



***READING AND WRITING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: POSTWAR; POSTMODERN;
POSTCOLONIAL***

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5.3. Gurinder Chadha, *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002)

Reading Skills

I

1. What is the meaning of the title of the film? What is the pun on the word "bend"?
2. Analyse the representation of Jesminder (Jess), paying special attention to her ethnic background.
3. What is Jess's main objective in life? Does she have any serious prospects of attaining it?
4. Why can't Jess be open about her life passion with her parents?
5. Assess the difference between Jess and her sister Pinky. What is Pinky's main objective in life?
6. In what way are Jess's parents depicted in the film? Is there any difference between the way each of them is treated? Give examples.
7. What do Jess's parents want her to study at university?
8. What is Jess's mother extremely interested in teaching her daughters?
9. Analyse the importance of conventions/tradition for Jess's household and for Pinky's boyfriend's family.
10. Why do Pinky's boyfriend's family call off the engagement?
11. What is Juliette's (Jules) main objective in life?
12. In what way are Jules's parents depicted in the film? Is there any difference between the way each of them is treated? Give examples.
13. How do Jules's parents react to their daughter's interest in football?
14. What kind of woman is Jules's mother? What is she like? Give examples.
15. What is she worried about after overhearing Jules and Jess's conversation in her daughter's bedroom?
16. Who/what does she blame for Jules's supposed lesbianism?
17. How does Jules's father react?
18. Who is Joe?
19. Why is he coaching the Hounslow Harriers?
20. What is his ethnic origin? Has he been discriminated against because of this?
21. Why does he reprimand Jess for attacking a member of the rival team who has insulted her with a racist epithet, a fact that ends with Jess being given a red card?
22. What is he going to do at the end of the film? Why?
23. What do Jess's father and Joe do at the end of the film?
24. Who is Tony?
25. What is his sexual orientation? Is he open about it? Why/why not?
26. Why does he tell Jess about it? How does she react?
27. What does Tony ask Jess's parents permission for towards the end of the film?
28. Do we see him at any moment with a partner?
29. What is his situation at the end of the film?
30. Where do the girls go at the end of the film?

II

1. In what ways is the issue of gender-bending present in the film?
2. In what ways can gender be seen as a construct in *Bend It Like Beckham*? Give examples from the film.
3. Find examples of the construction of femininity in the film.
4. What kind of relationship does Pinky have with her boyfriend? What does this tell us about British Asians?
5. How does the film view female friendship?
6. Why does Jules define Jess as “having balls” when she first mentions her to Joe? What does her use of words imply?
7. Is Jules represented as a ‘tomboy’, as ‘butch’? What are the implications of this kind of representation?
8. At several moments in the film, both girls are told—directly and indirectly—to behave like “proper women”. Identify some of these moments. What do you think is meant by such words?
9. At some point in the film, Jess complains that “boys don’t have to come home and help”. Does this sound familiar to you?
10. How do Black and White parents react towards their offspring’s interests in sport?
11. At the end of the film, Jess’s mother gives up her battle against her daughter playing football with the following words: “At least I’ve taught her a full Indian dinner. The rest is up to her”. What are the implications of these words?
12. What is the discourse on race put forward by the film? Does the film represent multicultural Britain? Give examples.
13. Find out about the ethnic distribution of London, and particularly of the Western part of the city, where the action of the film is set.
14. What do you know about Hinduism?
15. What is the difference between an Indian and a Hindu?
16. Identify the location of the Punjab and define its main characteristics.
17. Do some research on Sikhism. What are the main tenets of the Sikh faith?
18. What is the difference between a Sikh and a Muslim?
19. What is ‘Aloo Gobi’?
20. Identify three Punjabi dishes.
21. What do you know about East Indian food? Identify three of its main dishes.
22. What is a ‘Salwar Kameez’?
23. Where is South Asia? Which countries compose it?
24. Where does the London South Asian community predominantly reside?
25. Find out about any ethnic clashes that took place in the UK after World War II, paying particular attention to those which took place in 2002, the year when the film was shot. In what way does this information affect your reading of the film?
26. “You know how hard it is for our children over here. Sometimes they misjudge and start behaving like the kids here”. Discuss the implications behind these words uttered by Jess’s father.

