



BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM



A FILM STUDY GUIDE

Bend It Like Beckham
A Film Study Guide

© Gerry Lawson, 2003

Photographs and title logo © Fox Searchlight Pictures

Cover photo Parminder Nagra in ***BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM***

Photo Credit: Christine Parry

© Fox Searchlight Pictures



SCREEN EDUCATION ENTERPRISES

see@interbaun.com



FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

and

KINTOP PICTURES

Present

In Association with

THE FILM COUNCIL and FILMFOERDERUNG HAMBURG

With the participation of

BSKYB and BRITISH SCREEN

and in Association with

HELKON SK, THE WORKS, FUTURE FILM FINANCING

A

KINTOP PICTURES/BEND IT FILMS/ROC MEDIA/ROAD MOVIES

Co-Production

A GURINDER CHADHA FILM

**BEND IT
LIKE
BECKHAM**

PARMINDER NAGRA
KEIRA KNIGHTLEY
JONATHAN RHYS MEYERS
ANUPAM KHER
ARCHIE PANJABI
SHAZNAY LEWIS
FRANK HARPER

and

JULIET STEVENSON

Casting LIORA REICH
..... CARRIE HILTON
Costume Designer RALPH HOLES
Production Designer NICK ELLIS
Music Supervisor LIZ GALLACHER
Original Score by CRAIG PRUESS
Featuring Songs by BALLY SAGOO
Editor JUSTIN KRISH
Director of Photography JONG LIN
Line Producer PAUL RITCHIE
Executive Producers ULRICH FELSBERG
..... ZYGI KAMASA
..... SIMON FRANKS
..... HANEET VASWANI
..... RUSSEL FISCHER
Written by GURINDER CHADHA
..... GULJIT BINDRA
..... PAUL MAYEDA BERGES
Produced by DEEPAK NAYAR and GURINDER CHADHA
Directed by GURINDER CHADHA

Run Time: 112 minutes

Movies reveal a great deal about us: our social and cultural tensions; how we think; how we behave; and the values we hold important. Examining representations of people, events, ideologies, and philosophies can help us understand our world and our immediate environment. The purpose of this guide is to assist teachers in using *Bend It Like Beckham* as a classroom resource. It is suitable for grades 9-11. The guide is divided into three broad sections: Pre-Viewing that includes introductory information and topics for discussion that establish themes and situations raised in the narrative; Viewing activities that will help focus students' attention on key select scenes; and Post Viewing questions that provide more in-depth considerations about issues raised in the film.

I am grateful to Judge Gurcharan Singh Bhatia C.M., Court of Canadian Citizenship, and to Mr. Satya Das for their insights into the Sikh religion and customs.

G.L.



A FILM STUDY GUIDE
By Gerry Lawson

PRE-VIEWING

Background Information

The following information can be used to brief students prior to them seeing the film, or for clarification after they see it.

Soccer is not an American term. It was created in the UK to distinguish Association Football from Rugby Football. “Association” was shortened to “soccer.” Soccer in Great Britain is known as “football,” and rugby football is called “rugby.”

Mr. Bhamra says he was the best fastballer in high school. A fastballer is a cricket player, the equivalent of a baseball pitcher who specializes in fastballs.

Jesminder and her family are Sikh. The parents’ native language is Punjabi.

The man in the picture in their living room is Guru Nanak.

The family refers to Guru Nanak as “Baba ji.” “Baba” means “father,” and “ji” is a term of endearment. So, “Baba ji” means dear father.

Sikh customs date back about 500 years. Guru Nanak, the first of ten Gurus, defined the values and belief system of what would come to be the Sikh religion. In his time, Hindus believed in a caste system, but Guru Nanak preached that all humans were equal before God; therefore, there should be no caste recognition. His is a message of inclusiveness and equality for all, an advocacy for the acceptance of the commonality of humanity. Metaphorically, a team represents a microcosm of this sentiment.

The tenth and last of the Gurus was Guru Gobind Singh who established the sect known as the Sikh religion. He declared Sikhs should be proud of their beliefs and declared long hair would provide a visible sign of one who followed the tenants of the Sikh faith. Wrapping one’s hair in a turban would help to keep it clean. A Sikh should always carry a *kirpan*, or sword, as defenders of the Faith and of the weak, a concept similar to the beliefs of the Arthurian Knights. The bangles offered as a gift to the groom originated as wrist armor in ancient times. Today, the bangle reminds its wearer of the values of the Sikh religion.

