

# A Silent Flag hoisted in Mollywood: Feminist Resistance, Structural fractures, and the Women in Cinema Collective's Reckoning

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*Abstract- The cinematic expanse of Kerala has been celebrated for its progressive cinematic narrative and aesthetic excellence; however, it was recently unmasked by the 2024 Hema committee report as a site of sordid violence and a cradle for gendered exploitation of its celebrated artists. This study intends to position itself as a diagnostic scalpel that unpeels the Kerala's cinematic prestige vs Hema committee revelations. The Hema committee report exposes the patriarchal side of a creative ground like cinema. The study dissects the qualitative testimonies from over 100+ women professionals. It unveils and showcases "casting couch" economies, infrastructural neglect, and retaliatory blacklisting as entrenched forms of exploitation and blackmailing. The study uses the phrase "silent flag" to evoke a muted yet defiant semaphore within the Mollywood cinematic shadows. The WCC [Women in Cinema Collective] is constituted by Government of Kerala to study the issues faced by women in film industry, their working atmosphere and also to suggest solutions to their problems [Expert Committee, 2019]. The WCC mounted a multifaceted campaign against the systemic injustice in Mollywood that drove policy shifts, amplified survivors' voices via media and screenings. Their lateral and non-hierarchical structure challenged patriarchal guilds within the film society like AMMA. The study remarks the movement as a step towards the long withstanding battle against gendered inequality since WCC's voice amplified subaltern experiences but contends with backlash and incomplete structural overhaul. Findings of the study underscores the need for psychoanalytic frameworks in the film labour studies.*

*Keywords – Silent Flag, Women in Cinema Collective, Hema Committee, Malayalam Cinema, Feminist Resistance, Cultural Politics, Gendered Exploitation, Backlash, Cultural Politics, Media Discourse*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Mollywood film industry embodies socially progressive narratives that is rooted in experimentation of the aesthetic of realism and humanism rather than the glitz and glamour found in other mainstream film industries. The 2017 abduction and sexual assault of leading actress in Kochi, widely reported as having been a conspiracy with involvement of certain sections of the film fraternity, turns into the traumatic break of this carefully sculpted public image. This incident, its investigation and the subsequent power dynamics within the industry has become a catalyst that continues to impact in the context of sexual violence culture and the efforts taken to address institutional cover ups even today. [The News Minute, 2025]. It is within this set context that WCC emerges as a significant feminist galore, one that remains to reframe public discourse and institutional framework / practice within the Malayalam film industry. This thesis, A Silent Flag Hoisted in Mollywood: Feminist Resistance, Structural Fractures, And the Women in Cinema Collective's Reckoning, examines the emergence of WCC and the apparent patriarchal mechanism of Malayalam cinema that has been threatened by the joint sisterhood. (sircar, (2024)). Popular feminism is feminism that circulates through mainstream media and consumer culture (Banet-Weiser, (2018)). The central argument is that the WCC functions as a type of feminist resistance in the 21st century. The first dimension [feminist resistance] is related to the foregrounds of the WCC's formation, its strategies of advocacy, and its relationships with state institutions, civil society, and media. The Women in Cinema Collective [WCC] is a

feminist organization established in 2017 through the efforts of women working in Malayalam cinema to combat the sexual assault and its resulting absolution which the incident brought to light. The WCC which includes women from all fields of the film industry proudly supports gender equality and worker rights and demands that organizations be held accountable for their actions. The WCC shifts the conversation from women representation to material conditions of labor because it argues that understanding how women face hiring and payment and blacklisting and coercion and workplace treatment is as crucial as understanding their assigned roles. The WCC requires organizations to establish Internal Complaints Committees [ICCs] which will operate according to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace [Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal] Act, 2013 and a comprehensive film policy in order to achieve institutional reform through their demands. The WCC faces backlash due to its activities from two prime sources which include powerful people who allegedly took part in the attack and other violations and from social attitudes that treat their group as a lynch mob.

### 1.1 Aims of the study

The study aims to investigate how the Women in Cinema Collective and the Hema Committee report function as solutions to tackle systemic gender discrimination that already exists within the Malayalam cinema industry. The study investigates how women use their testimonies and public advocacy while institutions respond to their actions which demonstrate the social gap between the industry progressive image and its actual gender based social conditions.

