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Classroom without Walls: German and Indian Cinema as Multicultural Pedagogical Tool Sub-Theme: Globalization and Cultural Transformation

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Abstract:

Cinema is never just about the entertainment or fun. It is an interesting and unique way of looking at the world and getting connected with the people across cultures. Cinema reflects stories, values, emotions, cultures, traditions and transfers important things such as messages about social awareness, historical knowledge, empathy, moral lessons, creativity, religious or spiritual ideas, language and communication styles, environmental awareness. This paper explores how cinema acts as one of the powerful tools of teaching. By studying the pedagogical use of the cinema, this paper focuses, how cinema is helpful to the students to learn about the foreign languages and cultures. Indian movies, especially Bollywood movies have become popular in Germany namely Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, Sitaare Zameen Par. Indian Cinema has marked its special place in the classrooms of German universities to teach the students about the Indian traditions and multicultural patterns, while the German movies have a different perspective in India. Some examples of German movies are All Quiet on the Western Front, Run Lola Run. They are valued for their sanity, creative style, realism and philosophical intensity. Screening of Indian and German films at film festivals, academic programs, universities and cultural centres have introduced students and spectators of both the countries to European and Indian culture. This paper proposes that, when the cinemas of both the languages are thoughtfully analysed as a tool of education, then they can become more than just an entertainment and can become a classroom without walls. Together, they can build a communication bridge, which will make Indo-German relations stronger and opens new avenues for foreign language learning and cultural exchange in this modern era of digital globalization.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Entertainment, Teaching tool, Classroom without walls, Communication bridge.

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INTRODUCTION:

"Das Kino ist ein Klassenzimmer ohne Wände, das Herzen und Kulturen verbindet" (Cinema is a classroom without walls that connects hearts and culture). Culture is comprised of various kinds of things that determine the lifestyle of the people. Factors such as languages, food, festivals, geographical aspects like rivers, mountains, and sightseeing places, clothing, films, architecture, artistic styles, and history are the important elements through which the culture has been exchanged. But cinema is one of the most effective components, which travels very rapidly across borders and reaches spectators globally. It is a gateway for the viewers to investigate a culture different from their own. Through films, audiences can witness the struggles people face, the joys they experience, the ways families interact, and the celebrations of various festivals, all of which enhance their curiosity about other cultures. Traditionally, the term "education" always comes along with the classrooms. These are the places that feel incomplete without four walls, boards, desks, textbooks, notebooks, and teachers standing in front of students. But nowadays education is not limited to classrooms. In today's world learning also takes place outside the classroom, and cinema is a door

that allows students to step outside the classroom. Cinema is very effective, as it carries emotions, stories, and visuals. A film is a kind of language that is understood globally through the above-mentioned factors. It reaches every viewer, though the words are unfamiliar to them. For example, if a German spectator is watching an Indian movie, he may not understand every word of it, but the visuals, music, dance, architecture, and landscape shown in the movie will still make sense to him. Likewise, the same things may happen with an Indian watching a German movie. German and Indian cinemas are wonderful examples of cultural exchange.

Historical Background

There is an old relationship between Indian and German cinemas. In the early 20th century, despite limited technology, cinemas began to cross borders. Indian filmmakers were in the beginning phase of shaping their identity, while German filmmakers were experimenting with the new styles. Initially the seeds of intercultural curiosity started getting planted, and a key collaboration happened in the 1920s and 1930s.

The connection between Indian and German cinemas originated in the 1920s and 1930s through key collaborations that shaped early Bollywood. Pioneered by Himansu Rai and German director Franz Osten, studios like Bombay Talkies imported German technicians, bringing German Expressionist lighting and camerawork to India. Cinematographer Josef Wirsching played a critical role in this collaboration, blending European modernism with Indian narratives. (Montréal Serei)

German films were an inspiration to the Indian students. Usually, Germany used to make creative films, while social and mythological movies were very popular in India and were showcased sometimes in Germany. Due to these films, German audiences started taking interest in Indian culture and traditions. German cinema was studied in India to gain a deeper understanding of its philosophy and creativity. However, German viewers watched Indian cinema to study Indian multiculturalism, music, dance, and family values. In this way, the exchanges between German and Indian films were mostly academic and cultural.