Mrs. Bhamra criticizes her husband's niece for being divorced. Sikh religion holds that marriage is a holy sacrament that unites two souls into one. Divorce is not possible for this reason, even though the man and woman can be divorced by civil law.

Sikh greetings, said with hands clasped and head bowed slightly, can be translated as, "May the truth live forever." "I bow to the divinity within you." "God is truth."

Mrs. Bhamra refers to David Beckham as a "gora," and Jess uses the term when she asks her sister what their parents' reaction would be if she brought home a gora friend. The term is a derogatory reference to a white male. The female form would be "gori."

"Aloo" means potato; "gobi" means cauliflower.

In the ceremony and party the day before the wedding, a red veil is drawn over Pinky's head to symbolize protection from evil. Later, inside the house, we see a decorated domed shape with lit candles resting on top. This is a covered pitcher of water that will be passed from one guest to another as part of an ancient ritual.

"An Indian bride never smiles" the videographer says to Pinky. The bride is supposed to show sadness at leaving her father's home.

The groom traditionally arrives on a mare.

As Pinky leaves her father's house after the wedding concludes, we see her throw petals backward over her head. Normally, the bride throws wheat or rice to signify a blessing of happiness on the family, and that she will no longer depend upon her father for food.

Pre-Viewing Discussion

Before seeing the film, you may find it helpful to establish its themes and conflict by having students discuss these concepts on a personal level. The following questions serve as guidelines.

-  In what ways does a family represent a team, and a team a family?
-  How important are traditions in culture? In our community? In our society?
-  What is the value of routine in our lives? What are its drawbacks?
-  How do tradition and routine relate to stability?
-  How do the things we buy help alleviate the routine of our lives?
-  What constraints are imposed on us by society?
-  In what forms can "escape" take? From what do we seek escape?

-  What value do we place on travel? Why do we enjoy returning from a trip?
-  How is prejudice propagated?
-  How does lack of knowledge promote prejudice?
-  What misconceptions occur through judging by appearances alone?
-  To what extent do you believe parents contribute to bias in their children?

VIEWING

Teachers may wish to divide the viewing activities among the class and have individuals report their findings to the others. Before students see the film, explain the concept of “montage.” Montage is an editing term that refers to short shots of related images seen in quick cuts. Time is compressed in this way so that we get the impression of an activity or action instead of seeing it in detail.

-  **Watch for** the first appearance of Jesminder, her mother, and her sister, Pinky. What does each character’s initial appearance tell us about her?

(Jess is introduced through her fantasy of playing soccer professionally with David Beckham, thereby defining her aspiration and goal. Mother appears in her fantasy as an uncompromising critic opposed to Jessie’s dream. Jess’s fantasy is interrupted by the reality of mother’s entry into her bedroom expressing the same condemnation of soccer and in the same stern tone of voice that Jess had imagined. Mrs. Bhamra’s entry confirms Jesminder’s estimation of her mother’s attitude toward her dream. Jess’s mother values domesticity and propriety and she wants Jessie to assist her sister, Pinky, with wedding preparations. Pinky is associated with domesticity as well. Jess’s facial expression reflects her contrary attitude towards domestic concerns. We hear Pinky before we see her. Using a coarse term, she complains about one of her friends, then tells Jess to “get a flaming move on!” Our first impression is of a hot-tempered woman who is a parallel to her mother.)

-  Music plays an important role in the film, underscoring either a thematic concept or a cultural one. **Watch for** the montage of the girls at soccer practice as we hear the song, “She’s a Lady.” Try to listen to the lyrics. Why do you think director Gurinder Chadha chose this song for the scene?

(She is redefining the meaning of female in the film to show a departure from traditional definitions.)

 **Watch for** a montage of soccer practices and games, and family activities. Included is a shot of two older Hindi women jogging. We see Jess and Jules jog past them. The music is Curtis Mayfield's song, "Move On Up." Listen to the lyrics. What do you think the director is suggesting in choosing this music?

(The song symbolizes that, in pursuing their goal, the girls both "Move On Up" as well as go past or beyond both cultural and societal constraints.)

 **Watch for** a montage of Jess and Jules buying soccer shoes. What song do we hear on the soundtrack? Why is it a significant choice?

(The song is "Independence Day," sung by Melanie C, a.k.a. Sporty Spice, alluding to Jess moving towards self-definition.)

