

**Breaking Boundaries: Gender Dynamics in *Dangal***

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# **Breaking Boundaries: Gender Dynamics in *Dangal***

**Dissertation submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts**

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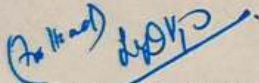
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project titled "Breaking Boundaries: Gender Dynamics in *Dangal*" is a bonafide record of a study carried out by Aleena Vincent, Amala Justin, Anandi S.N., Andrhea Clement, and Anupama B. at the Department of English, All Saints' College under my guidance and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, First Degree Programme in English and Communicative English under CBCS System.





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## DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the project entitled "Breaking Boundaries: Gender Dynamics in *Dangal*" is a record of research work carried out by us at the Department of English, All Saints' College, under the guidance of Dr Nishel Prem Elias, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, First Degree Programme in English and Communicative English under CBCS System.

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## PREFACE

This project examines the topic “Breaking Boundaries: Gender Dynamics in *Dangal*”. It explores the exceptional movie *Dangal* as a catalyst for women's empowerment, with a particular focus on the realm of sports. The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with themes such as the significance of women in sports and the history of wrestling. The second chapter is an analysis of the film's portrayal of the girls' arduous journey and their struggles with societal norms. The third chapter investigated the profound influence and impact of *Dangal* on its viewers.

Women all over the world face discrimination in various aspects of life such as health, education, work, and even sports. Despite a constitution that claims equal rights for both men and women, gender discrimination remains a serious issue in our country binding women under preconceived notions about the conduct and the role that they are to play in society.

Such discrimination is exposed and even criticised in *Dangal*, where two girls from a rural village in Haryana fall victim to the struggles and difficulties women face as they try to take control of what is rightfully theirs. The movie is a testament to women's emancipation as the powerful narrative unfolds showing how the girls overcome their challenges to become international sports heroes. The Phogat's' success story makes a significant contribution to feminist cinema. It raises awareness about the inherent potential strength of women while highlighting the systemic barriers they face.

By addressing these aspects, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on the role of cinema in promoting women's empowerment and advocating for equal opportunities for women, particularly in sports.



## Chapter One

### Introduction

A biopic or biographical film is a film that tells the story of the life of a real person such as a monarch, political leader, artist, or a sports personality. The term "Biopic" is derived from the combination of the words 'biography' and 'pictures'. It defines a biographical film making use of a narrative style to depict the lives of genuine individuals portrayed by actors or actresses on camera. It shows the life of a person and the central character's real name is used. There have been many biopics made recently on various personalities but these days sports biopics have become popular. Such as *Bhaag Milka Bhaag*, *M.S Dhoni: The Untold Story*, *Mary Kom*, *Paan Singh Tomar* and *Dangal*. For many, they are the dream project and pay attention to their favourite sports star and also the audience were inspired and celebrating the victory of their favourite sports person. Women in sports are defined differently. Sports biopics are objectionable but the main aim of making such movies was always about promoting other sports in India. Indian women have been steadily building their reputation as skilled sportspersons on national and international platforms and they have brought several medals to our country. Anything that men can do well, women can do better. There are a lot of living examples of women sportspersons who are stimulated through our Bollywood movies.

Biopics, particularly those centered on sports, have garnered immense popularity. Athletes have emerged as profound sources of inspiration for film-makers eager to bring their stories to the screen. Bollywood has endeavoured to showcase the athletic prowess of numerous leading actresses, successfully crafting memorable films that celebrate the achievements of our country's sportswomen. Biographical movies like *Mary Kom*,

*Dangal*, *Saina*, among others, serve as inspirations, prompting us to alleviate the intrinsic value of life.

*Mary Kom*, the film was released in 2014, is about Mangte Chungneijang Kom, a famous Indian boxer. It was the first women-centric sports biopic in India. The film also tackles issues related to women empowerment, and the struggles faced by a woman in balancing her personal and professional life. *Mary Kom* has set a new standard for the women of India who are emotionally charged, powerful and infinitely inspiring in so many ways such as facing career and life challenges while following a passion. The film serves as a powerful and motivational piece for women of all ages and diverse cultures.

The biopic *Saina* based on the life of badminton Saina Nehwal, is yet another biographical sports film. She is the first-ever badminton player from India to clinch an Olympic medal. The Indian shuttler created history when she won the bronze medal at the London 2012 Games. The Haryana shuttler started turning heads very early on in her career when she won the BWF World Junior Championships in 2008. The same year she made her first Olympics appearance in Beijing, but it was only in London in 2012 that she gained worldwide fame. The Indian shuttler successfully did that by representing India at the highest level in 2008 at the Beijing Olympics. En route to becoming the first Indian woman to reach the last eight of the Olympic quarter-finals, a young Saina Nehwal defeated the then world number five Wang Chen of Hong Kong before losing to Indonesia's Maria Kristin Yulianti in the quarter-finals of Beijing 2008.

