

# Leena Manimekalai

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Writer Director Producer Author

As a leading Tamil poet and filmmaker, Leena Manimekalai's films and writings are deeply driven by social justice. She has been recently selected as BAFTA India Breakthrough Talent for the year 2022. Her fifteen narrative documentaries as a Producer- Director on the topics of caste, gender, globalization, art therapy, student politics, eco-feminism, indigenous people's rights and LGBTQ lives have been internationally acclaimed and have won several National and International awards in prestigious international film festivals and civil rights circuits.

Her debut fiction feature **Sengadal/the DeadSea** won her NAWFF Award at Tokyo for the Best Asian Woman Cinema and also was recognized with prestigious Indian Panorama selections after the initial ban by CBFC that got cleared through several months of legal battle. One of her documentary **Goddesses** has won her Golden Conch at Mumbai International Film Festival and Nominations for Horizon Award in Munich and Asia Pacific Screen Award in Melbourne. **White Van Stories** an exclusive docu-feature on enforced disappearances on SriLanka was shot by her and won her accolades in platforms like Channel 4 and Aljazeera. Additionally, Leena has received the Charles Wallace Art Award(2012) in Visual Ethnography, the EU Fellowship(2005) in Media and Conflict Resolution and the Commonwealth Fellowship(2009) for her work in Cinema and Gender. She is currently a GFAD Fellow at Master of Fine Arts(Film) program, YorkU, Toronto.

Her latest short documentary **Is it too much to ask** on the quintessential journey of two trans artists Smiley and Glady, co-produced by NHK, Japan is currently doing a big run in the international film festival circuit winning her the Best Documentary Prize at Singapore South Asian Film Festival and Jury Mention at Film South Asia, Kathmandu. **Wonder Women** Docu Series, she had produced for Hall Mark TV, USA won the Emmy Award in the year 2017.

Her second feature length fiction film **Maadathy, an unfairy tale** that brings the invisible life of an adolescent girl from the slave community called Puthirai Vannars of South India into light, had a world premiere in Busan IFF, 2019 and after a successful run in the festival circuit, it is now streaming in Mubi and Neestream. Her documentary feature **Rape Nation** that traces rape survivors and their fight for justice across the Indian sub-continent is under production. She is developing the Internationally best selling book **Love Queen of Malabar** into a feature length fiction film with Montreal based Writer Merrily Wiesbord and that would be her first international coproduction with Canada.

She is well known for her poetry anthologies and her poems have been widely translated into Malayalam, Hindi, Kannada, English and Spanish. She has traveled to forty countries for film festivals, literary festivals, media training, production activities, residencies, conferences and seminars in the last twelve years as an Author and a Film Maker.

More to read: <http://leenamanimekalai.in>

## Selected Filmography

- Maadathy, an unfairy tale(Pure Fiction Feature) / 2019
- Is it too much to ask (Documentary) / 2017
- White Van Stories (Documentary Feature) /2015
- My Mirror is the Door (Poem Film) / 2012
- Sengadal the Deadsea (Fiction Feature) / 2011
- Goddesses (Mid length Documentary) / 2009
- MFA School Projects - Kaathadi/Kite - Thesis (Hybrid Cinema Feature), Isolation(3D Short), So Close yet So Far(Narrative Short), A story without an end(Analog Cinema), Black July(Archival Cinema), Waves of Chennai(Sonic Cinema), Kaali(Performance Documentary) /2021-22

## Selected Bibliography

- Six Poetry Anthologies and Three Screenplay Books

## Works in Progress

- Rape Nation - Non Fiction Feature - Post Production Stage
- Pendulum - Fiction Feature - Pre Production Stage
- The Sunshine - Fiction Feature - Development Stage
- Love Queen of Malabar - Fiction Feature - Development Stage
- Savukku - Webseries -Development Stage
- Dhanya - Cyber Crime Thriller - Development Stage
- The Pink Lines- True Doc Series- Development Stage

## Brief Chronology of Companies Served

- Assistant Director - Manoj Creations(Dir.Bharathiraja), Media Dreams (Dir.Cheran), Telugu Film Kamali(Nandita Das as Lead)
- Minbimbangal Productions - Program Producer and Anchor
- Star Vijay Television - Executive Content(Staffed) and External Producer (Fiction & Non Fiction)
- Sun TV Network - Program Producer, Anchor(Staffed) & External Producer (Fiction & Non Fiction)
- Deepam TV(London) - Program Producer and Anchor (Non Fiction)
- Kalaingar TV - External Producer(Fiction)
- Zee Kannada TV - External Producer (Fiction)
- Eenadu TV - External Producer(Fiction)
- Maa TV - External Producer (Fiction)
- Own Production Banners as External Producer - Touring Talkies Media works Pvt Ltd, Kanavuppattarai Productions, LM Productions, Karuvachy Films.

