

Bend It Like Beckham (2002)



Directed by Gurinder Chadha

Genre: Comedy / Drama

User Rating: ★★☆☆☆ 7.5/10 (6,524 votes)

Country UK / Germany

Language: English / Hindi / Punjabi

Runtime: 106 minutes

Plot Outline: The daughter of orthodox Sikhs rebels against her parents' traditionalism by running off to Germany with a football team.

A comedy about bending the rules to reach your goal, Bend It Like Beckham explores the world of women's football, from kick-about in the park to freekicks in the Final. Set in Hounslow, West London and Hamburg, the film follows two 18 year olds with their hearts set on a future in professional soccer. Heart-stopping talent doesn't seem to be enough when your parents want you to hang up your football boots, find a nice boyfriend and learn to cook the perfect Indian meal.

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The movie, set in London, tells the story of Jesminder Bhamra, known as "Jess," (Parminder K. Nagra) who comes from a traditional Indian family. Her parents are Sikhs who fled from Uganda to England, where her dad works at Heathrow airport. They live in the middle-class suburb of Hounslow, under the flight path of arriving jets, where her mother believes that Jess has two great duties in life: to learn to prepare a complete Indian meal, and to marry a nice Indian boy.

Jess plays soccer with boys in the park. In her family's living room is a large portrait of a Sikh spiritual leader, but above Jess's bed is her own inspiration--the British soccer superstar David Beckham, better known to some as Posh Spice's husband. To Beckham's portrait she confides her innermost dream, which is to play for England. Of course a girl cannot hope to be a soccer star, and an Indian girl should not play soccer at all, since in her mother's mind the game consists of "displaying your bare legs to complete strangers."

Jess is seen in the park one day by Juliette (Keira Knightley), who plays for the Hounslow Harriers, a woman's team, and is recruited to join them. The coach is a young Irishman named Joe (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), and it is love at second or third sight--complicated, because Joe cannot date his players, and Juliette is interested in him, too.

"Bend It Like Beckham is good not because it is particularly original but because it is flawless in executing a dependable formula. The parents must be strict and traditional, but also loving and funny, and Mr. and Mrs. Bhamra (Anupam Kher and Shaheen Khan) are classic examples of the type, as is Juliette's mother, Paula (Juliet Stevenson.)

Jess is a physically exuberant girl whose love of soccer crosses over into a love of life. She runs onto the field as if simply at play, she does cartwheels after scoring goals, and although she deceives her parents about her soccer dreams, she loves them and understands their point of view. Her father, who played cricket in Uganda but was discriminated against by the local London club, still bears deep wounds, but "things are different now," Jess tells him, and - of course - he sneaks into the crowd at a match to see for himself.

The movie's values run deep. It understands that for Jess' generation soccer is not about displaying bare legs (Jess has another reason to be shy about that), but it also understands the hopes and ambitions of parents--and, crucially, so does Jess, who handles the tentative romance with her coach in a way that combines tenderness with common sense. A closing scene at the airport shows her tact and love.

Like all good movies, "Bend It Like Beckham" crosses over to wide audiences. Its characters and sensibility are abundantly lovable.

(from a review by Roger Ebert)

Discussion:

1. Discuss the main character, Jesminder. Would you like to be her/her friend/her boyfriend ...?
2. Discuss the contrast between Jesminder and her sister.
3. Which of the **secondary** characters did you like best?
4. Which scene do you find most memorable? Why?
5. In your view, what are the main themes of the film?
6. The film has an open ending. What would you like to see Jesminder do in the future?