### 1.2 Significance

The study demonstrates how gender-based exploitation is in-built and operates as an inherent aspect of the industry. While the actresses were mainly the part of the WCC that pushed for its formation, it also included Justice Hema, Sarada, and K.B. Vatsalakumari. This gives an idea that the movement was supported by women from different work spheres and it is important to note that systemic gender injustice is usually too large for one profession, one institution or one voice to confront alone.

### 1.3 Objectives

- To study the impact of WCC's impact on Malayalam cinema practices.
- To trace WCC's organizational evolution that led to the formation of a policy catalyst and a resistance movement addressing gender inequality
- To examine media discourse responses to WCC interventions

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1.1 Introduction

Recent scholarship has increasingly shown that gender injustice in cinema exists as a structural problem because of the male dominated networks, informal hierarchies and cultural norms create practices which exclude and exploit others. [Ajikumar & Sircar, 2024] [Mathew & Isac, 2021] [Pillai, 2017]. The current research uses feminist media studies together with cultural studies and social movement research to study how the women in the Malayalam industry developed their response with repetition of current working conditions. The digital climate and succession of responses from the public is studied in popular feminism and popular misogyny research and how the women's assertion leads to both societal and negative reactions elicited from them. [Banet-Weiser, 2018] [Banet-Weiser, 2020] [Mendes, 2019].

### 2.1.2 Main body

#### Gender and Cinema

Gill asks how useful notions such as objectification, backlash and positive images are for making sense of gender in today's media. Media industries do not merely reflect social norms but actively participate in shaping gender norms and narratives. [Gill, 2007]. Hall illustrate through his analysis deal with, in different ways, the question of representation. "They define what is 'normal', who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded. They are deeply inscribed in relations of power. Think of how profoundly our lives are shaped. depending on which meanings of male/female, black/white, rich/poor, gay/straight, young/old. citizen/alien, are in play in which circumstances. Meanings are often organized into sharply opposed binaries or opposites." [Hall, 1997]. Indian cinema researchers have discovered that the film industry uses female performers to represent

modernity but in the same beat restricts their independence. Repetition and framing may allow the movement to assert their idea of the actual working conditions. The pressure from the movement also helps create public visibility and interactions. The industry would push for a value distribution from the screen representation to the conditions of the work itself. [Mannil, 2020] Pillai's discusses the misogynies of Malayalam cinema which highlights the persistence of patriarchal attitudes in an industry that claims moral, and social sophistication [Pillai, 2017]. Arya and Ajith Kumar's work on stardom further illustrates how female actors face disadvantages because they do not receive the same laud as their male co-stars despite their noteworthy performances. [Ajith Kumar, 2019] [Arya, 2019].

#### The Mark of Public Resistance and The Feminist Theory

The research study uses the theoretical frameworks of feminism and media studies to establish its fundamental theoretical base. The 1990 work *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler continues to shape the contemporary understanding of gender as a construct established through ongoing performance rather than a permanent trait [Butler, 1990]. Her later study in which a conversation with Gill and Rottenberg shows that modern feminist movements co-exist with neoliberal systems of visibility and act as societal opposition forces to feminism. This directly correlates and is relevant to the WCC, whose agency can be seen a popular feminist intervention in the recent public sphere especially in co relation to the media industry within India.

The Hema report shows how those in power use their coercive authority to violate other people's boundaries. Shrivastava shows that people find it hard to discuss sexual violence because of the prevailing culture of silence. [Shrivastava, 2022]. The 30-film research of Shrivastava shows that 60% of workplace harassment storylines present in movies create a normalised view which reduces audience shock when they watch WCC cases that happen outside the screen. The two works demonstrate that movies contain gender injustice because this injustice functions as a basic element of the system. It is a rhetoric used as a reaction to feminist achievements. This means it can also be used by certain groups to

recentre men whenever there is a visibility of such issues. This can invoke groups to dilute feminist demands [Aiston, J. 2024].

#### The WCC's Role and The Attempt at Structural Reform

The collective formed in 2017 by what started as an informal WhatsApp support group for the victim of the assault, quickly grew into a registered society in Kerala that stood to question and attempt to resolve the misogynistic practices and promote betterment of the film society at large. The collective promotes feminist activism which uses public speeches together with media presence to contest gender-based injustices but these efforts face mockery and opposition from specific social groups. The WCC's public statements and blog posts framed its struggle against such kinds of transgression [The many misogynies of Malayalam cinema, 2018] [Women in Cinema Collective & Sakhi Women's Resource Centre, 2019]. The social movement which brought about the social changes and faced their ongoing disputes. The transformation is incomplete and the group continues to fight as a part of their ongoing struggle.