 **Watch for** a montage that juxtaposes the ceremony and celebration the day before Pinky's wedding day with the soccer team practicing for upcoming championship game. The music is an East Indian song. What does the montage signify about Jess?

(Jess straddles two worlds, one of cultural expectations and restrictions, the other her Anglo influences that promise self-fulfillment. Jess is forced to choose between these two worlds.)

 **Watch for** the scene in Jules' bedroom when her mother, Paula, meets Jess for the first time. From whose perspective do we see Paula? What type of shot is used, and why? From whose perspective do we see Jules and Jess? What type of shot is used? Why? What is implied by the placement of Paula and Jules? Comment on Paula's appearance compared to the appearance of her daughter in terms of clothes, make-up, and hair. Comment on Paula's emotional perception of Jess here compared to her emotional perception of Jules.

(Paula is seen in a low angle shot from the perspective of the two seated girls who look up at her. In a reverse shot, the girls are seen in a high angle shot from Paula's standing perspective looking down. Paula assumes to be the dominant figure here, hence all knowing, but because the girls later laugh at Paula's incorrect assumptions, we understand this camera perspective of Paula is ironic. Her stylish clothes, hair, and make-up contrast Jules' track clothes, bandana, and hair merely pinned back out of the way. Paula's appearance shows feminine concern and awareness of appearance; Jules looks somewhat boyish and unconcerned.)

👁️ **Watch for** a short scene of Jess taking down pictures of David Beckham from her bedroom walls. How is the scene lit? Why is this lighting significant?

(Jess is photographed in low light with much shadow. The lighting externalizes her feelings of disappointment, perhaps depression.)

👁️ **Watch for** and note the number of times Jess meets with obstacles and disappointment.

👁️ **Watch for** instances of Jesminder practicing deception.

(When Jess phones her mother from Hamburg, it is significant that we see her in a mirror shot. This suggests her alter ego, her negative side, involved in deception and lies.)

👁️ **Watch for** and note instances of other characters practicing deception.



Keira Knightley in *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM*

Photo Credit: Christine Parry

The director directs the audience's gaze. Note that Jules is center-framed. The background is kept neutral and out of focus so as not to distract our attention from Jules. Costuming also helps bring our attention to her.

POST-VIEWING

Audience Identity

 For the audience to be sympathetic to the protagonist the audience must be able to identify with her. In what ways can we see ourselves in Jess?

(While young people can acknowledge that parents are well meaning, they generally views adults as obstacles. Parents often seem to disagree with their children's preferences, their heroes, and their pursuits. They justify restrictions by suggesting parents "know best." We also can identify with the parent who jumps to conclusions: for example, Jess's mother assumes Jessie had been kissing a boy in public and later, smoking. We can sympathize with Jess over her mother's objections to Jess playing soccer. Because our emotional point of view is always with Jess, her mother's negative responses help generate both our sympathy and identity with Jess.)

 Even when Jess is doing something wrong, the audience sides with her emotionally? Why?

(We applaud freedom from constraint. We like the spirit of adventure. We believe Jess is right and her parents are wrong. Vicariously, we can break the rules by going with Jess to Germany. When Jess misses the penalty kick against Germany and loses the game, we share her disappointment.)

 Several characters are either victims of prejudice or they fear being victimized by prejudice. Pinky contradicts herself, telling Jess when you are in love, you just know "he's" the one, but then advising Jess to fall in love with a boy from her own culture to avoid being "the one everyone stares at...because you married the English bloke." Jess is called "Paki" by an opposing team player. Joe alludes to having been victimized because he is Irish. Mr. Bhamra tells of discrimination against him by the cricket team. Tony fears his friends will learn he is gay. Jules' mother fears public opinion, believing her daughter is gay. This allows us to relate to the film on a different level. Have you ever experienced prejudice against you? Is there ever an instance when prejudice can be justified?

Theme

 Because many movies now are independent productions, the director will often express a personal philosophy. What is director Gurinder Chadha's purpose here?

(Mr. Bhamra delivers the film's central theme:

“When those bloody English cricket players threw me out of their club like a dog, I never complained. On the contrary, I vowed I would never play again. Who suffered? Me. But I don't want Jessie to suffer. I don't want her to make the same mistakes her that her father made, accepting life, accepting situations. I want her to fight. And I want her to win...I don't think anyone has the right of stopping her.”)

 How is the film's title applicable to this theme?

