

Impact Factor-7.675 (SJIF)

ISSN-2278-9308

B.Aadhar

Peer-Reviewed & Refereed Indexed

Multidisciplinary International Research Journal

ISSUE No- (CCXCI)291(A)

April -2021

Women's Empowerment Issues and Challenges



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Prof. Virag S. Gawande

Director

Aadhar Social

**Research & Development
Training Institute Amravati**

Editor

Asst. Prof. Baliram Pawar

**Head, Department of Sociology
Mahatma Phule Mahavidyalaya
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This Journal is indexed in :

- Scientific Journal Impact Factor (SJIF)
- Cosmos Impact Factor (CIF)
- International Impact Factor Services (IIFS)

Aadhar Publication

For Details Visit To : www.aadharsocial.com

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Published by -

Prof. Virag Gawande

Aadhar Publication, Aadhar Social Research & Development Training Institute, New Hanuman Nagar,

In Front Of Pathyapustak Mandal, Behind V.M.V. College, Amravati

(M.S.) India Pin- 444604 **Email :** aadharpublication@gmail.com

Website : www.aadharsocial.com **Mobile :** 9595560278 /

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Dangal, An Inspirational Saga of Women Wrestling'**Dr. Surender Singh**

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"The Study of literature casts light on the meanings in the film, and the study of the film can illuminate the full value of the literature."

- Ronald Perrier, *From Fiction to Film*

For decades, filmmakers all over the world have got influenced from great personalities, sports celebrities, iconic figures and literature and transcribed it into movies. Adaptation of biography into cinema is nothing new for the Indian film industry too and the impact of great personalities and literature on our films is almost as old as filmmaking itself. From *Raja Harishchandra* to Milkha Singh and Mahender Singh Dhoni and Saina Nehwal, Indian cinema has been inspired and adapted many legends, sports persons and literary figures. Since then, Indian filmmakers have directly or indirectly taken references from various mythological characters, biographies, auto-biographies and social stories in order to make their films. The recent one being Nitesh Tiwari's *Dangal*, which is regarded Geeta Kumari Phogat as a modern day "Harbinger of Women Wrestling" or "Cyclone in Dangal". It is a blockbuster and still attracts the masses to admire and appreciate the caliber and capabilities of "Heralder of Women Wrestling" in India.

The aim of the present research paper is to depict and delineate the endless struggle and the indomitable will in the lives of Geeta Kumari Phogat and Babita Kumari Phogat generally and their success become the historic monumental for women liberation in the sports arena, specifically. The prime aim is to break the aged-old dogmas and trifle tradition of the society and to sing the song of women liberation. It is also main motive to promote sports culture and sportsmanship in India especially for girls. Moreover, it is a burning question to find out the impact of biopics on the viewers and the society. Through the movie, *Dangal*, they become the torch-bearers and pave a way for budding wrestlers and boxers who are striving hard and putting their best endeavour to emerge as a winner in their life and to win glory for her beloved nation, Mother India.

In the last ten years of 21st century, we have seen many bio-pics on great sports personalities i.e. Milkha Singh (Bhag Milkha Bhag-2013), Merry Com (Merry Com-2014), **Budhia Singh (Budhia Singh: Born To Run-2016)**, Mohd Azharuddin (Azhar-2016), **Sachin Tendulkar** (Sachin: A Billion Dreams -2017), Mahender Singh Dhoni (M.S., The Untold Story--2017) Saina Nehwal (Saina-2021) and the upcoming on Kapil Dev ('83') and their impact on the viewers and society. The fundamental aim of these motivational and inspirational biopics is not only to promote sports and sportsmanship in India but to underline their endless struggle as sports icons also. Before it, numerous beautiful and life-changing films have been adapted and screened on the novels by authors such as Rabindranath Tagore, Prem Chand, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, Manju Kapur, Amitav Ghosh, and Rohinton Mistry, Chetan Bhagat and watch a selection of films by directors like Satyajit Ray and Mani Ratnam.

The Indian Express comments on the movie, 'Dangal': "What keep the film together are the performances. The first-timers — as little girls, and young women learning to gauge their opponent and beating all comers; no silver medals, only gold — all come off well. Tanwar, as Khan's wife, is a good choice, just familiar enough, and yet new enough. But this is clearly Amir's film. It wouldn't

have been made if he hadn't green-lit it, and he brings to it the sincerity of purpose which makes it not just a starry vehicle, but a film which is about something, which has meaning, with a message which doesn't overwhelm the telling."