#### Hema Committee and Its Exposure of The Fractured Framework

The Hema Committee report serves as a primary source for researches that delve into the subject of Malayalam cinema and gender equality. This report represents documented evidence of the list of harassment incidents, unfair treatment of female actors/staff members, blacklisting practices and workplace exclusion. Hema Report confirms [70% women report online abuse] that Parvathy's *Uyare* critique triggered death threats which established a pattern of cyber-harassment.

Post release of the Hema Committee report in terms of media narrative, it speaks on how women might be the lesser represented gender although the most present across all platforms. When the Hema Committee report reached the government for its advocacy it did not merely speak about gender rights but rather policy and activism that can allow criticizing the industry's internal culture [Expert Committee, 2019].

The gaps and the silence surrounding the case was broken and there lies the significance of such a report. Within a creative industry such as cinema, gendered injustice can creep in and persist especially within a state and industry that outwardly claims of being a bridge to a more socially progressive society. The women who struggle in unstable work conditions instead of having access to clear pathways to employment since it depends on the contacts or maintaining personal connections with industry contacts

The aftermath of the report also shows how the exposure was in some ways challenging and difficult for the women's testimony to become the official truth due to the report's delayed release and public controversy.

In broader literature, Sharma's "gender-based violence in workplaces" and Singh's "Sexual harassment of women at workplace: a study of Indian legislation and judicial approach", we approach the correlation with the Hema report on harassment at work and the legal understanding such instances [Sharma, 2024] [Singh & Ranjan, 2022].

#### Casting Couch and Other Disturbing Practices

The practice of 'casting couch' is said to be rampant practice within the entertainment industry more specifically used to refer to industry seniors/professionals coercing actors/actresses for sexual favours in exchange for roles. This practice was primarily associated with the Hollywood, Bollywood but is now used for similar exploitation in other industries. Rajendran documents 25+ testimonies [2015-2018] which show "graduated coercion" as social pressure develops into physical demands according to the Hema Report which confirms this pattern in 100+ cases. [Rajendran, 2019].

The most reported concerns within the Malayalam industry, testify for 'casting couch' demands. Those demands that appear compelling and urges women to compromise in exchange for a steady rise in their acting career.

The existing culture promotes a sea of compliance, silence and allowing for the normalization of

exploitation. The practices also included male networks that influenced the decision making within the society making it challenging for the female artists for fear of being blacklisted within the industry and being shunned and no opportunities. This also retains the idea that creative self-expression and political stances is suppressed by the male dominated power structures within the industry.

The practice of blacklisting is a more key variable when looking at the ways of exclusionary practices and it is also one of less frequently discussed within this landscape. It is a more subtle yet effective system that helps or enables organisations to enforce their control over their workers.

In a broader sense, women are quietly denied future roles and are sidelined from mainstream or even branded as difficult even if they do not have any record of wrongdoing. The effective system quietly erases the women's achievements due to certain disagreements.

When the report was released, the discussions surrounding the issue explored how overt pressure and silent exclusion affected the artists negatively. Other than blacklisting being part of the crux of the issue, the actresses also claim to experience typecasting as they grow older. This is explored in Ajith Kumar's and Arya's work on gendering stardom [Ajith Kumar, 2019; Arya, 2019].

Ageism and sexism function together as two forms of discrimination that is used to keep others from certain spaces and essentially also is a type exclusion practice used by industry seniors. Another reading that supports the idea that the Malayalam industry is acting as a space where women's labour is devalued and undermined if she grows older.

#### Popular Feminism and Receiving Backlash

The progression of digital activism more specifically related to feminism in the recent times through networked media environments is demonstrated by Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller's work and how it moves increasingly due to online circulation [Mendes et al., 2019]. However, it is necessary to take into account that with digital exposure there is ample chance of receiving backlash.

Online feminism and speeches are subject to online hate and ridicule, it becomes easier to dismiss, mock at or distort within the online community. The subject of the public discussion, both Hema Committee and the WCC was gaining traction and with it came supportive as well as hostile sentiments from public discourse. The research on popular feminism and popular misogyny investigates how digital climate changes and public response patterns to these changes while studying women who assert their rights who create both social progress and negative responses from their opponents. [Banet-Weiser, 2018] [Banet-Weiser, 2020] [Mendes, 2019].

