

Roger Thomas

“Bend It Like Beckham”

The film industry is still in shock and awe over the success last year of a little film called “My Big Fat Greek Wedding.” Though it will not match “Wedding’s” success, “Bend It Like Beckham” is currently poised to surprise the industry with its final box-office grosses.

After more than 80 days in release, the film ranked 10th at the box office. No other film in the top 10 has been in release for even half as long as “Beckham” has.

“Bend It Like Beckham” tells a simple story about a talented young person, Jesminder or Jess for short, who defies her cultural upbringing and her parents by playing soccer for a local girls team. It turns out that Jess is quite good, but that means nothing to her parents, who insist she quit the team once they discover she is playing.

Jess’ family is Indian, and they are practicing Sikhs. The parents believe that their daughter should be concerned with finding a good Indian husband and learning how to be a good Indian wife. Jess’ sister is already succeeding in both areas, as she is engaged to a nice young Indian man.

Jess, however, does not want the same things from life that her sister desires. Jess dreams of being like the British professional soccer player, David Beckham. (The film’s title refers to what Beckham can do with a soccer ball.) So, defying her parents, as youth often do in these sorts of stories, Jess sneaks off to play.

Many laughs and some touching moments follow as the family discovers her betrayal, plans her sister’s traditional wedding, and as Jess falls in love with her Irish coach, fights with her best friend on the team, and of course, plans to play in the big game where an American scout can see her skill.

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Beckham follows in the tradition of films like 1989's "Dead Poet's Society" and 2000's "Billy Elliot." In both of those films, and many others through the years, young people have defied their parents and followed their dreams. Sometimes the result has been positive as in "Elliot," and sometimes the result brings tragedy as in "Poet's Society."

"Beckham" makes it very clear that the teachings of the Sikhs, like the teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition, command that children honor and obey their parents. What happens, however, when parents want to prevent their children from following their dreams and using their God-given talents?

Is it morally sound advice to say children should ignore their gifts and blindly follow their parents' wishes? Is this good stewardship of the gifts God has given one? No one would argue that any child should honor his parents by allowing them to continually do physical harm to the child. Is it any less abusive to prevent a child from discovering her own destiny?

Certainly, some traditions would say: "Yes. It is not abusive because God gives parents all the wisdom and knowledge to know what is best for the child." Of course, there are some religious groups, including certain branches that claim to be Christian, who endorse all forms of physical discipline, no matter how destructive.

Though "Beckham" can stimulate some interesting conversations about obeying the fifth commandment, following one's heart and abusing parental privilege, ultimately this is just a charming, fun, insightful comedy about a culture most Americans don't experience. In the midst of yet another summer film season filled with explosions and special effects, the simple charm of this film is perhaps what is keeping it in theaters.

"Bend It Like Beckham" is certainly a film worth seeking out.

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[Roger Thomas](#) is pastor of First Baptist Church in Albemarle, N.C.

MPAA Rating: PG-13 for language and some sexual situations

Director: Gurinder Chadha

Writers: Gurinder Chadha, Paul Mayeda Berges, Guljit Bindra

Cast: Jesminder Bhamra: Parminder K. Nagra; Juliette Paxton: Keira Knightley;
Joe: Jonathan Rhys-Meyers; Mr. Bhamra: Anupam Kher; Pinky Bhamra: Archie
Panjabi.