*Saand Ki Aankh* is a Bollywood film released in 2019. It's a biographical movie about the inspiring story of sharpshooters Chandro and Prakash Tomar. The film was directed by Tushar Hiranandani and produced by Anurag Kashyap, Reliance Entertainment



and Nidhi Parmar. The film features Taapsee Pannu, Bhumi Pednekar and Prakash Jha in the leading roles, and Pawan Chopra, Kuldeep Sareen, Vineet Kumar Singh and Shaad Randhawa in the supporting roles. The film is based on the lives of sharpshooters Chandro and Prakash Tomar. The film was released on 25 October 2019. The main theme of the *Saand Ki Aankh* revolves around empowerment, breaking stereotypes, and celebrating the spirit of women. It highlights the incredible journey of Chandro and Prakash Tomar, who defied societal norms and became renowned sharpshooters despite facing numerous challenges. The film showcases their determination, courage, and the importance of pursuing one's dreams regardless of age or gender. It soon became an inspiring story for the women. It even received a lot of praise for its powerful performances. It's a powerful and inspiring portrayal of women in sports. The leading ladies of *Saand Ki Aankh*, Taapsee Pannu and Bhumi Pednekar, should be applauded for taking up the challenge of portraying women far older than their age. The story is set in Johri village of Baghpat district in Uttar Pradesh, and some parts of the film were filmed in Hastinapur and Mawana, but it is highly influenced by the culture of Haryana. Here, women are not allowed to step out of their homes to earn money. Despite doing all the household chores, taking care of kids and working in the field, they are called 'useless' by the men of the family, who are mostly seen idling around, smoking hookah. For the men here, their women are mere child-making machines who have been married off by their families to do the men's work.

*Shabaash Mithu* is a 2022 Bollywood movie based on the life of the Indian cricketer Mithali Raj. Her 23-year-long career is riddled with accolades and achievements, including breaking the world record for highest individual Test score at the age of 19 and serving as the first Indian captain to lead the country to two World Cup finals. The role of Mithali Raj



was played by the Bollywood actress Taapsee Pannu. Taapsee Pannu is the only 'hero' in *Shabaash Mithu*. The film was directed by Srijit Mukherji and produced by Viacom18 Studios. The film showcases the inspiring journey of Mithali Raj, who became one of the most successful and influential female cricketers in India. The film also highlights her struggles, achievements, and the challenges she faced in a male-dominated sport. It's a story of resilience, passion, and the power of chasing your dreams. It revolves around determination, breaking barriers, and women empowerment in the world of cricket.

Wrestling is an ancient sport that has captivated people for centuries. It is a physical and strategic battle between two opponents, where strength, technique, and agility play crucial roles. Wrestling can be found in various forms around the world, each with its own unique rules and traditions. It is a sport that demands discipline, dedication, and mental toughness. Whether it is traditional Indian wrestling or Olympic-style wrestling, the sport continues to showcase the incredible athleticism and determination of its participants.

Wrestling enjoys significant popularity in India, boasting a storied and rich history within the country. It has been practised for centuries and is deeply rooted in Indian culture. Wrestling, a sport practised in various styles by two competitors, involves forcing an opponent to touch the ground with some part of the body other than his feet; forcing him into a certain position, usually on his back; or holding him in that position for a minimum length of time. Wrestling is conducted in various styles with contestants upright or on the ground. Wrestling began as a way for men to keep fit. It was a way of entertainment for royal families but has now emerged as a robust professional sport that brings India international fame.

Wrestling, known as "kushti" in India, holds a long and illustrious history within the country. It dates back thousands of years and has been mentioned in ancient texts like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Traditional Indian wrestling is known for its unique style called "Pehlwani," which combines physical strength, technique, and discipline. Wrestlers, known as "pehlwans", train rigorously and follow a strict lifestyle that includes a special diet and daily routines. This sport has produced many legendary wrestlers who have brought glory to India in national and international competitions. Wrestling in India continues to thrive with events like the Kushti World Championships and the Indian Wrestling League gaining popularity. It is truly a fascinating part of India's sporting heritage.

### ***DANGAL***

The movie *Dangal* is a fantastic portrayal of the inspiring journey of Indian wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat and his daughters Geeta and Babita. It showcases their struggles, dedication, and triumphs in the world of wrestling. The film beautifully captures the essence of the sport and highlights the importance of breaking gender barriers. *Dangal* has not only entertained audiences but also shed light on the incredible achievements of Indian wrestlers.

*Dangal* stands out from other movies as it tells us a unique and inspiring story of a father's determination to train his daughters in wrestling. It breaks stereotypes and showcases the incredible journey of Geeta and Babita Phogat, who go on to become successful wrestlers. The film beautifully captures the emotions, struggles, and triumphs of the characters, making it a memorable and impactful movie.



