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Casting Couch in the Indian Entertainment Industry: A Content Analysis of Institutional Accountability in the Post-#MeToo Era

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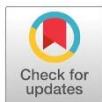
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This paper examines the “casting couch” the practice of demanding sexual favours in exchange for professional opportunities within the Indian entertainment industry through the lens of institutional accountability in the post-#MeToo period (2017–2025). Using a qualitative content analysis of publicly documented cases, government reports, and organisational responses across the Hindi (Bollywood), Malayalam (Mollywood), and Telugu (Tollywood) film industries, the study maps how allegations move from individual disclosure to institutional response, and evaluates the extent to which formal mechanisms the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 (POSH Act), industry-body committees, and government commissions have translated public disclosure into structural accountability. The findings indicate a persistent gap between disclosure volume and institutional consequence: public disclosures multiplied after 2018, but sustained institutional follow-through remained concentrated in a single jurisdiction (Kerala, following the Justice Hema Committee Report, 2024) and disproportionately favoured organised, contract-based segments of the workforce over the industry’s large informal and freelance labour pool. The paper situates these findings against comparative evidence from Hollywood and the South Korean entertainment industry, arguing that criminal-legal and reputational consequence has driven more consistent structural reform abroad than in India, where association-governed industry bodies retain considerable discretion over enforcement. The paper closes with policy recommendations for extending POSH Act coverage to the pre-employment and audition stage and to gig- and contract-based entertainment work, and for formalising industry-wide reporting mechanisms.

Keywords: casting couch; sexual harassment; Indian entertainment industry; POSH Act; #MeToo; institutional accountability; Hema Committee Report

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1. Introduction

The term “casting couch” denotes a specific form of employment-linked sexual exploitation in which sexual favours are solicited, implicitly or explicitly, as a condition for professional opportunity most commonly at the audition or pre-employment stage of a performer’s career. It differs from generalised workplace sexual harassment in one structurally important respect: the alleged conduct frequently precedes any formal employment relationship, occurring instead at the point of access to work itself. This distinction, largely incidental in popular discourse, turns out to carry significant legal weight, as this paper will show.

For decades, the casting couch was treated across India’s language film industries Hindi-language Bollywood, Telugu-language Tollywood, Tamil-language Kollywood, and Malayalam-language Mollywood — as an open secret: widely referenced in industry folklore and journalism, rarely documented, and almost never prosecuted (Malik & Sonu, 2024). The global #MeToo movement, triggered by allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein in October 2017, reached India roughly a year later, when actor Tanushree Dutta’s renewed allegations against a senior Bollywood actor set off a wider wave of testimony across media, journalism, and the film industry (John, 2020). In Kerala, a parallel and in some respects more consequential process had already begun: the 2017 assault of a leading Malayalam actress led to the formation of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) and the state government’s constitution of the Justice Hema Committee, whose long-delayed report was finally released, in redacted form, in August 2024.

A substantial literature now documents the disclosures themselves their framing in media and social media, their reception, and their place within the broader arc of Indian feminist politics (John, 2020; Pan, 2023; Bhrugubanda, 2024). Comparatively less attention has been paid to what happens structurally after disclosure: whether, and under what conditions, public allegation translates into institutional consequence a resignation, a criminal case, a legal reform, a change in how production houses contract their workers as opposed to a news cycle that recedes without lasting effect.

This paper addresses that gap. Its central research question is: to what extent, and through which institutional pathways, has public disclosure of casting-couch practices in the Indian entertainment industry (2017–2025) been followed by documented institutional accountability? The analysis proceeds through a content analysis of the public record news reporting, the Hema Committee Report, industry-association statements, and available legal filings coded for institutional actor, response type, and outcome. It situates the Indian case record against comparative material from Hollywood and the South Korean entertainment industry, both of which experienced comparably prominent #MeToo reckonings in the same period.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature across six themes: global #MeToo institutional-accountability theory, the Indian #MeToo movement, casting couch as structural exploitation, collective and organisational responses, the POSH Act’s legal architecture, and comparative international perspectives. Section 3 sets out the content-analysis methodology. Section 4 presents findings across eleven tables and two figures. Section 5 discusses the findings against the literature, Section 6 sets out policy implications, and Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global #MeToo and Institutional Accountability Theory

Organisational and institutional scholarship on #MeToo is dominated by US-centred, quantitative work examining how the Weinstein scandal altered firm behaviour and market outcomes. Yao, Xu, and Ao (2025) find that reputational loss following the Weinstein scandal diffused across countries in proportion to media coverage and to the strength of a host country's formal and informal gender-equality institutions an institutional-diffusion framework that implies structural reform is contingent on pre-existing institutional capacity rather than on disclosure alone. Luo and Zhang (2022) show a more direct behavioural effect: Hollywood producers increased their hiring of female writers following the scandal, evidence that scandal-driven social movements can produce measurable change in organisational practice, not merely reputational cost. Hennekam and Bennett (2017), by contrast, offer a more sobering account, arguing from interviews with creative-industry workers that harassment tolerance is not incidental but embedded in the sector's culture of precarity, informal hierarchy, and reputational dependency conditions that discourage reporting regardless of the external prominence of a social movement.