(The fact that so much of the practice and game footage is presented in montage suggests the picture is not about soccer, but rather what soccer represents. Jess learns to bend a kick like Beckham does, but she also bends the rules to achieve her objective.)

The film also includes themes of stereotyping and labeling, accepting differences, personal values, domesticity vs. freedom, parents vs. children, self-definition, and change.

Stereotyping and Labeling

 Discuss the reasons that contribute to prejudicial attitudes towards people.

(Ignorance and a lack of understanding of the unfamiliar can make people feel suspicious, resentful, or threatened. This, in turn, promotes fear as a response, which is then manifested as prejudice, a type of defense mechanism. Some people feel more powerful when they can judge, categorize, or label others, all of which contribute to diminishing another's stature.)

 How is stereotyping a form of prejudice?

(Stereotyping is a means of categorizing and labeling others. It may not be overtly offensive, but stereotyping still signals a form of bias.)

 In what ways does Jules' mother, Paula, unconsciously stereotype Jesminder?

(Instead of seeing Jess as a person, Paula is fixated on Jesminder's ethnicity. Jess is a label to Paula: East Indian, or Asian, or British-Asian; consequently, she connects Jess to a stereotype. Relating to Jess, not by who Jess is, but what Jess is, she assumes Jess's parents are arranging their daughter's marriage to a doctor, itself a stereotype of a profession equated with "suitable," "respectable," and "socially acceptable." Paula hopes Jess can "teach my daughter about [her] culture," thereby assuming the Asian culture is more traditional, as in "safe" from the contamination of modern societal influences. By implication, Paula suggests Indian girls are more feminine than modern Anglo girls. When Jess comes to apologize to Jules, Paula does not greet Jess by saying "Hello," or, "How are you?" She tells Jess, "I cooked a lovely curry the other day." Then she announces Jess's arrival by telling Jules, "It's your Indian friend.")

 Tony tells Jess, "You can't plan who you fall for. It just happens." Later, watching a soccer game, he responds to his friends' comments on one of the girl player's physical attributes, asking, "Why can't you lot just see them as footballers?" How can Tony's words serve as a metaphor for one of the film's themes?

(The metaphorical interpretation of Tony's words is to see people for who they are, not what they are, or what they represent.)

 Jumping to conclusions is a form of prejudicial thinking. Show how this applies to Paula and to Jules.

(Paula cries when she thinks she has discovered her daughter is a lesbian. In this regard, Paula is like Jess's parents: such "new" ideas are "taking her away from everything she knows." Jules assumes Jess and Joe are in love. She also assumes Joe does not care about continuing to coach the girls' team because he is being considered for a position as assistant coach on the men's team. She presupposes he lied about the American soccer scout attending a game.)

⚽ What examples can you cite of epithets used in the film? Do you find any of these instances ironic?

(Mr. Bhamra refers to Beckham as “this bald man.” Mrs. Bhamra calls Beckham a “skinhead boy.” Referring to her husband’s divorced niece, Mrs. Bhamra says she was “cast off after three years of being married to that white boy with blue hair.” An opposing soccer player calls Jess a “Paki.” Pinky uses a coarse epithet in reference to people who displease her, including her sister. Jules uses the same term on Jess when she believes Jess kissed Joe. Jess and Tony use the pejorative term “gora” in reference to white males. Jules’ mother seems unaware that referring to Jess as “your Indian friend” can be demeaning and offensive to Jess. She also freely uses terms like “butch” and “lesbian” in reference to female athletes. In each case, a term used suggests that the speaker both categorizes and judges someone. It is ironic that all of these people regard themselves as “good” and “proper” individuals. Jess tells her soccer team that no whites, blacks, or especially Muslims would be acceptable to her parents and relatives; yet, Mr. Bhamra recounts his feelings of embarrassment and hurt when the English cricket club refused to accept him on the team. “They made fun of my turban,” he says. When Jess mentions Nassar Hussein, Captain of England’s cricket team, Mrs. Bhamra is dismissive towards him. “Hussein’s a Muslim name. Their families are different,” but Mrs. Bhamra feels slighted when her community complains anytime the family hosts a function. Both the Christian and Sikh religions preach acceptance of others.)

Values

⚽ What does Pinky value? With which characters do these values link her? How do her values contrast those of her sister?

