

SEMESTER-I

ENGLISH-MDC-I

Notes on *Bend It Like Beckham* by Narinder Dhani

1. Discuss how *Bend It Like Beckham* portrays the conflict between traditional Indian values and modern British culture.

Or,

How does Jess negotiate her dual identity? Discuss.

Cultural Conflict & Identity

Bend It Like Beckham by Narinder Dhani explores the struggles of a young British-Indian girl, Jess Bhamra, who aspires to become a footballer despite strong cultural expectations. The novel centrally engages with themes of identity and cultural conflict within an immigrant family context.

The cultural conflict is evident from the beginning, where Jess's family prioritizes traditional values such as marriage, domestic roles, and social reputation. Events like Pinky's engagement and wedding preparations highlight the expectations placed on daughters. Jess, however, finds joy and self-expression in football, creating a tension between her personal desires and familial obligations.

This conflict intensifies when Jess secretly joins the Hounslow Harriers and lies about working at HMV to continue playing. Her dual life reflects the struggle of negotiating two identities—one rooted in tradition and the other shaped by modern aspirations. Incidents such as the misunderstanding with Teetu's family and her parents discovering her involvement in football further deepen this divide.

The turning point occurs during Pinky's wedding when Jess's father recognizes her unhappiness and allows her to play in the final match. Ultimately, he supports her decision to pursue a football scholarship in America, symbolizing a reconciliation between tradition and individual ambition.

Thus, the novel presents identity as a process of negotiation rather than rejection, where Jess successfully balances her cultural heritage with her personal dreams.

2. Examine how the novel challenges gender stereotypes through football.

Or,

In what ways does Jess's journey redefine the role of women?

Gender & Sports

Narinder Dhama's *Bend It Like Beckham* critically examines gender roles by placing a young girl at the center of a male-dominated sport. Through Jess's journey, the novel challenges traditional ideas about femininity and women's participation in sports.

Initially, Jess plays football informally with boys, where she faces teasing and skepticism about her abilities. This reflects societal assumptions that football is unsuitable for girls. However, her talent becomes evident, especially when she is invited by Jules to join the Hounslow Harriers, a women's football team.

The Harriers provide Jess with a supportive and professional environment where women train seriously and aspire to play at higher levels, including opportunities in the United States. This exposure broadens her understanding of women's roles in sports and strengthens her ambition.

Despite this progress, Jess faces resistance at home. Her mother insists on traditional gender roles, emphasizing cooking, marriage, and modest behaviour. The contrast between Pinky's wedding preparations and Jess's football activities highlights the tension between conventional femininity and modern aspirations.

Jess's actions—secretly buying football boots, continuing training despite restrictions, and performing in important matches—represent her resistance to gender norms. Her eventual success, including scoring goals and earning a scholarship, demonstrates that women are equally capable in sports.

Therefore, the novel not only challenges gender stereotypes but also redefines women's roles, presenting sport as a legitimate avenue for female empowerment and independence.

3. Critically analyse the role of Jess's parents in shaping her choices. Do they act as obstacles or enablers in her journey?

Parental Influence

In Narinder Dhama's *Bend It Like Beckham*, parental influence plays a crucial role in shaping Jess's journey. The novel portrays the complexities of family dynamics within a traditional immigrant household, where expectations often conflict with individual aspirations.

Jess's mother represents strict adherence to cultural norms. She discourages football, viewing it as inappropriate for a girl and prioritizing domestic skills and marriage. Her constant disapproval creates a restrictive environment that forces Jess to hide her passion.

In contrast, Jess's father is more understanding but initially cautious. His reluctance stems from his own negative experiences with racism in sports, making him protective of Jess. While he does not openly support her at first, he does not completely dismiss her interests either.

The tension escalates when Jess lies about her activities and is eventually caught, leading to disappointment and stricter control from her parents. These conflicts highlight the generational divide between traditional values and modern ambitions.

A significant transformation occurs during Pinky's wedding. Observing Jess's unhappiness, her father encourages her to play in the final match and later supports her decision to pursue

football in America. This shift reflects his realization that personal happiness is more important than rigid adherence to tradition.

Thus, while Jess's parents initially act as obstacles, they ultimately become enablers of her dreams. Their evolving attitudes underscore the importance of understanding and adaptation within family relationships.

4. Trace the development of Jess as a protagonist. How does she evolve from conflict to self-realization?

Character Development of Jess

The novel *Bend It Like Beckham* by Narinder Dhama traces the growth of Jess Bhamra from a conflicted adolescent to a confident individual who asserts her identity. Her development is shaped by her experiences, relationships, and challenges.

At the beginning, Jess is passionate about football but lacks the confidence to openly pursue it due to family pressure. She feels out of place during family events like Pinky's engagement, where traditional expectations dominate. This establishes her initial internal conflict.