Read together, this literature suggests institutional accountability following a #MeToo-type disclosure is not a single event but a sequence with several distinct stages individual disclosure, media amplification, organisational or collective response, legal or regulatory action, and (in the most consequential cases) structural reform at each of which attrition can occur. This staged conception underpins the analytical framework used later in this paper

2.2 #MeToo in India: Scope and Limits

India's #MeToo moment is best understood, in John's (2020) account, as continuous with a longer arc of feminist mobilisation against sexual violence dating to the 2012 Delhi gang-rape case, rather than as a discrete import of the American movement. John situates the 2018 wave spanning journalism, academia, government, and the film industry within this longer history, while also noting a structural limitation: a movement organised around individual testimony can name perpetrators but struggles to alter the underlying conditions, such as low female workforce participation, that make retaliation costly for those who speak.

Pan (2023) extends this critique along caste and class lines, arguing that mainstream #MeToo India discourse disproportionately amplified the testimony of urban, English-speaking, upper-caste women, while the experiences of Dalit and working-class women were comparatively marginalised even within a movement ostensibly concerned with gendered power. For the entertainment industry specifically, this critique has direct relevance: junior artists, background performers, and technicians the industry's least visible and most precarious workers — are systematically underrepresented in the public record this paper draws upon, a limitation discussed further in Section 3.5.

2.3 Casting Couch as Structural Exploitation in the Film Industries

A smaller, India-specific literature addresses the casting couch as a distinct phenomenon rather than as one instance of generic workplace harassment. Malik and Sonu (2024), writing from a legal-studies perspective, situate the casting couch as a form of quid-pro-quo harassment concentrated at the audition and pre-employment stage, and note the near-absence of successful prosecutions specific to casting-couch complaints in Indian courts

a gap they attribute to evidentiary difficulty, the reluctance of complainants to jeopardise future work, and the absence of a clear statutory “workplace” at the moment the alleged conduct occurs.

Bhrugubanda (2024) examines how casting-couch and #MeToo disclosures in Telugu cinema were received within the industry itself, documenting how senior figures publicly minimised the allegations and, in some cases, reframed economic dependency on the industry (“the industry feeds you”) as grounds for tolerating exploitation. This account is instructive for the present study because it illustrates a mechanism by which institutional response is blunted from within: an industry that frames itself as a provider of livelihood to its workers can discourage the very complaints that would trigger institutional accountability.

Vasanthi (2025), drawing on fieldwork conducted in the Telugu-language media and entertainment industry in Hyderabad and Telangana between 2021 and 2023, frames the sector through the concept of precarious labour employment marked by unclear contractual status and an absence of the stable employer-employee relationship that most protective labour and workplace-safety statutes presuppose. Vasanthi’s central finding, that the organised/unorganised sector binary used in Indian labour law does not capture the entertainment industry’s actual working conditions, connects directly to the POSH Act applicability questions examined in Section 2.5.

Taken together, this literature converges on a structural account: casting-couch exploitation is enabled less by the absence of law (the POSH Act has existed since 2013) than by the industry’s informal contracting practices and internal culture, both of which also blunt institutional accountability once a complaint is made public.

2.4 Collective and Organisational Responses

The most consequential organised response documented in the literature is the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), formed in Kerala in November 2017. Raj and Suresh (2026) present WCC as a rare case of durable feminist collective action within an Indian film industry, crediting its sustained advocacy including the #RefuseTheAbuse campaign with prompting the Kerala government to constitute the Justice Hema Committee. Earlier qualitative work on WCC’s digital and public-facing activism reaches a similar conclusion, describing the organisation’s role in keeping feminist demands visible in Malayalam cinema across a multi-year period during which the state’s own inquiry remained unpublished.

No directly comparable, sustained collective has been documented at similar scale in the Hindi, Telugu, or Tamil film industries. Tollywood’s principal institutional response the Movie Artists’ Association’s (MAA) constitution of a sexual-harassment committee in 2018 emerged reactively, following an individual protest by actor Sri Reddy outside the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce, rather than from organised collective mobilisation of the kind WCC represents. Tehzeeb (2026), tracing the Malayalam industry’s institutional trajectory descriptively, argues that durable change required both bottom-up collective pressure (WCC) and top-down state action (the Hema Committee) operating in tandem; neither, in her account, proved sufficient alone. This is a load-bearing claim for the present study’s findings, discussed in Section 5.

2.5 Legal Architecture: The POSH Act and Its Gaps

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) replaced the 1997 Vishaka Guidelines and, in principle, covers both the organised and unorganised sectors, mandating Internal Committees (ICs) in establishments above a threshold size and Local Complaints

Committees (LCCs) for smaller and informal establishments. Legal commentary identifies several gaps of direct relevance to the entertainment industry. First, the Act's definition of "employee" has historically been unclear for freelance, gig-style, and contract-based work the dominant employment form for junior artists, background performers, and many technicians. A 2024 Karnataka High Court ruling extending POSH Act coverage to a gig-platform driver has been read by legal commentators as a potential precedent for extending similar coverage to entertainment-industry freelancers, though the ruling was stayed on appeal and its reach beyond the facts of that case remains untested. Second, the Supreme Court's 2023 directions in *Aureliano Fernandes v. State of Goa*, issued after reporting exposed weak POSH Act compliance in national sports federations, have been cited by legal commentators as directly relevant to the film industry's comparable structure of association-governed, individually contracted professionals.

A gap not resolved by either development, and central to this paper's argument, concerns timing: casting-couch conduct is frequently alleged to occur at auditions or preliminary meetings, before any employment relationship exists. Because the POSH Act's protections attach to a "workplace" and, generally, to an existing or recently concluded working relationship, the pre-employment moment at which casting-couch harassment is most commonly alleged to occur sits in an unresolved zone of statutory applicability a gap this paper's findings return to in Section 4.5.

