

Bend It Like Jess: A Structuralist Feminist Reading of Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*

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Abstract: This article examines the depiction of gender equity, multiculturalism, sports, and structural inequities in the film *Bend It Like Beckham*. Gender equality in sports is a significant challenge in society. This paper examines the various angles of gender equity within the domain of sports, analyzing gender barriers and women's opportunities. The film is also examined from a feminist perspective to show women have the right to express themselves. The film illuminates the barriers and structural inequities that persevere within society, mainly about class and gender. The film illustrates the challenges women face in a male-dominated society. This paper aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in a patriarchal society.

Key Words: Gender equity; multiculturalism; sport; structural inequalities.

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception". – Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, emphasizes the importance of gender equality in decision-making processes. This quote asserts that women should have a voice in all areas of decision-making. Generally, women have been excluded in various departments like business, politics, and leadership roles. It highlights the importance of various issues women face and how society treated them as exceptions rather than the norm in positions of leadership, power, and decision-making. Throughout history, women have often had to fight against gender barriers and prejudice to access leadership roles. gender equity is not only a fundamental human right, but a vital cornerstone for a harmonious global community.

The 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham* has gained immense popularity for its intricate exploration of sports, race, and gender stereotypes within a multicultural setting. This film is incredibly inspirational and tedious. The film is both critically and commercially acclaimed in India, as well as in England, Australia, and North America. The film sheds light on women's active participation in sports. It pushes boundaries by embracing queerness and, a stereotypical sense of humor to reveal how culture affects a person's life and its upcoming consequences. The film is set in London, about a young British Indian woman named Jess Bhamra and her passionate love for soccer disputes with the limitations imposed by her family. Despite Jess's ardent love for football, she is bound by the typical Indian traditional values of her conservative Indian family, who prioritize her education rather than following her dreams.

Examine the various elements of the film *Bend It Like Beckham* which operates within the realm of transcendence, framing sports as a realm of opportunity in structural inequities. We argue that the film supports the idea of cultural conflict which means it attributes fault to groups that aren't in power for causing problems in society because they do not completely follow the rules and norms of the dominant culture, which is masculine, white, and heterosexual. This shows that being white and how girls should act and follow the traditional ideas of the society which also means being

straight is seen as the most crucial element. This film partially shows cultural differences by ignoring traditional Indian femininity.

In this paper, we explore the portrayal of women's treatment in society through the character of Jess Bhamra, Women are often confined to household duties, discouraged from wearing clothes they like, and they are forced to adhere to traditional norms. Women face significant barriers to accessing opportunities in sports and other fields. Gender equity and multiculturalism are some of the key elements in this film. This pattern continues gender norms and restricts women's freedom and their involvement in activities traditionally controlled by men. Additionally, we examine how the film demonstrates the structural inequities that persist within the societal frameworks.

2. FILM ANALYSIS:

Considering all these things, we will analyze Gurinder Chadha's 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham*. This film points out the major issues that prevail in society. Multiculturalism is represented in the eyes of Jess and her sister Pinky. Jess and Pinky have contrasting characters. Jess represents a modern woman, while Pinky is like a traditional woman, submissive and foolish. When Jess leaves her sister's wedding to play football it shows that she is determined about her passion rather than preserving family ties. In her Indian home Jess is an object of shame a filial daughter and it is repeated in her own mother's words " I don't want shame on this family ", that's it no more football ". when her mother's shame became an obstacle to her happiness Jess gradually alienated from her household. When multiculturalism becomes an unhappy object associated with segregation when Jess and Jules overtake two Indian women wearing salwar kameez the viewers get the idea that they are leaving their culture behind for their goodness. Their desire to play football and follow dreams and leave the world behind they are excluded from the melancholic migrant community.

Bend It Like Beckham explores the interactions of multiculturalism within the setting of a diverse and lively London community. The character of Jess navigates between her Indian heritage and British identity, struggling with the conflict of cultural values and expectations. The film shows the complexities of cultural integration and the struggle between keeping cultural background and accepting new opportunities. The characters in the film highlight different cultures and also talk about the difficulties faced by them. This film shows the challenges of a mixture of cultures in a diverse society.