## Chapter Two

### Gender Politics in *Dangal*

For decades, female athletes have been fighting an uphill battle in the world of sports. Despite the progress made over time, such stereotyping remains a serious issue in our world today. Traditional gender roles and expectations can influence how women athletes are perceived and valued. Stereotypes that portray women as less physically capable or less interested in sports can undermine their achievements and limit their opportunities for recognition and advancement. One such challenge faced by female sportspersons is the stereotype that women are generally weaker and less athletic than men. The media frequently reinforces this image by emphasizing women's physical appearance rather than their abilities on the field or the court. In general, the concept of 'femininity' has historically been considered non-athletic.

Although the constitution of India grants both men and women equal rights, gender disparities continue to exist in the country. Research shows gender discrimination mostly in favour of men in many realms including sports. When compared to men, women face various constraints when it comes to sports. Meagre payments, lack of financial support, lack of female coaches, and little to no support from family and community, are but a few reasons that women struggle to reach great heights as far as sports is concerned.

*Dangal* released in 2016 is an excellent portrayal of the dominating patriarchal society and the strain it puts on women to achieve their goals and dreams. Disney's *Dangal*, released in 2016, is an inspiring and critically acclaimed Hindi movie that chronicles the remarkable journey of Geeta and Babita Phogat, two sisters who defied social norms to become world-renowned wrestlers. The movie emerges as a cinematic triumph under the



skilful direction of Indian director and screenwriter, Nikesh Tiwari, who artistically weaves the film together combining the elements of sports, family connections, and social commentary.

The movie is set in the backdrop of the Bhiwani district, a small rural village in Haryana. Haryana, located in northern India, is known for its regressive and patriarchal social norms, which restrict the growth and empowerment of women. The state has a deep-rooted bias for male children, shaped by factors such as feudal traditions, the agrarian economy, and the dowry system. The state's dominant focus on the agricultural sector places more importance on the requirement of physical strength and manual labour which has led to the perpetuated preference. This preference has led to an alarmingly low sex ratio. The sex ratio is a valuable metric that expresses the number of females per thousand males which is used for several demographic analyses such as mortality, migration, marital status, and economics. The state of Haryana has long grappled with a persistently low sex ratio, one of the lowest among all the states of the country.

Additionally, this characteristic male preference has resulted in restricted mobility, societal pressures, and limited educational opportunities for girls. In the state, men maintain their dominance over women in all spheres of life: social, economic, cultural and political, and even in sports. Sons are seen as assets who contribute to agricultural work, inherit property and provide financial security for the family, while daughters are viewed as liabilities due to dowry-related expenses.

The characters featured in *Dangal* give us a first-hand view of the struggles and challenges that the two sisters face to achieve their dreams. The movie opens with the great wrestling champion Mahavir Singh Phogat. Born in the Bhiwani district of Haryana,

Phogat himself was an accomplished wrestler during his competitive career. The role of Mahavir Singh was accurately played out by Aamir Khan in the film. Initially, we see Mahavir as an ambitious young wrestler at the peak of his career. However, Phogat's own wrestling career did not reach the heights of winning national and international awards. His aspirations in wrestling were hindered by financial constraints and lack of support at the time. Mahavir chooses to move on and start a family.

The gender biases and prejudices of the locals are clearly seen in the way Mahavir waits for the arrival of a son to carry on his unfulfilled dreams. The family welcomes their first daughter with a touch of disappointment. The preference for a boy child over a girl was strongly prevalent and continues to persist in some rural communities in India even today. The story shows how not only the Phogats but also other locals of the society make efforts, some practical and some supernatural, to ensure the delivery of a male child. The phenomenon of the prevailing preference for the boy child is deeply rooted in the minds of the people of Haryana even today.

The movie satirises the senseless practices, from eating 'magic pills' to drinking milk from cows that only give birth to males, that the locals follow to beget boy children instead of girls. Despite the performance of such practices, Mahavir's wife gives birth to four daughters. The girls were considered a failure in the wrestler's life story; a barricade to the man's wrestling dreams. But Phogat's dedication to his goal refused to look down on his daughters and considered them equally efficient in achieving his ambition.

Determined to fulfil his dream of winning an international gold medal for India, Phogat decides to train his daughters, Geeta and Babita Phogat, in wrestling. He faces strong opposition and criticism for coaching girls in a sport traditionally dominated by



men. People questioned his decision to invest time and effort in training girls, suggesting that it was against societal norms and that wrestling was not a suitable pursuit for girls. Despite the criticism, Mahavir shows great determination to bring out the girls' wrestling potential. His training methods, strict diets, and rigorous exercise drills are captured in the film, giving us a realistic depiction of the girls' climb to success.