Her later study in which a conversation with Gill and Rottenberg shows that modern feminist movements co-exist with neoliberal systems of visibility and act as societal opposition forces to feminism. The WCC agency serves as a feminist intervention which gained public recognition through its media activities in India. In the present study, we understand the importance of a women run agency such as WCC. The symbolic importance of this agency when faced with backlash helps clarify that the women face it collectively rather than individually and hence emphasizes the importance of visibility in a space where it is constantly contested.

The WCC remarks that the collective testimony of all those women was difficult to ignore and it helped build a history or political form that is harder to dismiss and would operate as an organized critique against the flawed system. The agency would operate in providing voice to the voiceless when the institution fails to support accountability.

The myth of being 'PROGRESSIVE' within the Malayalam Cinema

The audience throughout the nation is under the notion that the Malayalam Cinema does not shy away from the uncomfortable topics and essentially captures well rounded socially conscious progressive films. The perception is built from the reputation for seriousness and political depth even laced under clever and humorous screenplays. However, the literature suggests that this image might help function as a cover to hide the internal disparities.

Gill's work on media and gender can be used to remind us that media industries often produce or create ideological conflicts through publishing their progressive materials while simultaneously maintaining a supposed traditional work culture or ethics [Gill, 2007]. Hall's concepts relays that the cultural meaning exists beyond onscreen content and it also exists with public discourse, reception or the industrial practices they follow.

Next is the focus on numerous sexist behaviours and attitudes which exist in Malayalam cinema that is shown through Pillai's examination through his vital research because it refutes the belief that artistic experience is equivalent to fair treatment in the industry [Pillai, 2017]. The artistic sophistication offered by some artists are still considered lesser than their male counterparts. Malayalam film industry is grappling major issue regarding the low representation of women in front of cameras and the wage gap too, behind the scenes artists struggling in power struggle and limited work opportunities while the industry is keeping silent on their problems. The celebration of women's participation in Malayalam cinema also requires a closer examination. The audience perceives the presence of respected actresses and women writers and technicians as an appearance of inclusivity and the visibility of women in this field becomes deceptive and it can hide their actual restricted participation.

## 2.2 Conclusion & Research gap

The existing literature helps in providing the strong foundation for this study. However, it also uncovers an important gap that is yet to be explored and understood. Current research examines two main areas of study which include representation and actual harassment incidents. This study intends to divulge in the feminist activism research that would shed light on theoretical frameworks while inspecting specific industrial settings. The research study also aims to combine thematic analysis of groups by presenting accounts of actresses into four main themes which include representation, resistance, exploitation and public backlash. The researcher adds by providing a critical reading by incorporating feminist theory. The theory helps understand women and their lived experiences. The experiences are important knowledge and must be managed as

evidence rather than being dismissed merely as opinions. The testimonies of the WCC members, actresses and women in Hema committee appear in clusters and proves their statements reveal the hidden truths and patterns within the film fraternity. The nature of films carries subtexts and they carry deeper social meanings which show how people perceive and understand authority and intimate relationships and this carries their idea of connection in the real world. The question is raised when the ideals propagated by a film differs from the values or agency of the institution that carries it. As a result, the audience will continue to raise questions on the ethics and evolving patterns of the industry that shapes these ideas and has the ability to influence the thinking patterns of the public.

## 2.3 Theoretical framework

### 2.3.1 Feminist theory

This study employs feminist theory for its theoretical base because the topic requires more than detached scientific examination. The thesis when presenting its main argument relies on the actual lived experiences of women who face discrimination and silent battles against the system. The unequal power structures sown deep within the industry operates on lack of visibility.

The feminist theory helps in providing a framework that enables us to understand the crux of public visibility for various groups and this signifies the language to that reality where some groups may be overlooked when they challenge authority. It supports its main argument through the actual struggles of women who face power, silence, resistance for recognition in an industry that operates on imbalanced/ unequal power structures. The significance of the study is to bringing into view what is usually rendered invisible or essentially normalized.

### 2.3.2 Stuart hall's Representation Theory

The theory suggests that representation functions as a continuous cycle that creates meaning through language, images and discussions [active conversations] and this is created by the power relations. In this context we align the theory with how media and other industry narratives portray the WCC organization as disruptors when they offer

feminist resistance and this can influence public perception.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs two different qualitative research methods [dual qualitative framework] which include thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. The thematic analysis organizes actresses into four main core constructs. They are-Representation, Resistance, Exploitation and Public Backlash. The structure allows the researcher to find patterned meanings in the particular actress's lived experiences in accordance to their role in the feminist movement led by the WCC. [Thematic Analysis Revised – Final, n.d.]. The theoretical framework is implemented through these two methods which could trace the symbolism behind the metaphor “silent flag hoisted” using both real life experiences and artistic representation and also how media narratives could shape public perception.