## Journey, Recognition and Praise

2022

- **The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) India - Breakthrough Talent Cohort 2022**
- **Spotlight Leena Manimekalai** - Mubi India - Curation of Six films - Maadathy, an unfairy tale; Sengadal, the dead sea; Goddesses, White Van Stories, Is it too much to ask, My Mirror is the Door.

- North American Screen/Lecture Tour-Continued - of **Maadathy, an unfairy tale** The University of Tennessee, York University, University of Wisconsin, Reclaiming India Conference -Hindus for Human Rights, New York
- Special Screening - **Is it too much to ask** Documentary - Fifth Tamil Studies Symposium - Inventories of Dispossession.
- Presenter:Transiting the Queer Uncommon's, Queer Summer Institute, Co-Creator - Original (Un) Common Digital Cabaret, York University
- Screening - Dalit History Month - **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Soho House, Mumbai
- Premiere, **Kaali** - a performance documentary on multiculturalism in Canada, Aga Khan Museum, Under the Tent program, CERC Migration, Toronto Metropolitan University.
- "Decolonizing Cinema and Smashing Patriarchy" - Dr. Rajayashree Khushu-Lahiri Memorial Lecture and Screening of **Maadathy, an unfairy tale** - The department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.
- Organizer - Solidarity with Ukraine- Music/Poetry/Film Screenings, York University
- Ladyland, March 8th, Woman's Day Screening of **Maadathy, an unfairy tale** at Adjoin, Vagator, Goa
- Women's Day Film Festival, Screening of **My Story, Your Story**, Panchajanyam Film Society Documentary, Kerala
- Dir. Balumahendra Award for Best Director, Best Debut Actor- Norway Tamil Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**
- Top Films of 2021 in India - Film Companion, Cinema at its Best Annual Awards, First Post, Street Awards / Alternative Arts - Loyola College, Chennai
- Cohort, South Bridge, Root.ax, International Co-Production Accelerator, Project **The Sunshine**
- Speaker, Press Freedom Under Fire, The Sania Farooqi Show
- Official Selection- Documentary, **Is it too much ask**, Jaffna Queer Film Festival, Sri Lanka

## 2021

- North American Screen/Lecture Tour of **Maadathy, an unfairy tale** including Columbia University, University of Minnesota , Brandeis University, Yale University, John Fisher College and more
- Featured Writer, Panelist and Screenwriting Workshop Mentor at Singapore Writers Festival
- Inaugural Film, Wench Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Mumbai, India
- Official Competition, Ottawa Indian Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Canada
- Official Competition, Regina International Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Canada
- Official Competition, Barcelona Asian Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Spain
- Invitation Screening, **Is it too much to ask**, Jaffna Queer Film Festival, Sri Lanka
- Invitation Screening, IVIEW World Human Rights Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, New Delhi/New York
- Special Screening, Imagine India Film Festival,**Maadathy, an unfairy tale** Madrid, Spain
- Suchitra Suvarna Sambhrama, Fiftieth Year Celebrations, Suchitra Film Society Screenings, **Sengadal/The Deadsea & White Van Stories**, Bangalore, India
- Vikalp@Prithvi Film Festival Screenings, **White Van Stories**, Mumbai, India
- Cinema Paradiso Screenings, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Auroville, India
- PK Rosy Film Society Special Screening, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Kerala

## 2020

- Inaugural Film, Panchajanyam International Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Kerala, India
- FIPRESCI Jury Award, Golden Kailasha Awards for Best Film - Best Actor - Best Cinematography, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Aurangabad International Film Festival, India
- Latin American Premiere, FICCI 60, Colombia, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**