(Pinky’s aspirations are opposite to Jess’s and similar to her mother’s and to Paula’s. Pinky seeks a traditional domestic life, where Jess resists it. “Ah, mom, Jess complains, do I have to go shopping [with Pinky] again?” Pinky is concerned with appearances: dresses, hair color, contact lenses, and getting a facial. The only appearance that concerns Jess is her scarred leg. Pinky’s name is a common Punjabi name, but its use in this film also suggests femininity through its color association.)

Domesticity vs. Freedom

Parallels can be made between Jess and Tom Sawyer. Both characters chafe at the restraints and constrictions of domestic life. Both seek freedom from domesticity via self-expression. Tom expresses himself in fanciful adventures and envies the freedom of Huckleberry Finn. Jess expresses her freedom in fanciful imaginings of playing for the Manchester United football team with star player David Beckham, and she envies the freedom Jules enjoys to play soccer. Both Tom and Jess represent the constricted hero who does not conform to the norms of his/her society and who seeks release through unconventional means.

“Mother” typifies domestication and is equated with civilization, conformity, and repression. With civilization and conformity come the loss of individuality and the freedom of expression. Mrs. Bhamra does not want Jess even watching soccer; neither does she approve of Jess’s infatuation with “this skinhead boy.” For Mrs. Bhamra, Beckham represents a departure from the family’s traditional values.

Where Pinky embraces domestic life, Jess feels threatened by it. Pinky, for example, wants a tight fitting sari to emphasize her feminine attributes. Jess wants her sari to be loose to de-emphasize her femininity. She does not want to sacrifice her identity to a custom of feminine allure, which she regards as superficial.

The film shows the traditional woman either in a house or pursuing domestic matters. At one point Mrs. Bhamra tells Pinky that Jess is “a nice girl now” because she helped wash the net curtains and prepare aloo gobi. For Mrs. Bhamra, “nice” means accepting a domestic role. Paula’s husband must use food condiments (a domestic relationship) to explain football’s offside rule to his wife. Paula, in turn, can accept her daughter playing soccer after learning one of the women playing for England is a happily married math teacher with a baby, thereby fulfilling traditional domestic requirements. If domesticity suggests boundaries and constraints to Jess and Jules, then the park and the soccer pitch represent the freedom of wilderness. Jess is angry and frustrated that her parents expect her to conform to a stereotype of a proper Indian girl. She rejects Tony’s advice to continue playing but not tell her parents. “Why should I have to lie?” she demands. By implication, a boy would not have to justify himself to his parents for wanting to play soccer.

⚽ In what ways does Jess express an imitative desire to be male?

(In her dream of playing for Manchester United, Jess seeks self-definition through a traditional male role instead of disappearing in the traditional female role demanded by her culture. It is significant that she identifies with a male hero, having no female soccer players as role models. Her friends are males who play soccer and who value her as a player, thereby according her equal status. “Come on, Jess. We really need you,” calls one of the boys. “I can’t, she responds. My mom’s waiting,” signifying domestic restriction. Later, she complains at the injustice of being female. “It’s not fair that boys never have to come home to help.” Freedom is associated with male pursuits. Jess straddles the line—a figurative frontier—between freedom (soccer) and civilization (family concerns and traditions.)



Parminder Nagra in *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM*

Photo Credit: Christine Parry

Freedom versus domesticity:

Soccer becomes a metaphor for life and learning to get around obstacles to achieve success. The soundtrack plays “Dream the Dream.”

⚽ Jess’s father tells her, “You must start behaving like a proper woman.” What defines “proper” and “woman” according to him?

⚽ How does Jules’ mother define “woman?” In what ways does her estimation match the Bhamras’ definition?

Change

 Why do Jess's parents adhere so rigidly to their cultural customs?

(Change is difficult, at times, frightening. Change involves risk, and risk implies danger, failure, and/or disappointment. The Bhamras are afraid to let Jess play because "This is taking [Jess] away from everything they know." In this statement by Jess, we can understand that once tradition is breached, one's feelings of stability are threatened.)

 Why is it important to take risks? What types of risks should not be undertaken? How do you know when a risk should not be attempted?

(Talent, acumen, ability, and positive results from lesser experiences are determining factors that indicate a risk has a chance of bringing success.)

 Joe tells Jess, "If you try pleasing [your parents] forever, you're going to end up blaming them." In what sense would Jess blame her parents? How does Mr. Bhamra unconsciously acknowledge Joe's prediction?