When Mahavir disclosed his intentions to his family, he found not a single supporter among his kin. They were particularly resistant to the idea of the girls slugging out in the mud. The family argued that wrestling was traditionally a male stronghold, reenacting Mahavir's mission.

“Being villagers, they had stereotypical mindsets and limited vision, considering only marriage to be every girl's life goal. Even a college education for a girl was barely tolerated. Since an early age, girls were taught to handle household chores to enable them to easily settle into their husbands houses in the future. So it came as no surprise that they couldn't even comprehend my idea.” (Mahavir)

Not one to be deterred by the opposition, Mahavir remained focused on his goal of making his girls international champions. The movie highlights the hardships that the man had to go through to achieve this dream, as well as his positive, never-back-down attitude. One of the film's standout tracks is 'Haanikaarak Baapu' (Harmful Father), a song that humorously depicts the challenges and sacrifices faced by Geeta and Babita as they undergo intense training under their father's supervision. The song highlights the demanding nature of Mahavir's coaching style, portraying him as a tough taskmaster who pushes his daughters to their limits. Thus, a true epitome of inspiration and strength,



Mahavir Singh Phogat, through his dedication and hard work, was able to rewrite history.

The narrative then makes a shift from Mahavir to the girls, more specifically Geeta Phogat, his oldest. The girls find it tough to cope with their father's stringent training methods. The idea of training to become a wrestler was odd in itself in the eyes of the public. The girls faced social stigma and disapproval from members of their community. Gender stereotypes often result in limited opportunities for women in sports. Wrestling, at the time, was generally seen as a sport meant for men, and their participation was met with scepticism and judgment. Traditional expectations regarding femininity and athleticism create an additional layer of challenge for women in sports. Society often struggles to reconcile the image of a powerful, competitive athlete with stereotypical notions of femininity.

The film points to the different confrontations that the girls encounter throughout their wrestling journey, enduring comments and taunts that question their femininity. At the time, when females had been expected to wear dresses, cook and clean, raise children, maintain a beautiful delicate body, and remain passive, moral, and pure, Geeta and Babita are made to cut their hair short, dress up in boys' clothes and perform workouts that were once considered fit for only the "masculine". This adds to the humiliation they face as they are continuously taunted by their classmates calling them "men". Moreover, the girls had limited opportunities to compete and showcase their skills as women's wrestling was not a well-supported sport at the time.

The coach had a tough time with the organisers of local dangals who were quite sceptical about letting the girls compete in their dangals. The sports ground would be teeming with men, not a single woman in sight, not even in the audience, let alone the

competitors. Some would even insult Mahavir for ruining the culture of the sport by allowing those of the 'weaker sex' to compete. He would often have to bear sarcastic comments and taunts from organisers across the board for trying to include his daughters and provide them equal opportunities in wrestling. For most, it was considered nothing short of sacrilege. Convincing organisers to allow the girls to wrestle was not the only challenge, for the grounds were also devoid of other girls who could compete with Geeta and Babita. There were times they were denied entry to such matches for the fact that they were girls. The girls had to fight for opportunities to participate in such competitions and prove their worth on the mat. Since the girls did not have fellow female competitors, they were forced to compete with boys. Considering it a sort of interesting entertainment, boys would quickly jump in, expecting an easy win.

The 'first fight' scene between young Geeta and a male competitor gains public recognition for the brave fight that the former was able to put up against the boy, even though she had ultimately lost. Soon after, with continuous training, the girls can defend and even win against male opponents in wrestling matches. Terrified by the thought of losing to a girl-which was considered a shameful disaster-even the boys started to withdraw. "We didn't realise it then, but all this made us resilient and prepared to fight anyone, be it a boy or a girl", remarked Mahavir's daughter. Their victories challenge the patriarchal belief that women are inherently weaker and incapable of competing with men. Geeta and Babita soon gained popularity in their community for their performance as wrestlers.

Upon entering the mud pit, the girls were instructed to discard any reservations and preconceived notions associated with their gender. Instead, they were encouraged to



display the same strength and tenacity that is generally associated with boys. It was this gender indifference and unbiased environment that became the girls' greatest strength and helped influence their performance in the world's largest sporting arenas.

The film shows the initial dread that the girls show towards their father's apparent odd ambitions. Gradually, they come to realise that Mahavir, unlike most fathers of rural households who force their daughters into marriage as soon as they turn teenagers, saw great potential for them to become independent sports sensations, and not just mere assets to be acquired by men. The movie features an emotional scene where a young girl, Mahavir's niece, is given in marriage at the tender age of fourteen years. This heartfelt scene highlights the main message that the movie aims to express – that women are more than just what is portrayed as their stereotype. They are worth so much more than just their bodies.