German Expressionism, particularly its visual styles and storytelling, was very

popular in the early 1920s. Indian cinema experienced a significant impact from German Expressionism. Some of the worldwide studied German expressionist films are *Destiny* (1921), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *From Morn to Midnight* (1920), *Warning Shadows* (1923), and *The Student of Prague* (1926). Their communication ideas and visuals were analyzed by the Indian film schools and directors. They learned how the film can be represented beyond realism. In this way, these films became case studies in Indian classrooms. Indian art cinema particularly benefited from this influence, as it consistently aimed to depict the inner struggles of its characters. The movies like *Light of Asia* (1925), *Mahal* (1949), and *Pakeezah* (1972) are examples of Expressionism in India.

While Indian film schools were influenced by the German movies, Indian films also started their journey to Germany in the late 1920s. Initially Germans watched the Indian cinemas as a source of only entertainment containing music, emotions, and dance, but later the movies became famous for the Indian traditions and multiculture. The screening of cinemas like *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* took place successfully and attracted many

fans in Germany. The colorful visuals, emotional storylines, and family themes of Indian cinema caught the attention of German spectators, though they were very different from German film traditions. In the renowned cities like Berlin, Munich, and Hamburg, Bollywood film festivals were organized, where Indian cinema was presented to Germans in a systematic way to showcase India's cultural richness with workshops, cultural programs, and discussions.

On 28th July 2016, the first Bollywood movie channel was launched in Germany. Its name is "Zee.One," and it can be watched without having to pay anything extra via cable and satellite. The feature of the TV channel is that it will show German viewers popular Indian TV series, films, and music videos. They are specially revised for the German market. The program covers all genres—from romance to action. (Berlin Global)

Meanwhile, Indian cinema not only graced film festivals but also made its way to German televisions and DVDs. German viewers especially loved the unique dance styles and songs, and most of them started the association with Bollywood's colorful flairs. In this way, the Indian filmmakers began to establish cultural ties with Europe. The

Bollywood phenomenon was integrated in German university courses on vivid cultures, global cinema, and migration. Students in Germany analyzed Indian traditions, modernism, and diaspora life. In this way, Indian cinema slowly developed into a unique cultural instrument and pedagogical tool.

Role of the Indian Cultural Centers and Goethe-Institut in Film Promotion

The cultural centers and Goethe-Institut, or Max Mueller Bhavan, in India played a vital role and became crucial promoters of German films in India. They organized film screenings and discussions in metro cities such as Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, and Kolkata. This tactic brought Indian spectators in contact with the German movies, which were not showcased in commercial cinema halls. These films were beneficial in the form of an educational tool for Indian students as well as teachers. Learning was made interesting through the discussions of audiences on the themes, style, and story ideas of the films. Collaborations between Indian and German filmmakers were also supported by the Goethe-Institut, and co-productions and workshops received various valuable opportunities.

Indian culture was better understood through the programs such as film screenings, cultural events and Bollywood festivals, arranged by the Indian cultural centers. Indian diaspora communities created the spaces, where they started celebrating their culture with others. They confirmed that the cinema can be used as the greatest tool of education. Films became a bridge between two cultures. These institutions created classrooms without walls through promoting films across borders. In this way, viewers started getting to know each other's culture and traditions through cinema. A long journey of interchange was explained by the historical background of Indian and German cinema.

German Cinema in India: Recognition, Influence, Challenges, and New Pathways

In India Film Festivals is the most important Platform for German Cinema. These Cinemas are often displayed in the events such as Habitat International Film Festival in New Delhi International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa and the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF). Indian audiences can watch the films of German Classics Contemporary and movies of New German Cinema movement. Universities also contribute effectively in projection of

German cinema. Institutions like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University, and the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) include German films into their film studies and cultural studies programs.