(Jess would always wonder if she could have been good enough for the American scout to have offered her a scholarship, which might breed feelings of resentment in her against her parents. Mr. Bhamra was perceptive enough to see that Jess was unhappy during Pinky's wedding, even though Jess was not sulking overtly. He was fair-minded enough to allow her to leave this important family celebration to play in a match that was equally important to Jess. Both Pinky and Jess fulfill their goals.)

Character

 Had this film been a drama, a character like Paula would be considered offensive, and Mrs. Bhamra irritating, but in this comedy, both characters remain sympathetic and likeable. Why is this so?

(Bend It Like Beckham follows the classical comedy plot of a protagonist successfully facing and overcoming difficulties, using the classic situation of opposed societies in conflict. Mrs. Bhamra and Paula represent the authority figures of the Old Order. Mrs. Bhamra's intransigence and control over her family, and Paula's conflicted feelings about female athletes and her daughter, indicate they feel their stability and customs threatened. Their daughters represent the New Order whose desires are thwarted. Humor lies in the deflation of the Old Order's rigidity and

autonomy, a similar concept to the arrogant rich man slipping on a banana peel. Instead of sight gags or word play, this is comedy founded in a character's confusion where the audience knows better. The audience can feel superior to Paula because we possess knowledge she lacks. We also laugh at Mrs. Bhamra's reactions, but here the humor is directed at ourselves as we recognize similar experiences through our identity with Jess. And as with classical comedy, the film has a happy ending, success having been achieved through the cooperation of the two opposing sides.)

 How are mother and father roles portrayed? Why is this ironic?

(Mothers are seen as more oppressive than fathers in the film. Jules' father both encourages and works with her at honing her skills as a player. Jess's dad eventually bends the rules to let Jess leave Pinky's wedding to play soccer. His wife would not have allowed this had she known at the time. Ironically, traditional East Indian culture is a patriarchal society. In the film, we see the pressure to conform coming from the females. When Jess "bends it like Beckham" and wins the important championship game on penalty kick, she is inspired by her opposition to family pressures of conformity to tradition.)

 In what ways are the following shown to be parallel characters: a) Jess and Jules, b) Jess's mother and Jules' mother, c) Jess's father and Jules' father? What purpose do you believe director Gurinder Chadha had in portraying similarities between East Indian and Anglo characters?

 To what extent are we shaped and defined by others? How is this illustrated in the film?

(Both Jess's parents and Jules's mother see their respective daughters each being unduly influenced by her friend. Teetu's mother is offended when she sees Jess and Jules embracing at the bus stop as they laugh at Paula's indiscretion. When Teetu's parents visit the Bhamras, Teetu's mother says, "Children are a map of their parents." This gives us a clue about Mrs. Bhamra's way of thinking and of her strict control of Jess. This same reasoning can be applied to Paula's fears about her daughter.)

Post-Viewing Discussion

-  Joe suggests that Jesminder ignore her father's wishes that she miss the final game adding, "Your parents don't always know what's best for you, Jess." What causes Joe to make such a statement? In what circumstances might Joe's statement be good advice? When would it not?
-  Mr. Bhamra does not support Jess's hope to play soccer professionally. He speaks from experience about prejudice and disappointment. How do our experiences shape our thoughts, feelings, and prejudices?
-  In what way is Mr. Bhamra wrong not to support his daughter's hopes? Why is Joe in a better position to evaluate Jess's chances for success?
-  What is a dilemma? What dilemmas does Jess face in the course of the film?
-  Jess's mother expresses disappointment and confusion at her daughters' deceptions. She points out the parents bought whatever their daughters wanted. What would you say to Mrs. Bhamra in response?
-  Because Joe becomes a new source of inspiration for Jess, she loses interest in David Beckham. At the end of the film, she barely acknowledges Beckham's arrival at the airport. How might Jess have reacted had she seen Beckham at the beginning of the film? Write a scene in which Jess goes to Heathrow Airport early in the film to meet her sister at work and she sees Beckham arriving.
-  What is the purpose of last scene in the film showing Joe playing cricket with Mr. Bhamra?
(Joe is getting to know Jess's father via her dad's interests. This will help Mr. Bhamra to get to know him, making it possible for Joe to establish a relationship with Jess.)

Conflict

 Unlike many stories, there is no character in the film who represents a villain. The plot involves both internal and external conflict relating to the film's themes. Show how each of the following provides conflict: attitude, tradition, concepts of propriety and role expectation, generational differences, values, and perceptions of others.