The girl's wedding gives us a brutally honest image of a victim of child marriage – a common practice in rural India. The scene shows music and dance, fun and frolic as a whole, but when we look at the bride's face, the girl looks lost and hopeless, and perhaps even terrified of what responsibilities she is to bear under the burden of early marriage. Everyone appears to be having fun, dancing cheerfully around the deep sadness of the bride who is forced to be married off at an unsuitable age. The girl's emotional turmoil, depicted through her demeanour of depression, loneliness, and fear, serves as a powerful commentary on the impact of cultural norms on individual lives. The young girl is robbed of her childhood by being forced into marriage under societal pressures and the expectations of her family and society.

The little girl tells her cousins that they ought to be grateful to their father for his



faith in their capability to become independent women instead of dependent wives. The touching scene voices the silent cries of those young girls who fall victim to child marriage. It is through this experience that Geeta and Babita realise the value of their father's training. The girls' attitude towards their father and wrestling take a U-turn and they decide to willingly cooperate during practice, making it easier for Mahavir to coach them to become, first district and then, state-level champions.

As the movie progresses, we see the girls' significant achievements in wrestling, bagging trophies from various competitions. Financial difficulties arise as Mahavir struggles to find adequate resources to support the girls' training. Female athletes often struggle to secure lucrative sponsorship and endorsement deals when compared to male athletes. Research shows that women's sports in India generally receive less financial support and investment compared to men's sports. This disparity in funding affects the infrastructure, training programs, equipment used, and the overall resources available to women.

Wrestling demands proper infrastructure, equipment, and coaching, all of which require financial investment. The family's limited means become evident as they grapple with the financial strain of pursuing an unconventional and ambitious path for the girls. Mahavir approaches the Government of Haryana with the hope of financial aid, but the Government refuses to provide any support in terms of finance, considering the chances of success for a female in sports to be very low. The bank's refusal to provide financial support solely based on the girls' gender reflects a broader societal mindset that devalues the potential of female athletes. This denial of financial assistance becomes a pivotal moment in the narrative, symbolising the institutional and cultural barriers that the Phogat family

had to overcome. Mahavir has no other choice but to make provisions for the training equipment himself.

Mahavir lacked the support of both his family and his community, and so, was forced to build his akhada all by himself. An akhada is a pious place for wrestlers, and constructing one from scratch is a physically demanding and time-consuming task. The akhada requires the right amount of soil and minerals and must be free from stones that might hurt wrestlers during matches. Devoid of any public support, Mahavir single-handedly had to clear the land, level the surface, and lay the foundation for the wrestling pit. Mahavir's solitary efforts are symbolic of the lack of institutional support for female wrestlers in his community.

With great effort and hard labour, Mahavir brings up his daughters in wrestling, and Geeta Phogat wins her first national-level championship. She is then selected to be coached at the renowned National Sports Academy in Patiala to win a medal for her country at the international wrestling championship. Training at the academy proves quite different from that of Geeta's traditional training methods as taught by her father. From the outdoor mud pits and mattresses to the indoor courts and mats, Geeta witnesses a shift in the training techniques used in wrestling. Nevertheless, she continues to be trained by her father alongside the training provided by her coach. In 2010, Geeta Phogat became India's first-ever gold medallist in wrestling at the Commonwealth Games, held in New Delhi, beating Emily Bensted from Australia in the gold medal match with a score of 1-0,7-0.

Geeta's gold medal serves as a powerful statement against gender stereotypes that underestimate women's athletic ability. Her victory not only showcases individual athletic achievement but also challenges deep-rooted stereotypes surrounding women in sports.



Haryana, with its severely skewed sex ratio and female foeticide, was the last place to produce women wrestlers, and that made Geeta's win all the more revolutionary. Her success becomes a tangible rebuttal to the gender bias prevalent in the community and the broader society depicted in the film. It sends a clear message that determination and skill should be the primary criteria for pursuing sports, irrespective of gender.

Geeta's accomplishment becomes a symbol of empowerment for women, inspiring others to break free from societal expectations and pursue their passions. Geeta adds to her achievements by becoming the first Indian female wrestler to have qualified for the Olympic Summer Games. Phogat won a gold medal in the Wrestling FILA Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament in Kazakhstan in April 2012. She won the bronze medal in the 2012 World Wrestling Championships held in Canada. In the 2012 Asian Wrestling Championships, Phogat bagged the bronze medal, and in 2013, she finished second and won the silver medal at the Commonwealth Wrestling Championships. Geeta Phogat was awarded the Arjuna Award, India's second-highest sporting honour, in 2012.