Among all, the Goethe Institute (Max Mueller Bhavan) plays a vital role in promoting German films in India. It upholds German Cinema by closely working with local film societies through screenings and thematic events. The purpose is to give audiences and students a widespread view of German Film makers in artistic evolution, recurring themes and stylistic changes. For example, screenings of Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* often accompanied by panel discussions, making them valuable tools in teaching in universities and cultural Institutions. By examining German Cinema next to Indian Cinema, students identify that both the traditions highlight the themes like identity, social reflection historical memory, development and environmental challenges. This fair approach enhances the study of both traditions.

There were also some challenges in the earlier decades about screening of German Cinema in India due to limited access, subtitling, and difficulty of audience to connect it.

Nowadays German films are watched easily on the digital platforms such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, German films and TV shows and MUBI. Other than the classroom strategies, students in the modern era explore such platforms and the web series like Babylon Berlin (MUBI) and Dark (Netflix) are very popular among them. Some films are famous for the Indo-German collaboration namely Watchmaker (2018) and The Fable (2024). German cinema strengthens the Indian film studies along with the entertainment and this helps to deepen communication and cultural bond between two countries.

Cinema as a Teaching Tool

Cinema also has a different perspective other than entertainment and fun. It works as a mirror of society and a bridge between various cultures. This medium can become a powerful and very effective teaching tool. In this section we will explore how German cinema in India and Indian cinema in Germany help students to understand cultures and societies beyond their own and how teachers can also use them to develop critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural ability.

Pedagogical Value of Cinema

Textbooks rely on words and abstract ideas, but cinemas are unique in that they engage directly with the heart and mind. Film captures the essence of life in motion. In a cinema, a story is narrated through dialogues, emotions, music, and dance, and this makes learning very interesting, intense, and relevant. **Visual storytelling** is the primary benefit of learning through cinema. Important components of the film such as characters, situations, storylines, cultures, events, and places get revealed before the eyes of the students. A very good example of this is the German film ‘Germany, Year Zero.’ Watching this film gives a stronger feeling of the history of post-World War II in Germany than reading a chapter about it.

The German film ‘Germany, Year Zero’ is a 1948 film directed by Roberto Rossellini. It follows the life of a twelve-year-old boy in post-World War II Germany. As in many neorealist films, Rossellini used mainly local, non-professional actors. He filmed on location in Berlin and intended to convey the reality in Germany the year after its near total destruction in World War II. It contains dramatic images of bombed-out Berlin and of the human struggle for survival following the destruction of Nazi Germany. When explaining his ideas about realism in an

interview, he said, "Realism is nothing other than the artistic form of truth." (Wikipedia)

Another advantage of using cinema as a teaching tool is **cultural immersion**. Film serves as a simple entry point into a different society. When a student learns through films, the process goes through listening to the language, observing everyday life, and witnessing traditions. It is a feeling of traveling and understanding cultures while sitting in one classroom. E.g., the film 'Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India' is the best choice for cultural immersion. It clearly displays Indian village life, social structures, traditional clothing, and passion for cricket, music, and dance. It offers a complete package, which reflects the Indian culture. There is one more plus point of learning through cinema: emotional connection. Some major emotions, namely love, hope, struggle, compassion, justice, empathy, critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, and morality, are always being showcased in the movies. Students learn to connect with the people from other cultures through these emotions when they use movies for knowledge facilitation.

Cinema: A Gateway between German and Indian Students

German films help Indian students to comprehend European society. These films are renowned for their creative styles, intellectual extent, and investigation of social crises. Indian students get to know about the facts of European philosophy, politics, history, and culture when they watch German movies. There are certain German films that showcase **German History and Politics**, such as

- *Mephisto (1981): A story of an actor who adapts a Nazi power. (Wikipedia).* This indicates the phase of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism.
- *Downfall (Der Untergang) (2004): This is a German historical war drama film, which covers Adolf Hitler's final days in the Berlin bunker. (Wikipedia).* This specifies a phase of World War II and the Third Reich.
- *Bornholmer Straße (2014): This is a film about the night the Berlin Wall fell.* This film showcases the phases of post-war, the Cold War, and divided Germany.