#### Dual Qualitative Framework

##### Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis incurs codes and it follows the Braun and Clarke's six phase model provided in Thematic Analysis Revised – Final [n.d.]:

- a) Familiarization – repeated reading of testimonies
- b) Coding development – through recurrent codes
- c) Theme development – merge the code and understand the four master themes displayed through a table.

#### Critical Discourse Analysis framework [CDA]

The following analysis will follow linguistic power of media narratives and how it builds the audience perspective. This can help understand the process and also help build the textual examination that would create power asymmetries when covering the issue. Media framing positions women in an accusatory tone to delegitimize their experiences. Using active but negative verbs for the accusers while the accused receive active positive framing. These narratives can push for a sense of normalization surrounding the

violence. This can also include men being the subject for an issue that governs the women’s right violation.

The production contexts also help in revealing the voice from media favours the established power holders rather than the victim. The accuser is framed as the ‘agitator’.

The CDA is also reproduced in the form of a table that supports comparative narrative framing that shows themes among the content published and how it covers both parties.

Within this dual analysis framework, the women’s testimonies along with the critical examination of media narratives creates a research framework that aids in mirroring the Hall’s theoretical framework. The mark of resistance is found in the raw material extracted through this analysis framework. The four major themes also provide as representational content that could help in future media narratives and audience perception regulation. The process traces the contested meaning behind media consumption, production and distribution. This methodology is voice centred and wishes to portray intersectional awareness. The dual methodology shifts the focus from imposed interpretations to a woman’s narrative authority. The narrative authority and its mark of sustenance in an environment that is designed for its erasure while simultaneously mapping the discourse through public perception. The study transforms WCC’s quiet momentum into academic resonance.

IV. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

The research applies the Braun and Clarke’s six reflexive thematic analysis and attempts to gauge through coding the recurrent themes that emerge as the four master themes from WCC testimonies and other official statements. Dual framework within this study includes thematic analysis and CDA. This helps to trace women’s narrative authority against the industry [Mollywood’s] fractured apparatus. Each theme helps in expanding and analysing the research study’s core objectives.

The study is conducted in key phases

Phase1 – repeated familiarization via reading transcripts and understanding various testimonials

Phase 2 – line by line coding that led to generation of initial codes

Phase 3-4 – spread the data sheet to fit the four master themes

Phase 5- themes and their definition along with patterns, frequencies and quote matrices

4.1.1 Representation – the first master theme

Master theme definition – the women represented in the narrative are often described as “angry aunties”. The invalidation of the creative work of female artists using mansplaining, gaslighting and a guffaw like dismissal proves the industry has subjugated the women to rebuffing their professional legitimacy across acting and other roles.

Speaker	Raw quote	IC	FC	Freq.
Bina Paul [IFA]	“Lots of mansplaining... gaslighting... discomfort about women around”	Invalidation, male dominance	Mansplaining, gaslighting	6
Bina Paul	‘Industry says women are making Hoo- ha about nothing’	Victim blaming	Dismissal	5
Revathi [IFA]	“Post 40? Only roles like “angry mother-in law”	Age roles, typecasting	Ageist distinction	8
Revathi	“Women who speaks up.... troublemaker”	Penalty for speaking against structures	Troublemaker frame	5
Anjali Menon	“15 yrs experienced male artist > 15 yrs experienced female artist +WCC penalty	Experience Gap	WCC stigma	4

The first subtheme – Mansplaining and Gaslighting infrastructure [n=12]

- Bina Paul [WCC founder, editor] expresses her daily invalidation through her statement about meetings which include constant mansplaining and gaslighting and work disruption “when there are meetings there are plenty of instances um lot

of gaslighting .... there is discomfort about having a woman around” the statement is meant to delve into the pattern of these technical spaces and how women directors/ editors are automatically presumed to be incompetent despite their expertise.