Geeta's younger sister, Babita Phogat, follows in her footsteps, winning the nationals and joining her sister at the National Sports Academy. At the 2010 Commonwealth Games, Babita won the silver medal in the women's freestyle 51 kg category. In 2011, at the Commonwealth Wrestling Championship held in Melbourne, Australia, Babita secured first place in the women's freestyle 48 kg category. Babita bagged the bronze medal at the 2012 World Wrestling Championships, and another bronze medal at the 2013 Asian Wrestling Championships Tournament. Babita Kumari Phogat won the gold medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games against Brittanee Lavedure of Canada, under the women's freestyle 55 kg category. In 2016, Babita became the third and final

entry in the women's wrestling category for the Summer Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro. She represented India by qualifying for the Rio Games. In 2018, Babita won the silver medal in the women's freestyle wrestling under the 53 kg category at the Commonwealth Games held at the Gold Coast.

The film's narrative contributes to changing perspectives and fostering a more inclusive dialogue surrounding women in sports. The portrayal of Geeta and Babita's journey challenges entrenched gender stereotypes. By showcasing their dedication, resilience, and triumphs in wrestling, the film defies traditional expectations of women's roles, especially in a conservative setting like Haryana. The media representation of these characters becomes a visual and emotional narrative that challenges preconceived notions. The film does not shy away from depicting the raw struggles faced by the Phogat family. By transparently presenting Mahavir's fight against societal norms, financial constraints, and resistance from the community, the film sheds light on the real-world challenges that individuals, particularly women, may face when pursuing unconventional paths. The film showcases the different challenges he faces, including criticism from the community, financial constraints, and the girls' initial lack of interest in the sport. These obstacles create tension and drive the narrative forward.

*Dangal* portrays a unique and transformative family dynamic that plays a central role in challenging and reshaping traditional gender roles within the Phogat family. At the core of familial bonds is Mahavir's visionary approach toward his daughters. Mahavir Phogat, played by Aamir Khan, defies societal norms and challenges gender biases by envisioning his daughters as successful wrestlers. His passion for his goal is seen in the drastic measures that he takes to accomplish his ambition. When he could not find female



competitors for his daughters, he arranged fights for them against boys. When he felt the need for his vegetarian daughters to consume more protein for strength and stamina, he fed them meat that he cooked himself. When the girls complained that their hair and clothes were getting in the way of their wrestling, he cut off their hair and made them boys' clothes. Mahavir could have easily given up on his dream but remained adamant about seeing his girls achieve true success.

Mahavir's love for his daughters is all the more evident when he speaks of his dilemma of choosing between being their coach and their father. Phogat talks of the difficulties of balancing his duties as a coach as well as a father. Strictly as he was a coach, he also loved and cared for his girls as a father. Mahavir tells his wife that he can only be either a coach or a father at a time, and not both together. The harsh and rigorous training for the girls' success as professional wrestlers forces him to cover up his role of an affectionate father to his children. The movie presents a scene where the girls are asleep, exhausted from the training, and Mahavir comes at night to massage their sore legs.

"At any point, I can either be their coach or their father. When the coach is doing his work, the father cannot interfere" (*Dangal*), says Mahavir with tears in his eyes as he lovingly tries to soothe the pains of his harsh training by massaging his daughters' feet. The scene shows that to make his daughters successful, Phogat had to sacrifice the joy of being a loving and caring father. This was another struggle that Mahavir had to endure in his coaching career.

Geeta and Babita's relationship with each other adds a layer to the family dynamics. The supportive bond between the sisters becomes a source of strength as they navigate through the different challenges of pursuing wrestling. They become each other's

biggest cheerleaders and sources of motivation. In the film, Geeta is seen to divert from her father's traditional wrestling techniques. It is Babita who brings her back on track, reminding her sister of their father's hard work and struggles to bring them to where they were. Geeta shares an emotional moment of reconciliation with her father who assures her of his help and support for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games. The sisterly bond presented in the movie depicts the evolving relationship between Geeta and Babita, highlighting their love, support, and shared determination to break societal norms and achieve greatness in the sport of wrestling. It is through this strong bond that Geeta Phogat was able to earn a gold medal for wrestling for her country.

The Olympian players, Geeta and Babita Phogat, have indeed emerged as role models for aspiring female athletes in India. Their inspiring journey and achievements have paved the way for young girls to pursue their dreams in sports. The girls shattered traditional gender norms by entering a male-dominated sport such as wrestling. They proved that women could excel in any field they choose, breaking barriers and inspiring countless others to follow suit. Their success can be attributed to their unwavering dedication and hard work. Their achievements on the global scale, winning international medals for the country, have brought pride to the nation, and motivated young athletes to aim for international success.

The story of the success of the Phogat sisters gained widespread recognition through the movie *Dangal*. The film's success further amplified their influence as role models, reaching a broader audience, and inspiring girls, not only in our country but also throughout the world. Through the example of their lives, the Phogat sisters actively advocate for women's empowerment and gender equality. They emphasize the importance



of education, physical fitness, and self-defence for girls, using their platform to encourage young women to pursue their aspirations fearlessly. The wrestling champions brought about widespread visibility to women's wrestling in India. Their journey was widely covered by the media, and their accomplishments were celebrated at the national as well as international levels. This increased visibility provided young girls with role models to look up to and aspire and emulate.