The successful movie, Dangal is a motivational and life-changing saga of women wrestlers in India. Nitesh Tiwari's direction lives a permanent mark directly, on the minds of the viewers and indirectly on the society. The film is a land -mark in many ways. Its well-knit-plot, rural area setting, using of Haryanvi twang (dialect), beautiful characterization and above all, the role played by Amir Khan as Mahavir Singh Phogat(father) , Sakshi Tanwar as Daya(mother) , Fatima Sana Shaikh as Geeta Phogat , Sanya Malhotra as Babita Phogat- is exceptionally unforgettable. Jim Jarmusch says, "*Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination.*"

The plot is, indeed, beautifully woven which underlines the incredible struggle of Mahavir Phogat in the name of kusti and unbeatable spirits of his loving daughters. It seems that to win the gold for India is the sole mission of Mahavir Phogat in his life. But, when he fails to do so, he trains tirelessly, day and night his own daughters and enabled them to win the Gold Medal for his beloved country.

"Maari chhorian chhoron se kam hai ke"

("Are my girls any less than boys"?)

What a striking line! If one line can transform lives, then it has to be this line which summarizes the core of this inspiring story. It is this belief of Mahavir Singh Phogat, the erstwhile wrestler that changes the destiny of Phogat daughters and of future generations of women wrestlers. This is such a powerful line and shows through movie the potential of outcomes when girls are believed to be equal to boys. The movie, Dangal which is a biopic on women wrestling champion -Geeta and Babita Phogat is special because it depicts an inspiring journey of a father and his girls who dare to dream and make that dream come true even when all odds were stacked up against them.

The movies points out various striking issues of Indian societies and the outlook of people towards women wrestling. Firstly, the Phogat Family lives in socially regressive Haryana, infamous for skewed sex ratio, female feticide and khaps. Secondly, the lower-middle-class family with limited resources and is more vulnerable to societal pressure as 'what people will say' matters in that world. Thirdly, choosing an unconventional career which is unfavorable to women – wrestling is revolutionary change. Traditionally wrestling has been a male domain and when you imagine a wrestler, you imagine a man. It was akin to imagining the unimaginable, doing the undoable.

The narrator, Omkar (Mahavir Singh Phogat's nephew) delineates and depicts the whole story in a very amusing and interesting way. The story moves as follows:

Mahavir Phogat (Aamir Khan) is an amateur wrestler who lives in a village namely Balali (Bhiwani) Haryana with his wife Daya (Sakshi). As an amateur wrestler, he has not only won several local championships but name and fame also. However, he was forced to give up wrestling in order to obtain gainful employment or we can say he takes up a job to feed his family. He was unable to win a gold medal for India and vows that his son will. However, wrestling never really leaves him. Mahavir dreams of the day when he will sire a son who will bring a gold medal for India. Unfortunately, He is dejected and disappointed when his wife gives birth to consecutive four daughters, the first two of Geeta (Fatima) and Babita (Sanya). He gives up his dream thinking that girls cannot wrestle and should only be taught household chores. But, when the incident of thrashing a boy happened, it changed the mind-set of Mahavir and he eventually realised that his daughters have the potential to become wrestlers.

He suddenly realises that he doesn't need a son to train in wrestling. Even a girl can fulfil his life-longed dream. He starts thinking of his lost mission. Mahavir begins coaching Geeta and Babita



in wrestling. His methods seem harsh, including gruelling early morning workouts and short haircuts to avoid lice. Even his daughters can do Dangal. As the narrator describes:

"Main hameshayosochakichhorahota to kusti me gold lekaraata.Par ye baatmerisamjhnaaai gold to gold hovhain ,chhoralavaeyachhori."

(All along, I was desperate for a son, so he could win gold for the country.)

But what didn't occur to me is that gold is gold, whether a boy wins it or a girl.)

As picturised in the movie, Mahavir, first of all, won battle of his own conservative and aged-old superstitions and social taboo regarding female wrestling. After winning his self-battle and visualized his lost dream, he embarks on the path of glory and heralds a long struggle for female wrestling. He fights for his girls with his wife, his brother, his villagers and everyone who is against the women liberation i.e. women kusti. When he went to the village akhara- coach and requests him to train his daughters then, the coach says:

"Yokebaatkarrahya sae, Mahavir.Chhoriyanaurakhadema. Is umar me paapkaraavgake?"

(How utterly absurd, Mahavi. Girls are in the wrestling arena? Will you have me sin at this age?

Despite of all adversities, Mahavir starts to train her daughters in his own field after cutting premature harvest. He nurtures them and inculcates true discipline and instructions of kusti as:

Aprimaatikihameshaizzatkaro.Kyokijitniizzat tam maatikikarogi ,utni hi maati se tumnemilaegi.

(Always respect Mother Earth. The more you respect it, the more respect you will get in return.)