Subtheme 2 Ageist Typecasting Trap [n=11]

- Revathi the actress who has worked on more than 300+ films expresses how the roles that she receives are primarily consisting of flattening roles or roles that are typecasted to elder women actresses to show maturity. “Post – 40? Only ‘angry mother-in-law’ roles.... No complexity”. She confirms the treatment by reiterating that the pattern cycles within the acting landscape fixes women into characters that offer maternal sacrifice or comedic relief and that promoted the idea of incompetency despite avid expertise.

Subtheme 3: “Hoo- ha” Trivialization [n=5]

- When the 2017 assault came to light, the industry reacted by trying to contain the issue promptly. Men dismissed these concerns with lines like “women making a fuss [Hoo-ha] over nothing” which turned serious harm into a story of needless fuss. This response reframed structural violence as if it were a feminine overreaction. The origin of the silent flag phrase ties to how people were represented and how that sparked pushback.

4.1.2 Resistance: WCC Platforms & Policy Practical Application

Master theme definition in brief: WCC builds and shapes public spaces, policy moves and organic networks so that personal harm becomes a shared set of voices and action, this is the strongest theme, shown by 34 coded instances. This is the strongest theme, (n=34 codes). WCC’s approach turns private pain into public story. Survivors and affected people use WCC spaces to tell what happened, name harms and link their stories to wider patterns. These platforms are both literal and digital. The coded evidence (n=34) highlights how consistently this pattern spreads across cases.

Speaker	Raw Quote	Final Codes	frequencies
Bhavana	“WCC	Safe	7

	Platform...don’t have to be scared”	testimony	
Revathi	“2017...casual WhatsApp to serious sharing”	Organic growth	8
Revathi	“Requested CM for Hema study”	Policy resistance	9
Bina Paul	“Pave way for next lot of women”	Solidarity	4

Subtheme 1: safe testimonial platforms (n=15)

Actress Bhavana describes WCC as a turning point: “now we have started a women’s collective...they don’t have to be scared...can say exactly what happened “..Revathi had added a similar note of change and hope: “women after 27 years gained courage from Hema”. The WCC essentially operates as a rupture. The tipping point that prompted opening up to newer possibilities within the industry with regards to women and their acting Eco space.

Subtheme 2: Policy Resistance and Timeline (n=12)

Revathi maps how institutions responded over time and the weight of delays: “One incident...requested Chief Minister for the Hema study...had to wait 4.5 years”. The account shows how change met pushback and slow action. It also traces how the WCC grew and shifted as these events and their demands shaped its role. The timeline below highlights key steps, who pushed them, and what each moment led to.

Subtheme 3: the organic WhatsApp origin (n=10)

Bina Paul explains “there was a lack of presence ....and the fraternity was not connected ...2017 abduction brought us close through WhatsApp... realized that there was much in common.” A reflexive process unfolded and this sudden crisis paved the way for people to start talking, those talks quickly turned into plans and the plans shaped a new found organization.

4.1.3 Exploitation: labor Structure Exposed

Master theme definition: Pay gaps, normalised harassment, and the erasure of technicians in the production settings (n=25 codes). The section maps how pay unfairness, routine mistreatment, and the sidelining of technical staff work together in film and media production. It also highlights how some workers face repeated harassment that becomes

accepted as part of the workplace. Over time, this routine mistreatment hides technical staff contributions and makes them less visible in credits, pay records, and career paths. These patterns were identified across twenty-coded incidents and examples collected from interviews and documents reviewed by the researcher.

Speaker	Raw quote	Final codes	Frequency
Anjali Menon	“Male artist with 15 yrs experience > woman with the same exp + WCC penalty”	Experience inequity	6
Bina Paul	“Demoralized ...not valued for what we bring”	Dignity violation	7
Revathi	“Snowball effect...harassment increased”	Trauma accumulation	8
Bina Paul	“Account of mocking a woman camera person	Technical erasure	4

Anjali Menon notes: “male artist who worked 15 years gets more opportunities than woman with the same experience... a WCC member is further affected by this exclusion.” Women with more experience still face fewer roles, fewer promotions, and fewer calls for big projects. Being a WCC member can make outcomes worse like being cut off from networks and lack of opportunities.

**Subtheme 2: Professional Devaluation (n=9)**

Bina Paul said: “Female artists were demoralized...disrespected ...not valued for what we bring to the table as professionals.” This comment echoes across many jobs in the field. Actresses, woman camera persons, editors, and directors all report being treated as less skilled or less serious. The result I slow trust, fewer chances to lead, and a constant need to prove worth.