Father Mahavir Singh Phogat is often considered an epitome of gender equality for his progressive mindset and approach towards his daughters' wrestling careers. In a society where women's participation in sports was not widely accepted, his decision to train his daughters and treat them equally as capable as men demonstrated his belief in their abilities and the importance of breaking gender stereotypes. His iconic line, "Do you think my girls are lesser than any boy?" summarizes the core of this inspiring story. The man dared to dream for his daughters and make that dream come true even when all odds were stacked against them. Mahavir's persistent efforts to train his daughters and his unwavering belief in their capabilities showcased his commitment to gender equality.

He also never undermined the role of education in his daughters' lives. "Though I wished for them to be to-class wrestlers, I also wanted them to concentrate on their studies. I never passed Class X, let alone attend college. But I wanted all our children, especially the girls, to be graduates, enabling them to think rationally and understand the world better" (*Dangal*). Mahavir knew the importance of educating his daughters and believed that education was necessary for them to be independent, both financially and socially. Remaining true to his wishes, all of Mahavir's girls not only excelled in sports but also in academics. Unlike the rural mindset of considering only marriage to be every life's goal,

Mahavir broke the norm by making sure that all of his daughters had a decent educational qualification and completed their graduation.

Despite facing criticism and opposition from the community, he remained determined to provide his daughters with the same opportunities as boys, emphasizing that skill and hard work are to be recognized regardless of gender. Mahavir's actions and the success of his daughters serve as a platform for advocating gender equality. His daughters' entry into the Olympics has earned him the reputation of being considered an Olympian coach. Mahavir has consistently spoken out about the importance of equal opportunities for women in sports and society as a whole. His advocacy has helped raise awareness about gender biases and inspired others to challenge and overcome them. Phogat was awarded the Dronacharya Award by the Government of India in 2016.

The movie stands as a poignant example of gender inequality. "Even today I have no words to express what I felt when I won that gold in the Commonwealth Games. For others it might have been just a gold medal, but for us, it was a life-changer proving to the world that Indian girls, especially those from Haryana, were no less in boys in anything" (*Dangal*), smiles Geeta. By championing the cause of gender equality, the film reminds us of the importance of empowering women, dismantling gender stereotypes, and forging a path towards a more inclusive and equal world. Through the lens of wrestling, it beautifully illustrates the transformative power of breaking free from societal constraints and pursuing one's dreams.

As we witness the journey of Geeta and Babita Phogat, we are not only entertained but also challenged to rethink traditional gender roles. The movie calls for a dismantling of age-old stereotypes that limit women's potential, urging us to support their aspirations



and accomplishments. In this way, the film transcends its cinematic boundaries to become a beacon of hope, guiding us towards a world where every individual is valued and empowered to thrive. *Dangal*, therefore, isn't just a film; it is an instigator for change, inspiring us to work towards a more inclusive, equitable world where every individual has the opportunity to shine regardless of gender.

## Chapter Three

### Conclusion

Nikesh Tiwari's *Dangal*, stands as an extraordinary catalyst for women empowerment, igniting a fervent dialogue about gender equality and challenging societal norms. With its gripping storyline and powerful performances, the film serves as a clarion call, resonating with audiences across the globe. Through the remarkable journey of the Phogat sisters, *Dangal* encapsulates the indomitable spirit of women breaking free from the shackles of patriarchy, defying expectations, and pursuing their dreams with unwavering determination. Set against the backdrop of patriarchal norms in rural India, the film boldly challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Mahavir defies societal expectations by training his daughters in wrestling, traditionally considered a male-dominated sport. Through rigorous training and determination, Geeta and Babita break barriers and shatter stereotypes, ultimately becoming renowned wrestlers. Their journey exemplifies the power of equal opportunities and the importance of nurturing talent irrespective of gender. "Dangal" not only celebrates the triumph of the Phogat sisters but also serves as a powerful reminder of the need for gender equality in all spheres of life, inspiring audiences to challenge outdated norms and embrace the potential of every individual, regardless of gender.

Though the literal meaning of 'Dangal' is 'wrestling competition', the movie is so much more. In a nutshell, it could be described as a wrestling of ideologies. While on the surface the movie is the story of the Phogats and their wrestling career, filled with thrilling



wrestling matches and rigorous training; on a deeper level, it shows the story of the two village girls who wrestle to establish their own identities within a patriarchal society. The girls fight against discrimination, societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and the critical scrutiny of their community in the pursuit of achieving their ambitions in the sport.

