

## **Title of the Module: Hollywood**

In this module, we discuss some of the important facts in the history of Hollywood with special reference to its contribution to the film. Hollywood is a region in the central part of one of the prominent states of America, California. The entire US film history revolves around this place with innumerable film studios of tremendous state-of-the-art facilities. Hollywood started its saga as a hub of moviemaking since the early 20th century and still it's able to retain its name and fame as the alpha and omega of the western film industry.

The following are the learning objectives of this module:

- i. To familiarize the history of Hollywood and its film productions;
- ii. To understand the major features of Hollywood movies;
- iii. To identify the most important contributions of Hollywood to the world cinema; and
- iv. To understand the changing practices, it introduced to the art of film making;

Hollywood, which has now become a synonym for global films, has a very interesting history to narrate before its attainment of the present nickname 'the dream factory'. H.J. Whitley, a Canadian real estate developer who came to enjoy his honeymoon with his wife Margaret Virginia in a valley-like place in the American continent in the year 1886 is considered to be the 'Father of Hollywood'. The story goes like this: when he was at the peak of a hill in the present Hollywood, he happened to meet a Chinese man carrying wood in a wagon. Upon the enquiry of the content in the wagon, Whitley received the reply from the man, "I holly-wood" meaning 'hauling or transporting wood'. The new found land was christened by the couple as Hollywood from then onwards.

Los Angeles, one of the prominent states of the US attracted the movie production companies through this hill station called Hollywood because of many reasons. The over surveillance of Thomas Alva Edison from New York with his patent rules and restrictions in the motion picture and the legal issues was one of the earlier reasons. It was a great escape from these restrictions to the new haven called the Hollywood because it also provided a very comfortable space with favourable weather, scenic beauty and cheap land price. It's in this space of great freedom that the first Hollywood film was born in 1910 with the title *In Old California*. This motion picture was a 17-minute long one made by the director D.W. Griffith. Griffith's crew, consisting of actors Blanche Sweet, Lionel Barrymore Lillian Gish, Mary Pickford, and others first started exploring the west coast and began filming on vacant areas near Georgia Street in Los Angeles. While there, they decided to discover new areas by traversing great distance towards Hollywood.

In 1911, H.J. Whitley's house at Hollywood, with its surroundings, was used by the first studio Nestor Motion Picture Company for shooting a movie. But it took over a decade to get this hill region converted to have the name Hollywood with the erecting of a large sign board in the hill. Many film companies including Warner Brothers, Paramount Pictures, Columbia started functioning on this hill in the first decade of the 20th century itself. It attained the good name of one of the largest film industries in the United States the next decade itself, that's in 1920s. The vertical makeover incorporating production, distribution and screening of films was snatched by these companies very quickly resulting in more than 600 movies per year to the credit of this 'Tinsel Town'.

Gradually Hollywood, instead of a sole recluse for the film-lovers, started growing as an excellent township with the erection of private houses and the entry of business incorporations

with the support of the agencies like the chamber of commerce. Along with this, a new culture of broadcasting and telecasting through the radio and television respectively also was getting shaped here. KNX, CBS Columbia Square, KTLA, KCET, etc. were some of the reputed names of these earlier broadcast and telecast attempts.

The entry of the Jewish immigrants to the Hollywood in the early twentieth century marked a historical turn in the entire industry. It was they who modified the system of film-making here into a disciplined business activity. Some successful businessmen like William Fox, Louis B. Mayer and the partnership tycoons like Warner Brothers (Harry, Albert, Samuel, and Jack Warner) also sped the pace of its progress. It was through Warner Brothers, the Hollywood shifted to the mixing of the motion picture with sound. Though, Vitaphone sound – the sound used by them – was the primarily utilized one by the Hollywood until 1928. The Western Electric Company snatched the film sound distribution domination through their subsidiary ERPI – Electrical Research Product Incorporated later. Immediately they all started controlling the new enterprise called the Movie Studio. It was after this, the Hollywood stepped into the concept of internationalization, though the dominance of Americanism or Amero-centrism can still be found as a residue!

Europe, very instantaneously identified the wetness of the land of Hollywood for easy and tension free movie making which ultimately paved the way of some legendary figures like Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang and Jean Renoir; and actors like Rudolph Valentino, Marlene Dietrich, Ronald Colman, etc. to enter into the zone. This happened chiefly after the I World War which again zoomed up the process of flourishing the industry. By 1940s, this flourish helped millions of Americans to become directly or indirectly the part and parcel of this industry.

Now, let's have a look at some of the very prominent and very popular places in Holly

- Madame Tussauds Hollywood
- Hollywood Heritage Museum
- Dolby Theatre
- Hollywood Masonic Temple
- Gower Gulch
- Hollywood Palladium
- Hollywood Museum
- Hollywood Wax Museum
- Charlie Chaplin Studios

Three major world events are conducted at Hollywood every year – the Academy Award function, the Annual Christmas Parade and the Half Marathon. Honouring the geniuses in the field of film through the Academy or Oscar Award ceremony in the month of February or March every year is a very colourful and flamboyant event in Hollywood. The Christmas Parade with celluloid stars is another big event held at the Hollywood Boulevard and telecasted all over the world. In April, the Half Marathon is conducted for raising funds for providing houses to the needy youngsters.

Hollywood stands apart from the other national cinematic vistas mainly because of its transnational nature. Though many other nations have a strong base with their individual national film productions and carried across the boundaries of various other nations, Hollywood's reach and scope cannot be overtaken by any of them. Every year, an average of

700 films are produced here with multiple language versions and nations. This present achievement is not the product of an overnight's effort, we can trace the toil behind this victory from the movies like *The Jazz Singer*, the first synchronized sound musical movie of the world which was produced in the year 1927 here.