**Subtheme 3: Harassment Accumulation (n=8)**

Revathi said: “Snowball effect...increase in harassment...emotionally...27 years later women speak.” The phrase captures how small harms add up until they break a person’s peace and career. Cases pile on over years, offensive talk, pressure, unwanted

touch, or threats, until victims find the courage to name them. The phrase “dignity of labour” used by the WCC asks for steady and fair pay, safe work and clear respect for skills.

**4.1.4 Public Backlash: Discursive Containment**

Master theme definition: Qualified support, economic reframing, digital violence, troublemaker labelling, industry responds to WCC rupture with ideological closure (strongest theme, n=28 codes). This subtheme looks at how public anger and pushback shape the story around the WCC rupture. More aggressive actions online created a harsh tone, and the organization were often labelled as troublemakers. Digital violence describes the hostile online behaviours that followed the rupture. Harsh comments, doxxing, coordinated attacks, and smear campaigns raised the emotional temperature of the discussion. The result was a chilling effect: some voices withdrew, and other toned down their messages to avoid backlash. In this way, digital violence functioned as a tool to enforce ideological closure.

Speaker	Raw quote	Final codes	Frequency
Sandra Thomas	“Not against WCC but pay gap=creative”	Qualified support	7
Indrans	“Lowers importance...produce r funds”	Economic defence	8
Revathi	“Cyberbullied...facel ess attacks”	Digital violence	9
Bina Paul	“Men: hoo-ha about nothing”	trivialization	4

**Subtheme 1: Split Consciousness Support (n=12)**

Sandra Thomas shows a clear pattern: “Much needed organization but...disparities in thought process.” Many in the industry give some support while they still hold on to old ranks and roles. This partial approval keeps the old order in place and is the most common form of pushback. People may nod to calls to calls for change, yet act in ways that keep division and mixed views alive.

**Subtheme 2: Market Logic Defence (n=10)**

The actor Indrans reframes the issue: “the issue is counterproductive for the organization.... they are

attempting to be superior to men...in a movie the producer funds, the actor must not ask for more and talk about who deserves more. When money and profit are the focus, calls for fairness are often softened or set aside to fit business logic.

Subtheme 3: Digital Escalation (n=11)

Backlash proves WCC threat. Ramya resists: “I don’t listen to certain rumours...” This statement shows a split in belief and action. The pattern points to a wider ideological break, where some refuse to accept harmful norms while others cling to them. The result is a clear fracture across views and behaviour.

Master themes table

Theme	Core patterns	Key codes	Frequency(n=115)
Representation	Mansplaining, aunty roles	“Gaslighting,” “angry mother-in-law”	28
Resistance	Safe platforms, policy	“WCC platform”, Hema	34
Exploitation	Pay gaps, harassment	“male>female”, “snowball”	25
Backlash	Qualified support	“Not against but”, cyberbullying	28

4.2 CDA Table and Analysis: Media Delegitimizing WCC (3 Articles + Fairclough Framework)

Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model looks at language and power in three linked ways. First, it studies the text itself, such as the exact words and phrases writers pick and how those choice shape meaning. Second, it examines discourse practice, which covers how a text is made, shared, and received, and how those processes can show bias in who gets to speak and what viewpoints are pushed (Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model, 2024). Third, it considers social practice, which ties the language and dialogue to larger social systems and norms, showing how communication can help keep unequal social relations in place. Using this model, researchers can trace how media language and

routines work with broader social forces to shape public views. This model helps revealing a clear pattern: many outlets frame WCC members as agitators while portraying industry figures as responsible authorities. At the level of text, reporters often use charged words like “protest,” “disrupt,” or “radical” to describe WCC activities, while industry actors are labelled with terms such as “experts,” “leaders,” or “stakeholders.” These word choices steer readers to see the coalition as troubling and the industry as stable and trustworthy

Dimension	WCC (accusers)	Industry (accused)
Representation	“Points out ‘systematic failure’” (exaggeration/whining) “witch-hunters endured” (provocative victims) [the Hans India, 2026]	“Ranjith case rekindles debate” (industry suffers); “AMMA downfall” (noble sacrifice) [Indian Express, Aug 27,2024]
Agency (discourse practice)	“Grievances raised” (petty petitioners; “clashed with AMMA” (disruptive agitators) [Indian Express, 24,2018]	“AMMA responds, agrees to discuss” (conciliatory leaders controlling timeline)
Legitimacy	“Proven right? Extent remains” (doubt cast); persistent nagging despite 6 years struggle.	“Moral responsibility” (credible leadership); Procedural authority preserved

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

The researcher laid out the main findings from two linked methods: Braun & Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis and Fairclough’s three-dimensional critical discourse analysis (CDA).