2.6 Comparative International Perspectives

Comparative material from Hollywood and South Korea provides a useful benchmark for evaluating the Indian case record. In the United States, criminal prosecution and civil litigation ran alongside market and reputational consequence: Weinstein was convicted in New York in 2020 (a conviction later overturned on appeal and ordered for retrial in 2024) and separately convicted in Los Angeles in 2022, a conviction that stands. Yao et al. (2025) and Luo and Zhang (2022) both document measurable downstream effects box-office reputational loss and changed hiring practice, respectively flowing from this combination of criminal and market consequence. Nikolova's (2021) discourse analysis of the Weinstein case's coverage in the *New York Times* found that US press coverage placed clear discursive agency and responsibility on the perpetrator, a framing pattern that comparative media-framing literature on Indian coverage of sexual-harassment allegations has often found to be less consistent, with greater scrutiny directed at complainants.

South Korea's entertainment-industry reckoning followed a different but comparably consequential path. Choo (2021) frames the Korean #MeToo movement as an "institutional critique" that moved beyond individual testimony to challenge broader patterns of corporate and cultural power. The 2019 Burning Sun scandal, involving K-pop performer Seungri and singer Jung Joon-young, resulted in criminal investigation, convictions, and subsequent regulatory scrutiny of talent-agency contracts by South Korea's Fair Trade Commission. As in the Hollywood case, criminal-legal consequence not disclosure volume alone appears central to the structural reforms that followed.

India's most institutionally consequential episode, the Kerala/Hema Committee process, followed a materially different pathway: a state-commissioned administrative inquiry rather than criminal prosecution was the primary lever of institutional change, at least in its first phase. Whether this pathway proves as durable as the criminal-legal routes taken in the US and South Korean cases is, at the time of writing, an open empirical question one this paper's findings speak to directly.

Table 1*Literature Summary Matrix*

Author(s) / Year	Focus	Method / Type	Key Contribution to This Study
John (2020)	#MeToo India's origins and limits	Conceptual / essay	Frames #MeToo India as continuous with post-2012 feminist mobilisation; identifies limits of testimony-centred movements
Pan (2023)	Caste and class in #MeToo India	Critical essay	Identifies systematic under-representation of Dalit and working-class women's experiences in #MeToo India discourse
Bhugubanda (2024)	#MeToo in Indian film industries	Descriptive / case analysis	Documents industry-internal minimisation of disclosures via economic-dependency framing
Malik & Sonu (2024)	Casting couch as legal category	Comparative legal analysis	Establishes casting couch as a distinct, under-prosecuted, pre-employment form of harassment
Tehzeeb (2026)	Institutional change in Malayalam cinema	Descriptive case study	Argues collective action and state inquiry were jointly necessary for institutional change
Raj & Suresh (2026)	Women in Cinema Collective (WCC)	Case study	Credits WCC with initiating the process leading to the Hema Committee
Vasanthi (2025)	Precarious labour in Telugu media industry	Fieldwork-based study (2021–2023)	Shows organised/unorganised labour binary fails to capture entertainment-industry work
Hennekam & Bennett (2017)	Harassment tolerance in creative industries	Interview-based	Argues harassment tolerance is embedded in creative-industry culture, not incidental
Yao, Xu & Ao (2025)	Cross-country diffusion of Weinstein reputational loss	Quantitative / econometric	Shows institutional capacity, not disclosure alone, predicts structural consequence
Luo & Zhang (2022)	#MeToo and Hollywood hiring practice	Quantitative	Demonstrates scandal-driven change in organisational hiring behaviour
Nikolova (2021)	Press framing of the Weinstein case	Critical discourse analysis	Finds US press coverage assigned clear agency to the perpetrator
Choo (2021)	South Korean #MeToo as institutional critique	Conceptual / qualitative	Frames Korean #MeToo as critique of corporate/cultural power structures
Guha (2021)	Media, social media and anti-rape activism in India	Interview-based (75 interviews)	Establishes agenda-building framework for Indian feminist digital activism
Hema Committee (2024)	Working conditions of women in Malayalam cinema	Government inquiry report	Primary documentary source for Section 4.9 findings
Justice Verma Committee (2013)	Criminal law reform after 2012 Delhi case	Government committee report	Legislative precursor informing the POSH Act's unorganised-sector provisions
Economic and Political Weekly (2024)	Gig workers under the POSH Act	Legal/policy commentary	Documents 2024 Karnataka High Court ruling on gig-worker POSH coverage
Supreme Court of India (2023)	Aureliano Fernandes v. State of Goa	Judicial directions	Establishes judicial precedent on POSH enforcement in association-governed sectors

Note. Full bibliographic details for all sources appear in the References section.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses qualitative content analysis of secondary, publicly available records to trace the relationship between casting-couch disclosure and institutional response in the Indian entertainment industry between January 2017 and June 2025. A secondary-record design was chosen over primary survey or interview methods for two reasons. First, direct access to complainants raises ethical and safety concerns that fall outside the scope and resourcing of this study. Second, this design is methodologically consistent with comparable published work on institutional response in this literature (Raj & Suresh, 2026; Tehzeeb, 2026), allowing findings to be read alongside, rather than at odds with, the existing evidence base.

