

Fat-Shaming in a Feminist Sports Film: A Critical Study of *Chak De! India*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of fatness in the Hindi sports film *Chak De! India* (2007) within the broader context of post-1990s transformations in Indian cinema. While the film is widely regarded as a feminist text for foregrounding women athletes in a male-dominated sport, this research argues that it simultaneously reproduces fat-shaming tropes through the characterization of Balbeer Kaur. Drawing on feminist media theory and fat studies, the paper employs qualitative textual analysis to explore how Balbeer's body is masculinized, ridiculed, and symbolically animalized despite her athletic competence. The study situates this portrayal within the Hollywoodization of Bollywood following economic liberalization, which intensified beauty norms privileging thinness alongside the rise of gym culture, cosmetic industries, and global beauty pageants. The findings reveal a contradiction: even films celebrated for gender progressiveness may marginalize bodies that deviate from dominant aesthetic standards. Since Indian academia is characterized by sparse scholarship on fat studies, and an odd silence about the return of fat actresses to Bollywood cinema, my research will contribute significantly to the study of representation in popular mass media, with particular relevance to our understanding of the contemporary Bollywood cinema.

It will also talk to the need of fat studies in higher education in India as well as Western nations like U.S. and the need to bring in popular culture texts in classrooms like film and media for the same.

Keywords

Bollywood, fat studies, body politics, feminist media, representation.