- Screening of **Sengadal, the Dead Sea**, Universite' de Que'bec a 'Montreal, Canada
- Official Invitation, Colombo International Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Srilanka
- International Narrative Features Competition, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Herat International Women Film Festival, Afghanistan, Official Competition, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Jaffna International Film Festival, Srilanka,
- Special Screening, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Colombo International Women's Film Festival, SriLanka
- North American Premiere, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Coalition of South Asian Festivals of North America formed by Tasveer South Asian Film Festival (TSAFF), Seattle; Chicago South Asian Film Festival (CSAFF), Chicago; DC South Asian Film Festival (DCSAFF), Washington DC; Mosaic International South Asian Film Festival (MISAFF), Toronto; Nepal America International Film Festival (NAIFF), Maryland; South Asian Film Festival of Montreal (SAFFM), Montreal; and Vancouver International South Asian Film Festival (VISAFF), Vancouver, Canada
- Finalist, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, Les Rimbaud du Cinema Awards, France
- Official Selection, I View World Human Rights Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**, New Delhi, New York, India, USA
- Queer Asia, COVID 19 Support Screenings for Trans Community, **Is It Too Much To Ask**, Kings College, London, UK
- Golden Jubilee Screenings, **Sengadal the Deadsea and White Van Stories**, Suchitra Film Society, Bangalore, India.
- Top 20 Films Nominations, FIPRESCI Grand Prix Award, India

## 2019

- World Premiere, Busan International Film festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**
- India Premiere, International Competition, Kolkata International Film Festival **Maadathy, an unfairy tale**
- Asian Competition, Third Eye Asian Film Festival, **Maadathy, an unfairy tale** Mumbai, India
- Mentor, Film Workshops, Visual Depiction of Violence Against Women, Film South Asia, Kathmandu, Nepal
- Marche Du Film, Indo-Canadian Co-Production, "**Love Queen of Malabar**", Cannes, France
- TIFF Industry, Indo- Canadian Co-Production, "**Love Queen of Malabar**", Toronto, Canada
- WOW Film Festival, "**Is it too much to ask**", Karachi, Pakistan
- Annual Festival of Films on Freedom of Expression, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, "**White Van Stories**", Delhi, India
- 100% Manusia Film Festival, Jakarta, "**Is it too much to ask**", Indonesia

## 2018

- Acquisitions, Cinema Politica, Canada Tour, **White Van Stories** and **Is it too much to ask**, 2018
- Runner up, Audience Award, Best Short, Berlin Feminist Week, Germany, **Is It too much to ask**, 2018
- Nominated for Satyajit Ray Best Documentary Award, South Asian Film Festival, Kolkata, India, **Is It too much to ask**, 2018
- Official Selection, Festival Des Cinemas Inidens de Toulouse, France, **Is It too much to ask**, 2018
- Producers Network, Cannes 2018
- Official Selection, Queer Asia Film Festival, British Museum, London, 2018
- Official Selection, Geneva International Queer Film Festival, 2018

## 2017

- Best Documentary - **Is it too much to ask**, Singapore South Asian Film Festival, 2017
- Jury Mention - **Is it too much to ask**, FSA, Kathmandu, 2017
- Nominated for Best Asian Film, Seoul International Women Film Festival, South Korea, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Official Selection, MIC Genero/Mexico -Argentina - Cuba, South American Tour, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Official Selection, Seattle South Asian Film Festival, United States of America, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Opening Film, Philadelphia South Asian Film Festival, USA, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Official Selection, Jaffna International Film Festival, Sri Lanka, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Official Selection, Trans Diamond Film Festival, Bangalore, India, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Curtain Raiser, Chennai International LGBT Film Festival, India, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017
- Official Competition, International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala, IDSFFK, India, **Is It too much to ask**, 2017

## 2016

- Emmy Award for Best Travel Series - Wonder Women, Line Producer, HallMark TV, USA, 2016
- Artist in Focus - Kerala Literature Festival Literature Festival, Kozhikode, 2016 & 17
- Selection Jury - IFFK, Kerala, 2016
- Official Selection, Co-Production Pitch, NFDC Film Bazaar, Goa, India, **The Sunshine**, 2016

## 2015

- "Woman of the Year" Femina Award for Literary Contribution, India, 2015
- Filmmaker in Focus, Aljazeera International Documentary Film Festival, White Van Stories, Qatar, 2015
- Artist in Focus - Singapore Literature Festival Literature Festival, Mumbai, 2015

## 2014

- National Lambda Award for Poetry by LGBT Non Profit Groups, India, 2014
- Official Selection, Co-Production Pitch, Docedge, Kolkata, India, Rape Nation, 2014
- Writer in Focus - Gateway Literature Festival, Mumbai, 2014 & 2015
- Official Selection, Co-Production Pitch, Docedge, Kolkata, **Is it too much to ask**, 2014