The study of these kinds of films helps students to grasp the complexity and details of German history and politics. They see how ordinary people in Germany survived

through those times. Certain films showcase the side of **Philosophy and Society**, namely:

- *Wings of Desire – Der Himmel über Berlin (1987)* The film is about invisible, immortal angel who populate Berlin and listen to the thoughts of its human inhabitants, comforting the distressed. (Wikipedia) It is a movie about existentialism and spiritual questions, and it is a highly philosophical movie. (YouTube)
- *Yella (2007):* It is a story of a woman who is separated from her husband. This film illustrates modern German society through the lens of neoliberalism, highlighting its impact on personal identity and economics. (Wikipedia)

German films also depict **social realism**. The best example is the film *The Edge of Heaven* (2007). This film routes the social complications of migration, identity, and generational argument between Bremen, Germany, and Istanbul, Turkey. The film focuses on the emotional and social realisms of its characters rather than melodrama.

In this way, German films enable Indian students to witness a virtual journey of European history, philosophy, and society. They transform learning into lived

experience and make education more realistic.

Indian films also help German students to grasp Indian traditions. Indian cinema has become one of the most effective cultural emissaries of South Asia. These films are not just the tools of entertainment for German students. For them Indian cinema is a path to reach the emotional, vibrant, and deeply rooted traditions of India. Through Indian cinema, German spectators learn about the everyday life of Indian society, culture, customs, values, and emotional bonds that keep the communities together. **Traditions and Rituals** are one of the most noticeable features of Indian cinema. The film showcases festivals, weddings, and family gatherings in detail, highlighting their cultural richness. A wedding scene in Indian cinema is a beautiful event of two people getting married, accompanied by all the family members, relatives, and friends coming together and enjoying cultural songs, dance, and flavors of delicious, traditional cuisine. A best example of this cultural event is the film-

Hum Aapke Hain Koun...! (1994), often titled in German-speaking regions as *Mein Glück liegt in Deiner Hand*, which is regarded by German-speaking Bollywood fans as a

definitive, high-quality, and heartwarming classic. It is celebrated for its traditional family values and vivid and joyous music. (Jimmy Cage)

Through these films, German students quickly experience the charm of traditions that bring people together and make everyday life more meaningful. They also understand the importance of family and community in one's life. The most beloved festivals in Indian cinema are Holi and Diwali, which focus on the role of color, happiness, and light in Indian culture. The Bollywood film "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham" (2003), known as "*In guten wie in schweren Tagen*" in Germany, represents a Diwali celebration, popular for its magnificent festive scenes and high admiration in Germany. The film "Silsila (1981)" is famous for its song "Rang Barse," which signifies the Holi celebration. These festival scenes are thought-provoking for the German students, where they become acquainted with the process of strengthening the social bonds and passing the traditions from one generation to another through these festivals.

Another effective theme in Indian cinema is **Migration and Multiculturalism**. Many films narrate the stories of Indians living in a

foreign country struggling to balance tradition with modernism. These narratives feel familiar for German students. Germany itself is a cross-cultural platform where diverse communities coexist. The films like "Kal Ho Naa Ho" (2003) and "Namaste London" (2007) are the best examples of this feature. This context makes Indian cinema remarkably significant in German classrooms. This approach facilitates students to understand that migration is a human experience brimming with hopes, emotions, and challenges rather than a political and social issue.

