

BREAKING BARRIERS: WOMEN IN SPORTS AND THE FIGHT FOR IDENTITY

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Abstract

Women in sports have historically faced numerous challenges, from societal expectations to institutional barriers. This paper explores how female athletes navigate selfhood, struggle, and resilience through the lens of three sports films: Begil, ShabaashMithu, and Dear Comrade. By examining these narratives, the study highlights how sports empower women, provide a platform to challenge gender norms, and redefine identities. This research underscores the transformative role of sports in fostering equality, leadership, and social change.

INTRODUCTION:

Sports have long been a male-dominated field, but women have continuously fought to carve out their space, challenging societal norms and institutional biases. Female athletes struggle for recognition, equal opportunities, and fair treatment, often facing discrimination and lack of resources.

Cinema plays a crucial role in highlighting these struggles, as seen in Begil, ShabaashMithu, and Dear Comrade. These films depict the challenges, perseverance, and triumphs of women athletes, showcasing how sports serve as a platform for empowerment and identity formation.

Begil : A Tale of Dedication and Struggle

Begil (2017) is a Tamil-language sports drama that tells the story of a woman who aspires to break into professional football despite societal opposition. The film addresses themes of gender bias, lack of support for women in sports, and personal sacrifices made by female athletes.

This dialogue represents the conflict between tradition and progress, highlighting the need for support from family in a woman athlete's journey. The challenges of women in professional football in India.

Cultural barriers preventing women from pursuing careers in sports. The role of coaching, mentorship, and family support in a female athlete's journey.

ShabaashMithu : The Inspiring Journey of Mithali Raj

ShabaashMithu (2022) is a biographical sports drama based on the life of Mithali Raj, the former captain of the Indian women's cricket team. The film highlights the discrimination, financial struggles, and lack of infrastructure that women cricketers face (ShabaashMithu).

One of the most powerful dialogues in the film is when Mithali Raj confronts the discrimination faced by women cricketers:

> "Agar ladkiyansapnedekhsaktihain, tohunhepoorakarne ka hakbhihai."
("If girls can dream, they also have the right to fulfill them.")

This dialogue encapsulates the central message of the film, advocating for equal opportunities and recognition for women in sports.

Dear Comrade : A Cinematic Take on Women Athletes

Dear Comrade (2019) blends a powerful love story with a sports theme, making it more than just a romantic drama. At its core, the film explores the struggles faced by women in sports, particularly in cricket, through the character of Lilly (RashmikaMandanna), a state-level cricketer.

At a breaking point, when Lilly struggles with harassment in sports, she delivers a powerful dialogue:

> "Main bas cricket khelna chahti hoon, par har jagah mujheladnapadtahai."

("I just want to play cricket, but everywhere, I have to fight.")

This line highlights the invisible battles women athletes face—not just on the field, but against society, discrimination, and personal trauma.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Study Design

1. Participants: Women aged 40-50 experiencing perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms
2. Intervention: A structured yoga program combining asanas, pranayama, and meditation
3. Duration: 12-week intervention
4. Measurement Tools: Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, Menopause Rating Scale

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future investigations should focus on:

- Long-term effects of yoga interventions
- Mechanisms of symptom reduction
- Personalised yoga protocols for diverse menopausal experiences

Cultural variations in yoga's effectiveness

CONCLUSION

Women in sports are not just competitors; they are pioneers reshaping gender roles and redefining excellence.

The films Begil, ShabaashMithu, and Dear Comrade serve as powerful narratives that highlight the struggles and triumphs of female athletes. Bigil and Dear Comrade go a step further, addressing sexual harassment and power abuse in sports, making their narratives socially relevant beyond just athletic achievement.

While progress has been made, the fight for gender equality in sports remains ongoing. Institutional support, policy changes, and societal awareness are necessary to ensure that women athletes receive the recognition, opportunities, and respect they deserve. Sports must continue to be a tool for empowerment, self-expression, and breaking barriers, allowing women to shape their own narratives in the world of athletics.

Women-centric sports films survey as Dangal (2016), Chak De! India (2007), Saand Ki Aankh (2019), ShabaashMithu (2022), Mary Kom (2014), Saina (2021), Panga (2020), Kanaa (2018), Kho Kho (2021), Bigil (2019), and Dear Comrade (2019) go beyond just celebrating victories on the field—they highlight gender discrimination, societal expectations, personal sacrifices, and systemic challenges that female athletes face.

While Dangal and Saand Ki Aankh focus on breaking patriarchal norms within families, Chak De! India and ShabaashMithu emphasize the institutional neglect of women's teams. Mary Kom, Saina, and Kanaa portray the individual journeys of sportswomen fighting against odds to achieve their dreams, while Panga and Dear Comrade explore comebacks and personal empowerment. Bigil and Kho Kho address the intersection of sports and social justice, highlighting power abuse and the struggle for recognition. Together, these films redefine sports narratives, showing that victory is not just about medals but also about equality, resilience, and self-respect.

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