(Pinky is a traditionalist. She is concerned foremost with her wedding, and she demands Jessie's assistance. Jess struggles against conformity and the expectations imposed on her by cultural tradition. Her mother's opposition to Jess's love of soccer is founded in her adherence to traditional attitudes and mores. Soccer, according to Mrs. Bhamra, is un-lady-like behavior. Her attitude is typified by her view of a woman's role; she insists, for example, that Jess learn to prepare a full twelve-course Punjabi dinner ("meat and vegetarian"). The aunts and friends we see at Pinky's engagement party seem to be copies of each other. They symbolize the conformity and loss of identity that Jess resists.

A secondary conflict involves Jess' relationship with Jules. Jess's reaction to the picture of Jules with Joe is our first clue that Jess is also attracted to her coach. In addition to the antagonism that results with Jules, Jess also knows her interest in Joe would contravene her parents' expectations and wishes. Her struggle concerning Joe is also an internal one, as she continues to show an interest in him. We see her almost kiss Joe in Hamburg. Later, she undoes her hair to look more womanly before talking to Joe at the soccer club, and she questions Pinky about her parents' reaction if she brought home a white boyfriend.

Joe feels conflicted as well, both in his feelings for his father and for Jess. He wants his father's acceptance and praise, but he blames his father for his damaged knee that prevents him from playing soccer. In Hamburg, Joe sees Jess as young woman instead of a girl for first time. On the night of Pinky's pre-wedding celebration, he asks Jess if she is promised to another boy. But Joe is also realistic enough to know he cannot pursue a relationship with one of the team members.

Paula faces internal conflict in her belief that her daughter is gay; and Tony fears his friends will learn he is gay.)

⚽ In classical “hero” myths, we see the hero struggling to overcome obstacles that will threaten to prevent him attaining a goal or accomplishing a purpose. The hero reaches a significant low point, a figurative or literal descent into Hell, before he can move towards achieving his goal. An implied rebirth shows the hero emerging changed and victorious. What obstacles must Jess overcome? What incident marks the lowest point of her descent? What internal demons must Jess confront? In what sense does she emerge “re-born”?

(Jess suffers a series of defeats: she is forbidden to play soccer; she deceives her parents by pretending to have a job, and later a cold, to sneak off to play; she is blamed for Pinky’s broken engagement. Her trip to Germany marks her deepest descent: she lies to parents to take the trip, then loses the game on a missed penalty kick. Next, she alienates Jules who thinks Jess is stealing Joe from her. Finally, her parents learn she has been lying to them all along, and this ends her participation on the team. Only when her father grants her permission does she return to the team and achieve her success.)

David Beckham represents a surrogate father and internal mentor to Jess. She “confides” in him in private. Her room as a quasi shrine to Beckham as inspiration.



Parminder Nagra in ***BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM***

Photo Credit: Christine Parry

Symbol and Metaphor

⚽ What does Beckham symbolize for Jess?

(Mr. Bhamra does not support his daughter's goals initially, so Beckham represents a surrogate father figure to Jess. Jess wears a Beckham 7 t-shirt when playing soccer with the guys. Beckham's jersey number is 7. When Joe asks her where she plays, meaning what position, she responds that "right" is best. Beckham plays right midfielder.)

⚽ We have previously seen Jess miss a penalty shot. As she prepares to kick the penalty shot that will decide the outcome of the championship game, we hear "Nessum Dorma" from Puccini's opera, *Turandot*, on the soundtrack. The song's lyrics include the lines, "...my secret lies hidden within me... At dawn, I shall win! I shall win! I shall win!" What visual metaphor is used in this scene, and why is it significant?

(Jess imagines Pinky, her mother, and her aunts standing in a line between her and the goal. In a symbolic sense, she must get around tradition to achieve her goal.)

⚽ David Beckham has just returned to England as Jess prepares to board the airplane for America. How might this situation be read in symbolic terms?

(One might consider the symbolic significance of Beckham returning to (Mother) England, but Jess is leaving for America (the New World) to pursue her own success. Jess no longer depends on the father figures.)



Photo Credit: Christine Parry

“Beckham’s uncanny ability to ‘bend’ the ball around a wall of players into the goal is a great metaphor for what young girls (and film directors) go through. You see your goal, you know where you want to go, but you’ve got to twist and turn and bend the rules to get there.”

Director Gurinder Chadha

©Fox Searchlight Pictures Weekend Read