3.2 Data Sources

Four categories of source material were compiled and cross-checked against one another:

(a) News reporting and wire coverage from established English-language Indian and international outlets, 2017–2025; (b) the Justice Hema Committee Report (2024), used as the principal government documentary source for the Kerala case cluster; (c) publicly available court and police records, limited to matters of public record such as First Information Reports (FIRs) and reported case status; and (d) public statements issued by industry associations (AMMA, MAA, WCC) and by relevant government bodies (the National Commission for Women, the Kerala state government).

3.3 Sampling Frame and Inclusion Criteria

An event was included in the case record if it met two conditions: (i) it was corroborated by more than one independent public source, or officially documented (for example, in a government report or court filing); and (ii) it was connected either to a casting-couch allegation specifically or to an institutional response industry, state, judicial, or civil-society to such allegations. Single-source allegations circulating only on social media without independent corroboration were excluded. This criterion was applied deliberately: the study's purpose is to trace documented institutional response, not to adjudicate the truth of individual, uncorroborated claims about named persons, and including such claims would not serve that purpose while raising avoidable risk of harm.

3.4 Coding Scheme

Each event meeting the inclusion criteria was coded on five dimensions: (a) industry sub-sector (Bollywood, Mollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood, or other/regional); (b) year of occurrence or disclosure; (c) type of institutional actor involved (industry association, state government, judiciary, or civil society/collective); (d) type of institutional response (self-regulatory, statutory/legal, administrative inquiry, or collective mobilisation); and (e) documented outcome as of the data cut-off date of June 2025. Coding was conducted iteratively, with categories refined as the case record was compiled, consistent with standard practice in qualitative content analysis.

3.5 Limitations of Method

Three limitations bear directly on how the findings should be read. First, reliance on the public record systematically undercounts incidents that are never disclosed publicly by a wide margin, on the account of every

source reviewed in Section 2, the majority of casting-couch incidents. Second, public and press documentation is skewed toward cases involving already-prominent individuals or organisations; the industry's least visible workers junior artists, background performers, and freelance technicians are correspondingly underrepresented in the case record, a pattern the findings themselves surface (Section 4.5) rather than merely note as a caveat. Third, English-language press coverage, which forms the bulk of the source base, likely underrepresents developments in the Bengali, Kannada, Marathi, Punjabi, and other regional-language industries relative to Hindi, Malayalam, and Telugu cinema, which received disproportionate national and international coverage. The analysis that follows describes documented institutional response; it does not, and cannot, estimate the underlying prevalence of casting-couch practices themselves.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the coded case record across ten tables and two figures, organised around the study's central question: what institutional pathways, if any, connect public disclosure of casting-couch practices to documented accountability. Each table is accompanied by brief interpretive text; fuller discussion follows in Section 5.

4.1 Chronology of Disclosure and Institutional Response

Table 2 sets out the major publicly documented events identified in the case record, year by year. The chronology shows two distinct clusters of activity 2018, coinciding with the national #MeToo wave, and 2024, coinciding with the release of the Hema Committee Report separated by a multi-year period (2019–2023) in which the Kerala inquiry's findings remained unpublished despite having been submitted to government in 2019.

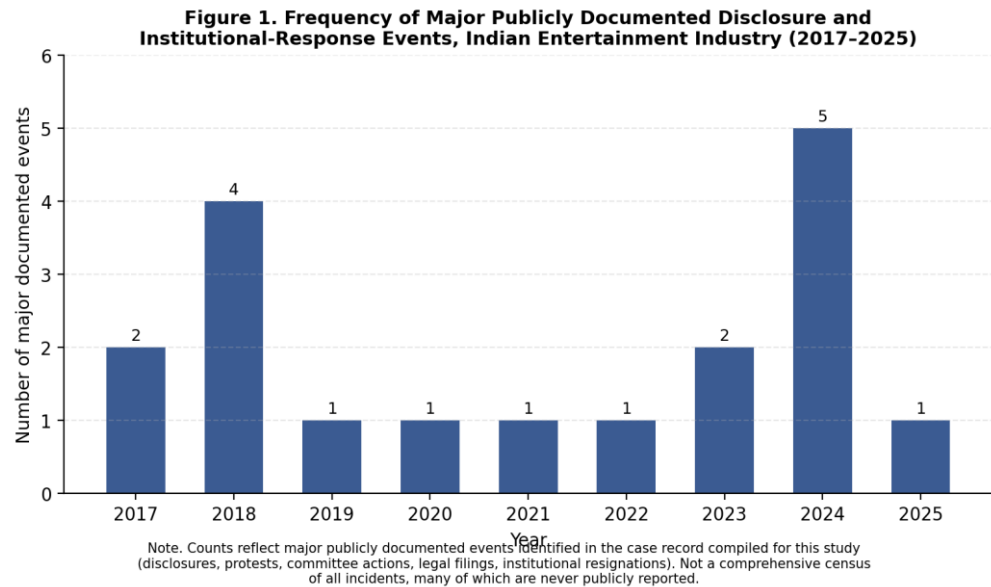
Table 2

Chronology of Major Disclosure and Institutional-Response Events, 2017–2025

Year	Major Publicly Documented Event(s)	Institutional Actor(s) Involved
2017	Assault on a leading Malayalam actress; formation of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC); Kerala government constitutes the Justice Hema Committee	Civil society; state government
2018	Tanushree Dutta's renewed allegations reignite #MeToo in Bollywood; Sri Reddy's protest outside the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce; MAA constitutes a sexual-harassment committee	Individual disclosure; media; industry association
2019	Justice Hema Committee submits its report to the Kerala government (not released)	State government
2020–2022	Continued POSH Act enforcement gaps highlighted in press and legal commentary; report not released	Legal commentators; civil society
2023	Supreme Court issues enforcement directions in <i>Aureliano Fernandes v. State of Goa</i> , cited as relevant to association-governed sectors including cinema	Judiciary