27. The film shows the existence of both tradition and modernity coexisting both within the South Asian and the White communities. Find some examples.
28. In what ways does the film represent 'postcolonial hybridity' in the United Kingdom?
29. Discuss the representation of Indians and British Asians in the film.
30. Discuss the film's representation of Irishness.
31. Discuss the connection effected by the film between being racially abused for coming from a non-white ethnic background and being Irish.
32. When Jess is thinking about giving up football, Joe tells Jess he would have loved to see her "playing for England". Discuss the implications behind these words bearing in mind the character that utters them.
33. Why is Jess uncomfortable when naked in front of the other girls in the locker room? What does this tell us about her?
34. What is the discourse on sexuality put forward by the film?
35. Isn't sexuality conspicuous by its very absence?
36. What is the film's treatment of homosexuality? Is the film homophobic? Is *Bend It Like Beckham* a queer film?
37. In what ways does the film put together examples of different types of discrimination? In what ways can Jess's gender and race, Jules's gender, Joe's Irishness and Tony's homosexuality be understood?
38. What seems to be the film's attitude towards racism/intolerance?
39. Why do you think Joe decides to stay with the Hounslow Harriers at the end of the film? Is it realistic?
40. Why do you think the film leaves open the relationship between Jess and Joe?
41. What is the symbolic significance of Jess's father and Joe playing cricket together in West London at the end of the film?
42. The film places great emphasis on avoiding lies and on overcoming gender and racial barriers. Do you think that this is generally achieved?
43. The character of Tony, Jess's closeted cousin, is the way in which the film reflects homosexuality in the British Asian community in London. What do you think of the representation of the character? What does the fact that he is the only character without a 'fairy tale' ending show?
44. Is this a feminist film? Discuss.
45. Discuss the use of editing in the film.
46. Discuss the use of music in the film.
47. Discuss particular instances of the use of cinematographic language in *Bend It Like Beckham*.

Writing Skills

1. Toril Moi, in "Feminist, Female, Feminine", defines 'femaleness' as "a matter of biology", 'femininity' as "a set of culturally defined characteristics" and 'feminism' as "a political position". (Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1989. p. 117). Write an essay on the presence of Moi's categories in Chadha's film, discussing their depiction and giving examples from the text.

2. "One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one". (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage, 1973 (1949). p. 301). Discuss de Beauvoir's statement and apply it to *Bend It Like Beckham*. Illustrate your answer by close reference to the film.
3. In the film, "differences between siblings and parents are prompted by the reactions of Asian-born Britons, or Britons of mixed race and culture, to their inheritance". (Amy Sargeant, *British Cinema: A Critical History*. London: BFI, 2005. p. 341). Comment on the above lines bearing in mind the characters of Jess and Pinky. Argue your case in the light of the film as a whole.
4. A number of contemporary British films "take the contemporary experiences of multiculturalism and transnationality as their central themes. They thus explore the complex and occasionally aggressive negotiations and resistances that take place between different cultural identities and formations in post-colonial England". (Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson, *British Cinema: Past and Present*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. p. 38). In what way/s could the above lines be applied to Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*? Illustrate your answer by close reference to the film.
5. "*Bend It Like Beckham* explores the queer connections between race, class, gender, and sexuality". (Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. p. 274). Discuss by making close reference to the film.
6. Michael Giardina has described how the film attempts to "challenge longstanding colonial and patriarchal narratives of dominance and subordination, both within Britain and sport". (C. Richard King and David J. Leonard, eds. *Visual Economies of/in Motion: Sport and Film*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2006. p. 50). Discuss by making close reference to the film.
7. According to Justine Ashby, "the film frames questions of racial and sexual identity within an upbeat, postfeminist idiom". ("Postfeminism in the British Frame". *Cinema Journal* 44, No.2, Winter 2005, p. 130). Do you agree with the above quote? Why/why not? Argue your case in the light of the film as a whole.