Emotional Storytelling is the soul of Indian cinema. Indian films are popular in expressing feelings such as love, family values, happiness, sacrifice, and sorrow with deep intensity. This is the new experience for German students, as German films generally prefer to portray realism and emotions with subtle elegance. This feature teaches them core values like respect, compassion, and loyalty. They also learn how the emotions in Indian culture are important on both the personal and social levels. Some examples of the best Emotional Storytelling Indian cinema are Telugu films like Jersey (2019) and Sita Ramam (2022) and the Hindi film Veer Zaara (2004). Thus, Indian cinema contributes to the German classrooms by

making students understand about Indian traditions, migration and emotions.

Classroom Strategies

The real impact of a great educational tool “cinema” depends upon the teaching strategies of teachers. **Film Screening** is the first key strategy. Teachers often schedule screening as a part of curriculum and carefully select the films that support their learning objectives. The German film *Run Lola Run* (*Lola rennt* 1998) might be showcased in an Indian university, and the highlighted points of discussion are modern fast-paced German society and urban life challenges. On the other hand, an Indian film, “Hum Saath Saath Hai,” might be screened in German universities to study Indian traditions, family principles, and balance among love, care, and commitment. These visuals make the education more engaging, and they have a long-lasting impact on students’ lives.

The next crucial step after screening is **Guided Discussions**, as it turns passive viewers into active speakers. Through meaningful conversations, students compare cultures, traditions, relationships, and emotions shown in the films with their own life experiences. Such types of constructive discussions encourage critical thinking and

intercultural understanding. For example, German students might discuss the significance of family approval in Indian marriages after watching the film *Vivah* (2006); on the contrary, through the German film *Isi & Ossi* (2020), Indian students might debate about an individual choice, which often draws attention in Germany.

Another productive strategy is **Comparative Analysis**. Educators project cinema from both the cultures simultaneously, and students are asked to compare them. For instance, a German film, “*Almanya: Welcome to Germany*” (2011), can be paired with an Indian film, *Swades* (2004), about migration. Students then investigate how different individuals and societies handle alike issues. This strategy also improves critical thinking. Students acquire knowledge of ideas, narrative techniques, and symbols through cultures.

One more beneficial approach is **Assignments and Projects**. To make this pedagogical tool more effective, the support of assignments and projects is necessary along with the above-mentioned strategies. This approach includes essays, presentations, short films, video projects, and creating mimes and reels. This method attains depth of learning, as it demands the active

involvement of the students. They are driven to create something new, rather than just watching and discussing.

Teachers frequently implement an **Interdisciplinary Methodology**. Films can be used as one of the best pedagogical tools across various subjects such as literature, history, social studies, languages, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), management and business studies, psychology, philosophy, civic education, film studies, and media literacy. With the help of German cinema, Indian students can practice German competencies. While listening to accurate accents along with the subtitles, students can improve auditory understanding and learn everyday expressions. In a subject called German cultural studies, educators can use Indian cinema to teach about multicultural life, traditions, and migration in India. This strategy makes the learning process more connected and immersive.

Parting Thoughts

Education can be transformed into an effective, creative, and meaningful journey of knowledge by using cinema as a pedagogical tool. It exhibits culture not as theoretical concepts but as dynamic traditions. It teaches history through lived

reality. Emotions are conveyed via interpersonal interaction. Cinema becomes a bridge that connects cultures and societies in Indo-German classrooms. Educators turn films into engaging instructional techniques through teaching combined with result-oriented strategies such as film screening, guided discussions, comparative analysis, assignments, projects, and interdisciplinary methods. When films are used in classrooms as a teaching tool, they lead to vivid positive outcomes, namely empathy, critical thinking, engagement, intercultural proficiency, and global perceptions. With the help of digital platforms, cinema travels rapidly across borders. In recent times, German films have arrived at Indian homes, and Bollywood has also become a part of entertainment and learning tools in Germany through web-based hubs like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and MUBI. Thus, in this modern era, films enrich classrooms, reinforce Indo-German relations, and open new avenues for learning a wide range of cultures and foreign languages. Every individual must remember the saying “*Das Kino verwandelt Lernen in eine Reise voller Entdeckungen*” (Cinema transforms learning into a journey of discoveries).

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