Year	Major Publicly Documented Event(s)	Institutional Actor(s) Involved
2024	Hema Committee Report released (redacted) after RTI and court proceedings; AMMA leadership resigns en masse; FIRs registered against multiple individuals; Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed; Kerala Cine Employers and Employees (Regulation) Act proposed	State government; judiciary; industry association; civil society
2025	National Commission for Women seeks the complete, unredacted Hema Committee Report; continued WCC advocacy for systemic reform	Central government body; civil society

Note. Compiled from news reporting and government records cited in Section 3.2; see References.



4.2 Industry Sub-Sector Comparison

Table 3 compares the five sub-sectors covered by the case record. The comparison highlights a sharp asymmetry: Bollywood is the only sub-sector in which both a dedicated collective and a state-commissioned inquiry are documented, and it is correspondingly the only sub-sector with sustained institutional consequence association leadership resignations, FIRs, and a proposed legislative instrument traceable in the public record.

Table 3
Comparative Institutional Landscape by Industry Sub-Sector

Industry Sub-Sector	Dedicated Collective / Union?	State-Commissioned Inquiry?	Primary Documented Accountability Driver
Bollywood (Hindi)	No dedicated equivalent to WCC identified	No	Media and social pressure following individual disclosures; limited criminal follow-through
Mollywood (Malayalam)	Women in Cinema Collective (2017)	Yes — Justice Hema Committee (2017–2024)	Combined collective mobilisation and state-commissioned inquiry

Industry Sub-Sector	Dedicated Collective / Union?	State-Commissioned Inquiry?	Primary Documented Accountability Driver
Tollywood (Telugu)	No dedicated collective; MAA internal committee formed reactively (2018)	No	Individual protest (Sri Reddy) plus media coverage
Kollywood (Tamil)	Not identified in the public record reviewed	No	Limited public disclosure; comparatively undocumented
Television / regional-language industries	Not identified in the public record reviewed	No	Least institutionally documented segment in this case record

Note. “Not identified in the public record reviewed” indicates absence of documentation within this study's data sources, not confirmed absence of such organisations.

4.3 Institutional Response Typology

Table 4 classifies the distinct types of institutional response documented in the case record. Of the five types identified, only judicial intervention carries binding statutory force; the remaining four which account for the large majority of documented responses are advisory, self-regulatory, or not yet enacted.

Table 4

Typology of Institutional Response, with Documented Examples

Response Type	Documented Example	Binding / Statutory?
Industry self-regulation	MAA sexual-harassment committee (Telugu industry, 2018)	No — internal, association-run
State-commissioned administrative inquiry	Justice Hema Committee (Kerala, constituted 2017, reported 2024)	Advisory; recommendations require separate legislative or executive action
Judicial intervention	Supreme Court directions in Aureliano Fernandes v. State of Goa (2023)	Yes — binding directions on POSH enforcement
Civil-society / collective mobilisation	Women in Cinema Collective (2017–present); Sri Reddy protest (2018)	No — advocacy and public pressure
Legislative proposal	Kerala Cine Employers and Employees (Regulation) Act (proposed 2024)	Not yet enacted at time of writing

4.4 Outcome Categories of Publicly Documented Cases

Table 5 sets out the outcome categories observed across the case record. This table is descriptive rather than statistical: the underlying case record is not large enough, nor systematically enough sampled, to support precise proportions, and no such proportions are claimed. The qualitative pattern is nonetheless clear disclosure, resignation, and investigation are documented with some frequency; criminal conviction specific to a casting-couch complaint is not documented at all within this study's data collection window.

Table 5*Outcome Categories Observed in the Case Record (Descriptive, Not Exhaustive)*

Outcome Category	Description	Documented in Case Record?
FIR registered	Formal police complaint filed against a named individual	Yes — multiple instances, 2024 Kerala cluster
Under investigation / SIT probe	Matter referred to a dedicated investigative body, outcome pending	Yes — Kerala SIT, formed 2024
Resignation from association position	Individual steps down from an industry-body leadership role, without criminal finding	Yes — AMMA leadership, 2024
Criminal conviction specific to a casting-couch complaint	Court finding of guilt in a matter originating as a casting-couch allegation	None identified in the case record as of the June 2025 data cut-off
No formal action beyond disclosure	Allegation publicly documented (including via the Hema Committee's anonymised findings) with no traceable subsequent legal or institutional consequence	Yes — the majority category across the full case record

Note. Absence of a documented conviction reflects this study's public-record data source and time window; it is not a claim that no such conviction has ever occurred or will occur as pending investigations conclude.

4.5 POSH Act Applicability Gaps Specific to the Entertainment Industry

Table 6 maps the specific applicability gaps identified in the legal-commentary literature reviewed in Section 2.5 onto the entertainment industry's actual employment categories. The pattern that emerges is that POSH Act coverage weakens systematically as workers move further from formal, salaried employment precisely the direction in which the industry's own contracting practices have moved, per Vasanthi's (2025) fieldwork. The audition-stage gap is the most consequential for casting couch specifically, since it is the stage at which the practice is most commonly alleged to occur.

