



Cover Story

LIGHTS, CAMERA, LITIGATION

The Hema Committee report has turned the spotlight on the precarity of women and other marginalised communities working in Malayalam cinema, which in many ways reflects Kerala society's inherently hierarchical, feudal, and patriarchal structure.

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In recent weeks, patriarchal norms and male dominance in Malayalam cinema have come under scrutiny following the release of the redacted version of the Justice Hema Committee report. This report, commissioned by the Kerala government, has highlighted the various challenges faced by women in the Malayalam film industry. The committee came into being thanks to the per-

► **The press conference** by the Women in Cinema Collective in Kochi on October 13, 2018. It was a watershed movement in the feminist labour history of Kerala, where women forefronted themselves on the basis of their work.

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sistent efforts of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), a group established in 2017 to address gender inequality and precarious working conditions in Malayalam cinema. The report's findings mark a significant moment for the ongoing struggle for gender equity in the industry.

The Hema Committee submitted its 290-page report to the government on December 31, 2019. This was followed by a long period of silence and inaction from the government. Finally, on July 5, 2024, the State Information Commission directed the State government to release the report after excluding confidential and controversial parts of the report. There are many arguments for and against making the report public in its entirety, and it is an ongoing legal battle before the High Court of Kerala.

The Hema Committee has identified 30 categories of women workers in cinema and has come up with elaborate suggestions and recommendations to ensure gender justice in the Malayalam film industry. The committee has suggested compulsory written contracts at the start of work with clarity on remuneration, working schedules, and workplace facilities and accommodation. This is achievable in its true spirit only with legal literacy among women across categories of workers.

The report has also recommended mainstreaming gender justice in the content of the films to enhance visibility of women and girls on screen; refiguring characterisation of women occupying power positions; conducting gender awareness training programmes for different categories of workers in the film industry; redefining masculinity and femininity; issuing certificates on gender justice; and providing various forms of incentives to films wherein 30 per cent of women are engaged in production activities.

Although the recommendations could have a knock-on effect on other sectors, the