The prominent film theorists divide the history of Hollywood's movie making into three different ages:

1. The Classical Age
2. The New Age
3. The Modern Age.

### **The Classical Age**

Though an exact demarcation is not practically possible, these ages have been divided by taking some of the common features into consideration. One primary feature among them is the synchronized use of sound in the production of motion pictures. *The Jazz Singer*, the first Hollywood production with the sound which was released in the year 1927 marks the beginning of the Classical Age. The years preceding this should not be erased from history, but it can be put under the term 'formation time', or 'in the making'. Thousands of films had been streaming out to the different celluloid spaces of the world with unstoppable pace until 1960. The world had eagerly been waiting for the innovative visual wonders as spectacle on the silver screen now and then. The financial returns which went through the packed box-offices alerted many businessmen and groups to try their luck at this game during this age and ultimately the motion picture got its status elevated into an industry from mere entertainment.

Introducing the western ways and manners of the world was another key feature of this age. A bold attempt to establish this culture as an imitational one was popularized through the productions which came out from the studios of the Hollywood. Dominance of comedy, musical melodramas and animated cartoons were some other common dishes in the menu of the movies produced during this period. Many of these films were produced and distributed by the same crew members under the same banners, sometimes. Some of the very interesting living figures were given a chance to appear before the spectators in their biographical pictures, though the term 'bio-pic' was not common during that time. It was during this age, motion picture industry started closely sticking on to the formula of films.

By the third decade of the twentieth century, majority of the American cinema theatres were under the control of Five Big Studios – MGM, RKO, Paramount Pictures, Warner Brothers and 20th Century Fox. During this golden age of the Hollywood, MGM was able to control the industry and create a new wave – that is the stardom – in the Hollywood. The 'King' and 'Queen' concepts of the screen slowly crept into the industry during this period. After the production of *Snow White and The Seven Dwarves* (1937) by one of the geniuses of all-time celluloid history, Walt Disney, and its unimaginable Box Office success, the formula of stardom got deeply established as a reality in Hollywood.

This period is still considered to be one of the remarkable ones in the history of cinema and film making. The role played by studios, the budget spent, the convincing scripts created, the excellent crew including the actors and the directors, etc. fashioned the sensibility of the film goers and their choice for artistic productions. Legendary directors like Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock were becoming iconized during this era. Some of the classical productions during this period include *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone with The Wind*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Casablanca*.

The representation extended to women in scripting, acting, and some other background responsibilities also is an area of discussion during this period.

### **The New Age**

The New Age spanned from 1960s to 1980s is also known as the age of post-classical cinema. This period is marked with the changing methods of narration and story-telling in the Hollywood. One of the major shifts in the storyline that happened during this period is the unexpected twist the audience shockingly watched. Highly talented and well-trained professionals from different parts of the world, especially from the west started getting a comfortable space in the Hollywood during the 1960s. The movie *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) marked the paradigm shift in the American motion picture industry which was equalizing the quality of the movies with that of Box Office successes.

Legendary movie makers like Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, Roman Polanski, etc were some of the great contributors during this period. It was during this period, the theme of adult eroticism with the bold exposure of acting beyond the boundaries of nudity by both actors and actresses gradually got foregrounded. This is the reason some historians preferred to label this era as the 'Golden Age of Porn'.

Both commercial success and critical acclaim were juxtaposed in many of the movies released during the 1970s. Spielberg came with *Jaws* (?) while, Coppola's productions, *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*, Polanski's *Chinatown*, George Lucas' *Star Wars* etc enriched this period which ultimately compelled the Hollywood studios to go for Blockbuster Box Office hits. It is very sad to note that this type of craze for blockbusters also dragged some filmmakers and studios into unimaginable bankruptcy.

### **The Modern Age**

The entry of technology, change in political equations, and economic new waves inaugurated the modern age in the history of Hollywood films. Epic level spectacle with excellent sound quality was the hallmark of the films produced and distributed during this period. In 1990, *Dick Tracy*, the first 35mm feature film, marked the beginning of this age. The first film to utilize the possibility of digital Dolby stereo sound system was the 1992 production titled *the Batman Returns*. The spectacular feast to the spectators' eyes blended with the surrounding sound system created an unbelievable wonder among the movie lovers.

Further, the exploitation of technology with the computer graphics elevated these film lovers into the seventh heaven of astonishment when the realistic films like *Jurassic Park* (?), *The Phantom Menace* (1999), etc hit the screens. The digital transformation enriched the modern age cinema in general and Hollywood in particular. With the help of the online promotions, million (dollar) budgeted movies also were produced which added the ever-shining glitters to this age. The biggest stars like Sylvester Stallone, Tom Cruise, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, and Julia Roberts who received enormous amounts as remuneration were not only the actors but also the shareholders of some of the big production houses of the Hollywood.

The Hollywood continues its chariot race through the decades of the post millennium too with changed formulas and awesome visual treats. The Sci-Fis, the space movies, the unimaginable adventure feats, etc. reign the present Hollywood screens and have been constructing and maintaining new popular cultures through their productions.

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**Web Links:**

- <http://thehollywoodmuseum.com/>
- <http://www.learner.org/resources/series67.html>
- <https://www.aci-americancinema.com/home/>
- <https://www.siff.net/festival/programs-and-competitions/new-american-cinema>