Table 6*POSH Act Applicability Gaps by Worker and Career-Stage Category*

Worker / Stage Category	POSH Act Coverage Status	Specific Gap Identified in Legal Commentary
Junior artists / background performers	Ambiguous	Frequently uncontracted or informally engaged; "employee" status for POSH purposes unclear
Freelance technicians and crew	Ambiguous	No fixed employer or workplace under Section 2(o); coverage depends on production-specific arrangements
Aspiring actors at audition / casting stage	Contested	Harm alleged to occur before any employment relationship exists; workplace definition may not yet apply
Production houses with fewer than 10 workers	Covered via Local Complaints Committee (LCC) only	LCC route depends on district-level administrative capacity, which legal commentary describes as inconsistently resourced

Worker / Stage Category	POSH Act Coverage Status	Specific Gap Identified in Legal Commentary
Gig / platform-adjacent entertainment work	Emerging, following 2024 Karnataka High Court ruling	Ruling addressed a platform driver, not audition-stage conduct; application to entertainment gig work untested and currently stayed on appeal
OTT / streaming productions	Ambiguous	Multiple potential “employers” (platform, production house, casting agency) complicate accountability

4.6 Comparative International Institutional Response

Table 7 places the Kerala/Mollywood case the most institutionally developed episode in the Indian case record alongside the Hollywood and South Korean cases. The comparison is illustrative rather than a matched-case design, given differences in legal system, industry structure, and time elapsed since the triggering event. Even so, a pattern is visible: both comparator cases combined administrative or reputational pressure with criminal-legal consequence, while the Indian case, at the time of writing, has produced administrative and investigatory action but no documented conviction specific to the underlying casting-couch allegations.

Table 7

Comparative Institutional Response: India, United States, and South Korea

Dimension	India (Mollywood cluster)	United States (Hollywood)	South Korea
Trigger event	2017 assault case	2017 Weinstein allegations	2019 Burning Sun / Jung Joon-young scandal
Primary accountability mechanism	State-commissioned committee; subsequent FIRs and SIT probe	Criminal prosecution; civil litigation; industry commission (Hollywood Commission)	Criminal investigation and prosecution
Legal consequence for most prominent implicated figure(s)	Under investigation / trial as of 2025	Criminal conviction (NY 2020, overturned/retried 2024; LA 2022 conviction stands)	Criminal conviction and sentencing
Documented structural / industry reform	Proposed Kerala Cine Employers and Employees (Regulation) Act	Morals clauses in standard contracts; ongoing Hollywood Commission surveys	Talent-agency contract reform; Fair Trade Commission oversight

4.7 Collective and Organisational Responses

Table 8 compares the collective and organisational bodies documented across the case record. The asymmetry noted in Table 3 recurs here: WCC is the only body documented as having initiated, rather than reacted to, institutional change, and no equivalent body is identified for Bollywood India's largest and most internationally visible film industry — within the sources reviewed for this study.

Table 8*Collective and Organisational Bodies Documented in the Case Record*

Organisation	Industry / Region	Formed	Documented Role
Women in Cinema Collective (WCC)	Malayalam cinema, Kerala	November 2017	Sustained advocacy; campaigns including #RefuseTheAbuse; credited in the literature with prompting the Hema Committee's constitution
MAA Sexual Harassment Committee	Telugu cinema (Tollywood)	2018	Formed reactively by the Movie Artists' Association following Sri Reddy's public protest; internal, self-regulatory body
CINTAA (Cine and TV Artists' Association)	Hindi film and television, Mumbai	Pre-existing body (general grievance redressal)	General-purpose artists' association; not documented in the case record as having undertaken a #MeToo-specific institutional response

4.8 Hema Committee Report: Key Documented Findings

Table 9 summarises, by category, the principal findings of the Justice Hema Committee Report (2024), the single most detailed government documentary source available for this study. The report's own findings substantiate several of the structural mechanisms identified in the literature reviewed in Section 2.3 in particular, the absence of written contracts and the existence of an informally organised power structure, both of which the report connects directly to the persistence of exploitative practices including the casting couch.

Table 9*Key Documented Findings of the Justice Hema Committee Report (2024)*

Category of Finding	Summary (Hema Committee Report, 2024)
Sexual harassment and casting couch	Documents sexual demands and harassment, including at the casting stage, across multiple levels of industry seniority
Gender-based discrimination	Finds systemic discrimination in pay, working conditions, and professional opportunity between male and female industry workers
Absence of written contracts	Reports that a majority of women workers, particularly in junior and technical roles, lacked written contracts specifying terms of engagement or remuneration
Inadequate basic amenities	Documents absence of basic facilities such as washrooms and changing rooms on many production sets
Informal power structure	Identifies a small, informally organised group of senior male industry figures exercising outsized influence over casting and production decisions
Recommended reforms	Proposes statutory Internal Complaints Committees at the production-house level and a dedicated Kerala Cine Employers and Employees (Regulation) Act

Note. Summarised from the Hema Committee (2024) report as covered in contemporaneous government and press documentation; the original report itself remains only partially released.

4.9 Pre-2018 versus Post-2018 Institutional Landscape

Table 10 compares the institutional landscape before and after the 2018 #MeToo wave. The comparison shows genuine change on several dimensions public framing, the emergence of dedicated collectives, and increased legal-commentary attention alongside striking continuity on the dimension that arguably matters most for deterrence: the documented conviction rate specific to casting-couch-origin complaints, which remains at zero in this case record both before and after 2018.