Dangal is a representation of brilliance that transcends gender in a society that devalues femininity to the point of oppression. The movie makes the case that women can be successful without embracing a more "masculine" identity and still maintain their femininity.

Undoubtedly, Dangal stands out as one of the most powerful recent films advocating for women's emancipation. The film's subtly delivered message about what must be done in a society beset by biases, pervasive misogyny and outright injustice is sufficiently evocative, and its impact is reinforced by the film's climax, which gathers all of the films hints and gives it a definitive, impartial space.

Not only does it address significant social issues, but it also defines many of the rules and expectations of popular cinema. It is successful in getting us to applaud young ladies who defy gender norms. Therefore, in the Indian setting, where women are perceptions about gender roles and gender identities. The way women are portrayed in these movies promotes societal change in the highly patriarchal and male-dominated Indian society.

The film "Dangal" has garnered immense popularity not only for its compelling storyline but also for its authentic depiction of the challenges faced by the two women wrestlers. It has emerged as a powerful source of inspiration and empowerment for women in various sporting endeavours, serving as a beacon of encouragement for them to pursue

their passions and excel in their respective fields. Indian Women's National Cricket Team Sensation, Harmanpreet Kaur, is one such example; who claimed to have drawn inspiration from the tale of the Phogat sisters and their success. The captain of the Indian Women's Team expressed that the film instilled a sense of hope within her, demonstrating that Indian women possess the ability to overcome the numerous stereotypes imposed upon them.

Through unwavering dedication, resilience, and sheer determination, these women can triumph over obstacles and realise their aspirations with equal, if not greater, ease compared to men. Kaur revealed that she, too, was insulted and mocked for playing cricket with boys. The team captain found a deep connection with the struggles portrayed by the girls in the movie, using their story as a driving force to prove her strength and proficiency as a woman in the realm of cricket. Inspired by their journey, Harmanpreet now serves as a captain of the Mumbai Indians and plays as an all-rounder in the National Cricket Team. She was also awarded the Arjuna Award for Cricket in 2017.

*Dangal* not only portrays the journey of the Phogat sisters but also serves as a powerful commentary on the possibilities and challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society, making it a significant contribution to feminist cinema. The film celebrates the achievements of its female protagonists without downplaying their femininity. It sends a powerful message that women can succeed on their terms without compromising their identity.

Father of the Phogat sisters, Mahavir Singh stands as an advocate for women's empowerment through his words and actions as he coaches and trains his girls in the male-dominated sport of wrestling. The different struggles he was confronted with because he promoted women in sports—from denial of financial assistance, to refusal from entering



local dangals, to the lack of support and the harsh criticism from the community— all present a realistic portrayal of the backlash women face if they ever decide to assert their independence.

Driven by his desire to establish a lasting legacy, Mahavir Singh initially believed that it required a son to fulfil his unaccomplished ambitions. However, upon discovering his daughters' remarkable potential in wrestling, he underwent a profound transformation. Recognising that gender was inconsequential in the pursuit of his noble cause, Mahavir took it upon himself to personally train the girls, instilling in them the determination to bring home gold for their country. The movie revolves around the central theme of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The resounding success of the girls' journey serves as evidence that women can carve out their own identities in society when provided with the necessary guidance, support, and resources. This inspiring narrative underscores the importance of nurturing talent and breaking down societal barriers to foster an environment where individuals can thrive regardless of their gender.

*Dangal*, not only dominated the charts within the country but also achieved a blockbuster status in nations worldwide for the positive message that it conveys. In December of the year 2016, *Dangal* was released worldwide and lauded for its honest depiction of a real-life story. China, in particular, was one country where the movie audience embraced the film. The movie was screened at the Beijing Film Festival in 2017, and was a commercial success, becoming one of the country's top 20 highest-grossing foreign films. At the 62<sup>nd</sup> Filmfare Awards, it won four main awards: Best Film, Best Director, Best Action, and Best Actor. The movie won the Best Asian Film Award at the AACTA Awards in Australia.

The cinematic masterpiece goes beyond a mere source of entertainment, a rallying cry for women everywhere, inspiring them to rise above adversity, pursue their passions, and rewrite their destinies. It challenges societal norms, dismantles stereotypes, and encourages viewers to question and overcome the limitations imposed on women in the various spheres of life. The movie *Dangal* serves as a profound inspiration to Indian society, especially in the context of prevalent caste systems, by advocating for gender equality and the opportunities women deserve. In a society where traditional norms and barriers often hinder women's progress, *Dangal* shines a light on the importance of breaking free from these constraints. The film boldly advocates for gender equality, compelling society to grant women the opportunities they are inherently deserving of. *Dangal* ignites a vision for a future where every woman can pursue her aspirations unencumbered, paving the way for a more inclusive and forward-thinking society.



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