One day Geeta and Babita attend a school mate's wedding without telling their father. When they tell their friend who is getting married how they hate their father for making them going through the wrestling training, she replies that it was nice of their father to at least give them some training, unlike her who was being forced to marry at the age of 14. When Geeta says," May God never gives anyone such a father."(Esabaapbhagwankisikonae de"). Then, the best and life- changing message comes from Sunita, a class-mate of hers:

"Kash!Bhagwan ne esabaaphamediyahota.Tharabaaphare bare maekuchhsochta to hain. Warnayahan to haalyohainkechhoripaidahui ... sikha do usakochulha-chauka... karalojhadu- pochha... aur jab 14 kihojaye to kar do usakehaathpeele...chhuda lo pichha... kardosirf ese mardkehawale...jiseusanekabhidekha hi nahi... karne do paidabachche ... palane do unhe.

Tharabaapharetaekum se kumauladkadarja to de rahyahain ... puriduniya se lar rajyahain ...sabbkijali-katti sun kaechuphain ...kyun...taki tum donnokuchh bun sako...esmegaltikekaraerayahain."

(I wish God had given me such a father! Otherwise our reality is –the moment a girl is born, teach her to cook and clean, make her do all the household chores. And once, she turns 14 marry her off. Get rid of the burden! And hand over to a man, whom she has never seen before. Make her bear children and raise them. That's all she's good for. At least your father considers you his child. He is fighting against the whole world. He is silently tolerating their taunts. Why? So that, the two of you can have a future, a life. What is he doing wrong?)

After getting this practical and pragmatic piece of advice, the girls learn to appreciate their dad. Next morning they set off for training and from then on, they train real hard. Mahavir allows them to wear shorts for the training and he even allows them to eat chicken. Once he thinks they are ready, he gets Geeta to participate in her first Dangal at Rohtak where she loses the bout from a local pehelwan(wrestler) but wins hearts of the spectators/ onlookers. She wins Rs 50 (more than the winner Rs. 20) after losing the bout. Mahavir preserves this 50 rupees note in an album as a token of regard. After this Geeta, never looks back, wins several tournaments and even wins a Gold Medal. When she grows up she goes to the National Sports Academy in Patiala and participates in several international tournaments. In the meantime, Babita also becomes a professional wrestler and wins local



championships. Babita also qualifies to go to the NSA. Here she sees how her older sister has lost her way. She gets her sister to come back on track by patching up with her father, who has moved to Patiala with their cousin, Omkar. While the sports coach trains them at the Academy, their father gives them lessons outside.

When it is time for the Commonwealth Games, Geeta beats World Champion in the Semi-final and has to wrestle with Angela Watson (in the final) to whom she had lost earlier. Eventually, she beats her and emerges as a Gold Medallist in 55 k.g. women category and her sister Babita won Silver Medal. The Times of India comments on film Dangal:

"It is to the film's credit that though Geeta and Babita's wins are documented, it still manages to engage the viewer with the wrestling tournaments and bring patriotic emotions to the fore. Most importantly, Dangal scores with its first-rate performances. An ungainly Aamir (22 kilos heavier) with grey hair is pitch-perfect as the ziddi yet sensitive parent. The 51-year-old actor should be complimented for experimenting with his roles, unlike his contemporaries who prefer to play safe. Sakshi as his wife is restrained, yet effective. And, the debutants Fatima and Sanya are easily this year's best finds. Demonetisation will be damned, watch Dangal."

This unforgettable biopic leaves various lessons to learn as: firstly, Children's (especially girls) destiny lies in hands of parents to a larger extent. Secondly, the social barriers, stereotypes and glass ceilings have to be broken once and they remain broken for all. Thirdly, the conviction, focus on goals, self-belief, hard-work, sacrifices & trade-offs are determined in life. Fourthly, success changes everyone's negative attitude into positive. As it is delineated in the movie that night before the final bout of commonwealth games, father tells Geeta that this fight is not only with opponent but with the "mindset" that girls are not equal to boys and this mindset is the root-cause for gender inequality, denying girls opportunities to life, career and choices.

Conclusion:

Dangal offers various surprises because Geeta and Babita's historic wins at the Commonwealth Games 2010 and following championships paved a way to the women wrestling. However, this screen adaptation serves as a recap of their arduous journey and it vigorously recaptures their stubborn father's resolve to make them professional wrestlers against the odds. Since it encapsulates the historic wins of the Phogats, who brought India glory, the film is also bound to inspire more women to seriously consider kushti as a sport specifically in Haryana and generally in India. All the taboos regarding female wrestling or female as a sportsperson has been battered, shattered and tattered. The present movie arises many questions as our obsession with the male child (prevalent since the dark ages), myopic stand on bringing up our daughters and the administration's pathetic disposition towards sports, are loud and crystal clear. But the ultimate message which is universal is Geeta and Babita's life changing saga which will remain immortal forever in pages of history as women wrestlers forever.

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