Her development begins when she joins the Hounslow Harriers, where she gains exposure to structured training and supportive teammates. Encouragement from Jules and Joe helps her overcome insecurities, such as her embarrassment about her scar.

Jess's willingness to take risks marks a significant stage in her growth. She lies to her parents, participates in matches, and travels to Germany, where she experiences both success and failure, including missing a crucial penalty. These experiences build resilience and maturity.

Her emotional growth is also evident in her relationships. Conflicts with Jules and her feelings for Joe teach her about trust, responsibility, and self-awareness. The climax of her development occurs when she chooses to pursue football despite family opposition.

By the end, Jess openly declares her ambitions and gains her father's support, symbolizing her transformation into an independent and self-assured individual who embraces both her identity and dreams.

5. Analyse how internal and external conflicts structure the narrative of the novel. How do these conflicts drive the plot forward?

Narrative Structure & Conflict

Narinder Dhama's *Bend It Like Beckham* follows a linear narrative structure driven by a series of internal and external conflicts that shape Jess's journey. The novel effectively uses these conflicts to develop both plot and character.

The story begins with Jess's introduction as a football-loving girl constrained by family expectations, establishing the central conflict between personal ambition and cultural norms. This internal conflict persists throughout the narrative, as Jess struggles with guilt and fear of disappointing her parents.

External conflicts arise from multiple sources. Her family opposes her involvement in football, leading to secrecy and tension. Her friendship with Jules is strained due to misunderstandings involving Joe, while challenges on the field—including competitive pressure and instances of racism—add further complexity.

Key events such as joining the Harriers, being discovered by her parents, the Germany match, and Pinky's wedding mark important turning points in the narrative. These moments escalate the conflict and drive the plot forward.

The climax occurs when Jess plays in the final match, supported by her father, and proves her ability. The resolution follows with her acceptance into a football program in America, signaling both personal and narrative closure.

Thus, the novel's structure effectively integrates emotional, social, and cultural conflicts, making Jess's journey compelling and coherent.

6. What role does Jules Paxton play in the development of the plot? Discuss.

Jules Paxton- Character Sketch & Her Role

In *Bend It Like Beckham* by Narinder Dhami, Jules Paxton is one of the most significant supporting characters who plays a vital role in shaping Jess's journey. She represents a confident, independent young woman who challenges traditional gender norms through her passion for football.

Jules is first introduced when she notices Jess playing football and invites her to join the Hounslow Harriers, a women's football team. This moment is crucial, as it opens the door for Jess to pursue football seriously. Jules's encouragement and belief in Jess's talent act as a catalyst for Jess's development as a player.

Unlike Jess, Jules comes from a more liberal background where playing football is not culturally restricted, though she still faces pressure from her mother, who expects her to conform to conventional femininity. This parallel highlights that gender expectations affect women across different cultures.

Jules's friendship with Jess is central to the narrative. Initially supportive and motivating, their bond is tested due to misunderstandings involving their coach, Joe. Jules feels betrayed when she believes Jess has crossed boundaries, leading to tension between them. However, their reconciliation reflects the strength and resilience of their friendship.

As a character, Jules also acts as a foil to Jess. While Jess struggles with cultural restrictions, Jules struggles more with societal expectations of femininity. Together, they represent different aspects of women's experiences in sports.

In conclusion, Jules is a dynamic and empowering character whose friendship, support, and challenges significantly influence Jess's personal growth and the overall development of the narrative.

7. Evaluate the significance of friendship (especially Jules and Joe) in Jess's journey. How do these relationships contribute to her empowerment?

Role of Friendship & Support Systems

In Narinder Dhami's *Bend It Like Beckham*, friendship and support systems play a vital role in shaping Jess's journey and enabling her to pursue her dreams. These relationships provide emotional strength and practical encouragement.

Jules is the most significant influence, as she introduces Jess to the Hounslow Harriers and helps her realize her potential. Their shared passion for football creates a strong bond, although

it is temporarily strained due to misunderstandings involving Joe. This conflict highlights the complexities of friendship.

Tony also plays a crucial role as a supportive friend. He encourages Jess to continue playing despite family opposition and later helps her by proposing a fake engagement to convince her parents to allow her to go to America. His actions demonstrate loyalty and selflessness.

Joe, as a coach, acts as a mentor who recognizes Jess's talent and motivates her to improve. His belief in her abilities strengthens her confidence and commitment to football.

These support systems are essential in helping Jess overcome challenges such as family restrictions, self-doubt, and social pressures. They provide her with the courage to take risks and assert her identity.

Overall, friendship in the novel is not merely supportive but transformative, enabling Jess to navigate conflicts and ultimately achieve her aspirations.