The objectives of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Act East Policy are fully aligned with Seoul's NSP project. Although diplomatic contacts and exchanges between Seoul and New Delhi have not yet reached their peak, regular summit talks between the two leaders have helped to elevate bilateral ties and strategic confidence to a far higher level since the NSP's inception.

### **India-South Korea Trade Relations**

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between India and South Korea in 2009 has significantly increased bilateral trade. This agreement has reduced tariffs, allowing smoother trade flows in critical sectors such as electronics, automobiles, and textiles.

- **Trade Volume:** The trade volume between the two countries reached \$21.5 billion in 2022, making South Korea one of India's top trade partners.
- **Investment:** South Korean conglomerates like Samsung, Hyundai, and LG have invested heavily in India, creating job opportunities and fostering a deep sense of cultural exchange between the two countries.

**Table 3: India-South Korea Trade Growth (2010-2022)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Trade Volume (Billion USD)</b>
2010	10.5
2015	15.7
2020	18.9
2022	21.5

### **BRICS and India-Korea Collaboration in the Cultural Sphere**

While South Korea is not a BRICS member, India and Korea's cultural interactions provide a model for how cultural diplomacy can influence multilateral groupings like BRICS. India has used its relationship with Korea to expand its diplomatic and economic reach in Asia and internationally.

### **Influence of BRICS on Cultural Diplomacy**

India has consistently advocated for cultural exchange programs among BRICS nations, and its collaboration with South Korea has provided valuable lessons in leveraging culture for diplomatic success.

### **Challenges in India-Korea Cultural Relations**

Despite the growing cultural ties, certain challenges remain in enhancing India-Korea relations:

- **Cultural Differences:** Language barriers and distinct social customs sometimes limit deeper cultural understanding between the two nations.
- **Economic Constraints:** While trade and investment are growing, there are concerns about trade imbalances and uneven access to markets, which may hinder cultural collaborations.

India's cultural and economic engagement with South Korea, though outside the BRICS structure, provides a crucial model for cultural diplomacy in a multilateral framework. By leveraging soft power tools such as Bollywood and K-pop, India and South Korea have enhanced their people-to-people ties and contributed to regional peace and cooperation. In the future, the cultural and economic collaboration between India and Korea can serve as a template for deeper engagement with other BRICS and non-BRICS nations, ultimately enhancing India's role within this crucial bloc.

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