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## *Bollywood*

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**R. Amit Kumar**  
*Bollywood*

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Bollywood*

Ganti, Tejaswini. *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2004; 254 pp.

For abecedarians of popular Indian cinema—coming out of the Bombay film industry and produced primarily in the Hindi language with a mix of Urdu, English, and Arabic—Tejaswini Ganti’s book *Bollywood lives* up to its titular expectation: It is a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema. The book is for a general, quick, one-evening study of Hindi cinema, clearly written, keeping a Western audience in mind. Besides a well-written chapter on production and distribution processes of the Hindi film industry, which brings in some freshness and insights, in this book Ganti does not add much to the already available theoretical, socio-cultural, and historical knowledge on Indian cinema. Rather, what she does well is provide concise, to-the-point, easy-to-follow information and analysis in a small-sized book on the modes of functioning of the Bombay film industry.

The anthropologist Tejaswini Ganti presents an ethnographic study of the Hindi film industry based on fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and discussions in the industry with producers, directors, actors, screenwriters, stars, and choreographer. Not many scholars working on Indian cinema use this kind of fieldwork as a primary method of their research (but see Emmanuel Grimaud’s superlative monograph, *Bollywood Flim Studio, ou comment les films se font à Bombay* [Paris: CNRS Editions, 2003]). Thus, when Ganti writes about the film industry and its modes of operation, freshness and tactile depth ooze out of her writing.

Her book opens with a solid introductory chapter riding on a short note on the recent prominence of Hindi cinema in a global arena. Ganti quickly dissociates “Bollywood” from the rest of the (lesser) film industries in India. She gives a broad understanding of cinema in pre- and postindependence India, based on political, economic, and social changes. She does a good job of explaining how “the state” played and continues to play a vital role not only in the form and content that comes out of Bollywood but also in the day-to-day working habits of professionals in the Bombay film industry.

In the second chapter Ganti gains momentum with her own research and provides fabulous insights into how film production and distribution function in India—neither vertically nor horizontally integrated, diffuse, a chaotic place where anyone with large sums of money and the right contacts can make a film. She stresses the importance of connections, kinship, and networks. She also

describes in good detail the importance of several factors that are central to the Bombay industry's modes of operation, such as unofficial "black money," stars, secretaries a.k.a. agents, the Bombay industry's own random classification of its audiences, film music, remakes, and adaptations. Then there are other important insights Ganti provides in this chapter: the impact of state taxation on the film industry; chaotic and illegal ways of financing films; most movies flop every year: Bollywood makes far fewer prints than Hollywood because of its market reach; scripts are written in English because professionals from various linguistic backgrounds come together in Bombay; and most of the films are still dubbed.

The rest of the chapters are rather weak and could have been organized and approached differently. Overall, the book's strength is in its first two chapters, after which it falls flat and loses its readability. These last chapters read as brief biographies of key figures in Indian cinema, small plot descriptions of "key" Hindi films (which seem only a critic's choices of what to include and what not), excerpts of a few selected opinions and interviews from Bombay industry professionals, and a compilation of important dates and events over the 100-year history of Indian cinema.

More than the plot descriptions, an analysis of visual styles and character types in some of the important films would have worked better. Also, there are films which break the norms of Bollywood filmmaking in their visual style, in their particular use of music, song-and-dance sequences, and also in the use of character types, by straying from the usual hero, heroine, and villain formulae of Bollywood. Ganti uses Bollywood as an umbrella term for films coming out of Bombay and fails to acknowledge any differences in the kinds of film that come out of this industry, which I believe is because in this book Ganti pays less attention to providing much analysis of film texts.

However, it is noteworthy that, rather than using texts as a referential point to make arguments about the Indian cultural context, Ganti focuses on the film industry itself and its modes of functioning. She identifies the cultural, social, political, economic, and historical contexts in which Hindi films are being produced and consumed.

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