Table 10

Institutional Landscape Before and After the 2018 #MeToo Wave

Dimension	Pre-2018	Post-2018
Public framing of casting couch	Widely referenced as industry folklore / open secret; rarely treated as an actionable complaint	Increasingly framed and documented as a specific form of workplace-linked sexual harassment
Dedicated collectives	None documented	WCC (Kerala, 2017); reactive committees elsewhere (e.g., MAA, 2018)
POSH Act invocation in entertainment-sector disputes	Rarely documented despite the Act's existence since 2013	More frequently referenced in legal commentary, though applicability gaps (Table 6) persist
Government inquiry	None commissioned specific to a film industry prior to 2017	Justice Hema Committee (Kerala, 2017–2024); no equivalent commissioned in other states' film industries
Documented conviction rate for casting-couch-origin complaints	None identified	None identified as of the June 2025 data cut-off, despite increased disclosure and investigation

4.10 A Conceptual Framework of Institutional Accountability

Figure 2 and Table 11 operationalise the staged framework drawn from the institutional-accountability literature (Section 2.1) against this study's own case record. At every stage after the first, the volume of documented activity narrows not smoothly, but sharply, with the largest single drop occurring between organisational response (Stage 3) and binding legal or regulatory action (Stage 4). This pattern is the paper's central empirical finding and is discussed at length in Section 5.

Figure 2. Stages of Institutional Accountability Following Casting-Couch Disclosure, with Attrition Points Identified in the Case Record

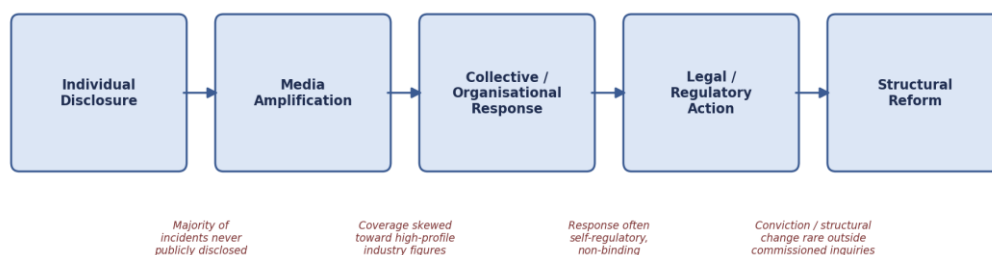


Table 11*Stage-Wise Case-Record Evidence and Documented Attrition Mechanisms*

Stage	Case-Record Evidence of This Stage	Primary Documented Attrition Mechanism
1. Individual disclosure	Documented for a small number of high-profile figures across all five sub-sectors (Table 3)	Majority of incidents, per every source reviewed in Section 2, never reach public disclosure at all
2. Media amplification	Extensive coverage of 2018 and 2024 clusters; national and international outlets	Coverage concentrated on already-prominent individuals and organisations; junior workers' cases rarely amplified
3. Collective / organisational response	WCC (Kerala); MAA committee (Telugu); Hema Committee constitution	Response is self-regulatory or advisory in four of five documented response types (Table 4)
4. Legal / regulatory action	FIRs, SIT probe (Kerala, 2024); Supreme Court directions (2023)	POSH Act applicability gaps (Table 6) leave audition-stage conduct in a contested statutory zone
5. Structural reform	Proposed Kerala Cine Employers and Employees (Regulation) Act (not yet enacted)	No equivalent legislative proposal documented outside Kerala; reform proposal itself not yet enacted

5. Discussion

The case record assembled for this study supports a central finding: sustained institutional consequence following casting-couch disclosure in the Indian entertainment industry is heavily concentrated in a single state, and followed a specific combination of factors — organised collective mobilisation (WCC) operating alongside a state-commissioned administrative inquiry (the Hema Committee) that has not been replicated in any other language industry covered by this study. This is consistent with Tehzeeb's (2026) argument that bottom-up and top-down pressure were jointly, not separately, necessary for Malayalam cinema's institutional trajectory, and it helps explain why Bollywood despite far greater national and international media visibility shows comparatively little documented structural consequence in this case record: it lacks a WCC-equivalent collective, and no state government has commissioned an inquiry comparable to Kerala's. A second finding concerns the dominant mode of institutional response nationally. Of the five response types identified in Table 4, only judicial intervention is binding; the remainder self-regulation, administrative inquiry, collective advocacy, and legislative proposal are advisory, voluntary, or not yet in force. This is consistent with Bhrugubanda's (2024) and Vasanthi's (2025) shared argument that the industry's own structural conditions informal contracting, economic dependency, association-governed self-policing blunt institutional accountability even where disclosure is extensive. The MAA committee in Telugu cinema illustrates the pattern directly: it was formed by the same association that had, until Sri Reddy's protest, denied her membership, and it remains an internal, self-regulatory body with no external statutory oversight identified in the case record.

Third, and most specific to casting couch as distinct from workplace harassment generally, the audition-stage timing gap identified in Table 6 recurs across the legal-commentary literature and is not resolved by the most relevant recent legal development the 2024 Karnataka High Court ruling on gig-worker POSH coverage because that ruling concerned harassment during an existing working relationship, not conduct alleged to occur before

any relationship exists. This gap matters because it is definitional to the practice under study: if the POSH Act's protections do not clearly extend to the audition stage, then casting couch specifically may fall outside the Act's practical reach even in cases where a production house has a compliant Internal Committee for its existing employees.