Gender inequality is a major issue in every field irrespective of nationality. The film challenges the traditional gender roles through the character of Jess, a talented and well-determined athlete who opposes societal expectations placed upon her as a young Indian woman. Jess's passionate love for football wasn't approved by her family and her community. This film teaches us to support one's passion and highlights the importance of empowering women and breaking the gender barriers built by society in sports.

Sport is one area where gender inequality is strongly evident. The notion that men and women are naturally different has been used for many years to justify the exclusion of women from some or all sports. Many people feel that since women could never equal or surpass men's achievements, there was no apparent reason for women to be allowed to participate in sports. Simply because men are more physically fit than women doesn't mean that they are not fit into sports. Jess faces problems from both her family and society. Her mother finds it inappropriate for a girl to participate in sports so she struggles to achieve her dreams.

Sports serve as a powerful weapon for empowerment, self-expression, and cultural shift in *Bend It Like Beckham*. Sports not only give physical strength but also support the mental health of one's life. When a woman enters the world of sports the acceptance is comparatively less than men. To achieve their dreams, they are forced to alienate from society and family. Even though there was a drastic change in women's lifestyles, many more things still need to be eradicated. Jess belonged to an Indian society that does not allow a girl to do something simple; primary education is unlikely to let her participate in sports without hurdles. Jess feels pain, frustration, and agony and it is evident in her bedroom's dark, cramped spaces where she hides all her emotions. Her freedom is somewhat restricted because of her duty towards family and cultural promises. Jess's mother is the typical representation of how Indian women think about their daughters. Being born into a conservative family that is resistant to change Jess emerged as a rebel to achieve her dreams. For Jess, football not only provides a way to pursue her dreams but also helps to foster friendship and physical growth. Furthermore, the difficulties and victories Jess and her teammates experience show how sports can change a person's life help them overcome obstacles, and make positive transformations in society.

The film illuminates structural inequities within the patriarchal society, particularly concerning race, gender, and culture. Some problems need to be fixed in society. One of the problems is the perspective of people's concept related to

sexuality. This is portrayed through the character of Jules. Jules's mother Mrs. Paxton thinks that she is lesbian because of her friendship with Jess. She always wants her to dress like a young lady, here the outside beauty is given importance rather than empowerment. Times have changed and are improving, but there is still much to achieve. Being a gay or lesbian is still considered as a taboo in society. At the end of the film when Jules confronts her mother by saying she is not a lesbian she also adds that 'Being a lesbian is not a big deal'.

Bend It Like Beckham is a compelling narrative that opposes stereotypes, encourages individuals who face struggles, and also promotes the acceptance of cultural diversity. The film addresses the ongoing obstacles to gender barriers and freedom to express sexuality. The film encourages us to be true to ourselves and consistently try to make the world equal for everyone. To ensure that everyone is treated equally and has the same opportunities.

3. CONCLUSION:

Ultimately, *Bend It Like Beckham* strengthens conventional standards like fitting in, and being male-dominant and feminine. The film has been able to challenge the white culture and traditional gender roles, but it also doesn't offer a chance for immigrant families to navigate cultural differences. The analysis of gender dynamics in *Bend It Like Beckham* exposes the film's profound exploration of gender equity, multiculturalism, structural inequities, and societal expectations. The character of Jess Bhamra and her rebellious nature towards traditional norms challenge gender stereotypes and promote women's empowerment.

Sexuality is not a central theme of the film, but it mainly focuses on gender equality and cultural expectations. The film doesn't delve into deeper aspects of the fluidity of sexuality, but being gay or lesbian is still considered a taboo in society.

Examining *Bend It Like Beckham* from a feminist perspective, it is a battle against gender stereotypes and pressures put on women by society. The film shows how women should act in a certain way and follow traditional norms set by the community. The film challenges the conventional beliefs of femininity and strengthens its female characters to chase their dreams, mainly in a male-dominated society. Jess's character shows the difficulties of being in a patriarchal society and her journey teaches us how women should overcome such obstacles. The film represents feminist principles of showing gender equality, and the right to express their opinions and define their selfhood. The film reflects on the significance of gender equality and ensures that every individual has an equal opportunity to pursue their dreams without barriers.

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