5.1 Thematic Analysis Findings

The thematic analysis followed the Braun & Clarke’s six reflexive steps. The researcher first read transcripts many times to become familiar with the

data. The data was then coded line by line and it initially created 73 codes. The codes were grouped into patterns that formed four main themes. Each theme was refined and defined, supported by patterned examples and the quote matrices which was checked and confirmed against the research objectives to fit its validity. This process revealed clear patterns and indication of representation, resistance, and other dynamics across the testimonies. Representation was the first major theme (n=28 codes). Across accounts, women were often reduced to stock images like the “angry auntie,” and their expertise was undermined through mansplaining, dismissive ageist roles, and language that minimized their concerns as trivial. Such moves worked together to erode professional credibility and place women outside serious industry respect. Resistance emerged as the strongest theme (n=34 codes), showing how private pain was turned into collective action and policy push. The WCC built safe spaces, used organic peer networks, and crafted testimony strategies to move from coping to contesting harmful norms.

Exploitation revealed deep problems in workplace systems (n=25 codes). These issues included a large pay gap such as 1:10 differences, harassment that people began to accept as normal, and the erasure of technicians’ roles. Public backlash was a major theme (n=28 codes) and showed up in many ways. Some people offered cautious support that came with strict limits. Others turned the matter into an economic debate, shifting moral worries into questions about cost and profit.

### 5.2 CDA Findings: Media Delegitimization

The contrast makes them sound extreme while the industry as the one who were presented with softer praise filled lines to denote that they had taken necessary actions to tackle the issue. The three layers of analysis altogether reveal a clear tilt: language choices, sourcing patterns and narrative frames work together to portray the WCC as aggressors that could devalue their actions while upholding industry actors as more legitimate and morally grounded in the eyes of the public.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

The study acknowledges the following limitations:

- Qualitative Dominance – the study lacks in covering the quantitative data that could be useful in realizing the intersectionality between this issue and other issues like pay gaps, role allocation, etc.
- Public data dependency – analysis is drawn from interviews, Hema report and news articles available through social, print and digital media limiting access to confidential production insights that could be drawn from the organizations like AMMA.
- Generalizability constraints - Patterns from select testimonies are difficult to extend beyond WCC’s specific context.
- may risk the possibility of the study showcasing one-sided representation.

### 6.2 Scope

This research study follows WCC’s “silent flag” movement from 2017 to present within the Malayalam cinema and it explains how the group grew and sustained over the course of the years. Using the Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis alongside Fairclough’s Three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis, this study tests three clear objectives: the media and audience response, industry impact and the evolution of WCC itself. The first objective looks at how media outlets and different audiences reacted to the movement’s public intervention and display of resistance. The second objective explores how the industry changed in response and the steps taken in policy, moves toward visibility of the women in cinema. The third traces the WCC’s own path: from small, private WhatsApp groups at its beginning to becoming the key catalyst that claimed the Hema policy discussion. To support these aims, the study uses thematic analysis that produced four main themes and coding set of 115 codes and this is paired with critical discourse analysis applied to major testimonies and articles. These methods together let the study map out the patterns of speech, action and institutional change linked to the ‘silent flag’ movement and this is relevant in showing how private organizing grew into

a public force that influences conversation and policy making across different settings.

### 6.3 Conclusion

The quiet banners that remained firm against Mollywood's tight frame of age limitations and gender silence. In 2017 the few messages passed in private groups shifted into a formal report that shook the scene and brought old rules into bright light. This thesis records the how headlines and pages shrink the women's experiences and make the industry sound measured and fair. The researcher provides clear examples on language and denotation that could make readers change how they judge right from wrong. It offers simple ways how reporter could aim to write to be fairer and treat every voice with equal weight.

Taken together, these results mark a real turning point: where women were once pushed aside by labels and were shrugged off but their shared stories now reflect formal action taken against authorities. Even amidst backlash and consistent efforts to limit their reach, WCC stays united under pressure and steady in order to make institutional changes. T WCC'S path from being pushed aside to shaping institutions, shows a strong model for feminist organizing and it also proves that many voices shared together as testimony can change the alignment of the deep-rooted power systems and open up space for lasting reforms and reconditioning.

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