Finally, the comparative material in Table 7 suggests that criminal-legal consequence, rather than disclosure volume or media prominence, is the more reliable predictor of structural industry reform evident in both the Hollywood and South Korean cases, each of which combined criminal prosecution with subsequent industry-level regulatory change. India's most developed case, by contrast, has so far produced administrative and investigatory action (an SIT probe, multiple FIRs) without a documented conviction specific to the underlying casting-couch allegations. Whether the Kerala process eventually produces convictions and, in turn, the kind of structural reform seen in the comparator cases is an open question this paper cannot resolve, given its June 2025 data cut-off; it is, however, the single most consequential unresolved variable for assessing whether the post-#MeToo period represents durable change or a concentrated but ultimately contained episode.

6. Policy Implications

The findings in Section 4 point toward a specific, actionable set of recommendations rather than a generic call for stronger enforcement. Table 12 maps these recommendations to the stakeholders best placed to act on them. Two recommendations follow most directly from the paper's central findings: closing the audition-stage timing gap in POSH Act coverage (Section 4.5), and extending collective-organisation models comparable to WCC beyond Kerala, given the clear association in this case record between the presence of such a collective and the presence of sustained institutional consequence (Section 4.2).

Table 12

Policy Recommendations Mapped to Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Recommendation
Central / state government	Amend the POSH Act, or issue clarifying rules, to explicitly extend coverage to the audition and pre-employment stage of engagement in the entertainment industry, closing the timing gap identified in Table 6
Central / state government	Extend statutory mandate for Internal Complaints Committees to the production-house level for all productions above a defined budget or crew-size threshold, regardless of the organised/unorganised status of individual workers
Production houses and OTT platforms	Adopt standardised written contracts for all cast and crew, including junior artists and background performers, following the Hema Committee's (2024) specific recommendation on this point
Industry associations (AMMA, MAA, CINTAA, and equivalents)	Establish grievance redressal mechanisms with external, non-industry representation, rather than the purely internal self-regulatory model documented in Table 4
State governments outside Kerala	Consider commissioning comparable independent inquiries into working conditions in their respective language film industries, given the absence of any equivalent to the Hema Committee elsewhere in the case record

Stakeholder	Recommendation
Unions and worker collectives	Support the formation of WCC-equivalent collective bodies in the Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, and other language industries, informed by WCC's documented organisational model
Researchers and policy bodies	Track institutional-response data longitudinally and across states, building on this study's case record to assess whether the Kerala process produces durable structural reform beyond its first phase

7. Limitations of the Study

Beyond the methodological limitations set out in Section 3.5, three broader limitations bound the scope of this paper's conclusions. First, the study's single-state depth (Kerala) reflects the genuine unevenness of the underlying public record rather than a deliberate sampling choice; this unevenness is itself a finding (Table 3), but it also means the paper cannot speak with equal confidence to industries where documentation is thinner. Second, the study's June 2025 data cut-off precedes the resolution of several ongoing matters, including the Kerala SIT investigation; its findings regarding conviction rates and structural reform should be read as a snapshot rather than a final assessment. Third, as a content analysis of public documentary sources, the study cannot independently verify contested factual claims within its sources and has relied on corroboration across multiple sources, and on official documentary status, as its primary safeguard against including unreliable material.

8. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine what happens institutionally after casting-couch allegations become public in the Indian entertainment industry, tracing the case record from 2017 to 2025 across five sub-sectors and against comparative material from Hollywood and South Korea. The central finding is a persistent and specific gap between disclosure and accountability: public disclosure increased sharply after 2018, but sustained institutional consequence resignations, investigations, proposed legislation remained concentrated almost entirely in Kerala, the one jurisdiction where organised collective action and a state-commissioned inquiry operated together. Elsewhere, institutional response has been predominantly self-regulatory and non-binding, and a statutory timing gap around the audition stage leaves the practice's defining moment in an unresolved zone of POSH Act applicability.

These findings suggest that the post-#MeToo period in Indian entertainment should be read less as a single, industry-wide reckoning and more as a concentrated, still-unfolding episode whose durability remains genuinely uncertain. The comparative evidence from Hollywood and South Korea indicates that criminal-legal consequence, not media visibility, has been the more reliable driver of lasting structural reform elsewhere; whether India's administrative-inquiry-led pathway eventually produces comparable reform, or instead recedes as previous disclosure waves have, is a question only future longitudinal research tracking the outcomes of the Kerala process and any subsequent state-level inquiries will be able to answer. On the other hand, the Authors quote some prominent personalities views regarding the advice and experiences they have shared. For instance, Surveen Chawla has stated that—even before her debut film—women in Bollywood face situations requiring skin exposure during auditions and casting processes, and that they have to contend with such uncomfortable circumstances. Ayushmann Khurrana has shared an incident from when she was entering the film industry. A

casting director—a role involving the selection of actors for a film, typically under the director's supervision blatantly asked him if he would have sex with them. This highlights how the "casting couch" phenomenon, rooted in power dynamics, can affect men as well. Expressing her opposition and raising awareness regarding this issue, Actress Vidya Balan stated that while she had not personally experienced such a situation, she advises newcomers not to compromise their safety or dignity for the sake of any opportunity. Following this, Tisca Chopra also revealed that, early in her career, a famous writer and actor propositioned her for an illicit relationship, subjecting her to mental anguish and distress. It is unclear for how many more years such harrowing incidents will continue to occur in the pursuit of opportunities. Even in 2026, such things continue to unfold—albeit indirectly and in a controlled manner. Compounding the situation is the fact that many still hesitate to come forward and speak about it.

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