## 2013

- Official Selection, Nepal Human Rights Film Festival, Nepal, **Ballad of Resistance**, 2013,
- Official Selection, Signs Film Festival, Kochi, Kerala, India, **Ballad of Resistance**, 2013,
- Official Selection, Vibgyor Film Festival, Thrissur, Kerala, India, **Ballad of Resistance**, 2013
- 5th Edition Du Festival International de Films, "Pecheurs du Monde", France, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2013
- Rare Picks at Hundred years of Indian Cinema Package, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2013
- Official Selection, The International Film Festival Puebla (FICPuebla), **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, Guatemala & Mexico, 2013
- Artist in Residence - University of Chicago, 2013
- International Association of Women in Radio & Television (IAWRT) Fellowship, **Ballad of Resistance**, 2013

## 2012

- Charles Wallace Artists Fellowship, Visual Ethnography, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2012

- Official Korean Premeire, International Women Film Festival, South Korea, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2012
- Official Taiwan Premeire, International Women Film Festival, Taipei, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2012
- NAWFF Award Premieres at International Women Film Festivals at Israel and Beijing, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2012
- A Panorama of Indian Contemporary Cinema, Auroville, Pondicherry, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2012
- Melting Point of Indian Cinema, Directorate of Film Festivals, New Delhi, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2012
- Jury, International Women Film Festival, Seoul, 2012
- Public Sector Broadcasting Trust Film Fellowship, India, **Pennaadi**, 2011-12

## 2011

- Indian Panorama Selections for 2011 - **Sengadal/The Deadsea**
- World Premiere, International Competition, 32nd Durban International Film – Festival, South Africa, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Official Selection, First Film Competition, 35th World Montreal Film Festival, Canada, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Official Competition, International Competition, Mumbai Film Fest, MAMI, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- NAWFF Award for Best Asian Women Cinema - **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, Tokyo, 2011
- Official Selection, World Cinema, International Film Festival of Kerala IFFK, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Chithrabharathi Competition, Bangalore International Film Festival, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Unite End Violence International Film Festival. Johannesburg, South Africa, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Opening Film, International Film Festival of Thrissur, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Closing Film, Samsung International Women Film Festival, Chennai, India, **Sengadal/The Deadsea**, 2011
- Sirpi Literary Award/ Tamil Poetry, Tamilnadu, India, **Parathaiyarul Raani**, 2011

## 2010

- **Sengadal/The Deadsea** wins the Global Film Initiative Grant(GFI), 2010

## 2009

- Iyal Award for Poetry, Toronto, Canada, "**Ulagin Azhagiya Muthal Penn**", 2009
- Official Selection, Birds Eye View Film Festival, London, **Goddesses**, 2009
- Official Selection, Belgrade Documentary Film Festival, **Goddesses**, 2009
- Commonwealth Fellowship - Women in Cinema - United Kingdom, 2009

## 2008

- Official Selection, International Competition, Tri Continental Film Festival, South Africa, **Goddesses**, 2008
- Official Selection, International Factual Competition, Roma Fiction Film Festival, Rome, **Goddesses**, 2008
- Official Selection, National Competition, International Video Film Festival of Kerala, **Goddesses**, 2008
- Golden Conch for Best International Documentary in Mumbai International Film Festival, **Goddesses**, 2008
- Visiting Scholar Fellowship, Berlinale, 2008
- Nomination to Horizon Award, Munich International Film Festival, **Goddesses**, 2008

- Nomination - Asia Pacific Screen Awards, Brisbane, **Goddesses**, 2008
- One Billion Eyes National Award - Best Documentary, **Goddesses**, 2008

## 2007

- Jury Award for Best Cinema of Resistance - John Abraham National Award, **Goddesses**, Trivandrum, 2007
- Premiere, Stockholm Water Symposium, Sweden, **A Hole in the Bucket**, 2007
- Mention, IAWRT International Documentary Film Competition, Women Building Peace, Nairobi, Kenya, **Goddesses**, 2007

## 2006

- International Jury in Asian Film Festival, Malaysia, 2006
- Official Selection, Yamagata International Film Festival, Japan, **Waves After Waves**, 2006

## 2005

- Spice of Life - EU India Experience - University of Tampere, Finland, **Connecting Lines**, 2005
- Best Actor and Best Experimental Video in Independent Art Film Festival, **Love Lost**, 2005
- Best Documentary in Paris and Norway Independent Diaspora Festivals, **Mathamma**, 2005
- Retrospective, International Democratic Socialist Youth Film Festival, Venezuela, 2005

## 2004

- Retro - Ethnographic Montages, Chicago Women in Director's Chair International Film Festival, **Mathamma-Parai-Break the Shackles**, 2004
- Vikalp Films For Freedom, Mumbai, India, **Parai**, 2004
- Silver Trophy for the Best Documentary in Europe Movies Film Festival, Mathamma, 2004
- European Union Film Fellowship, Media and Conflict Resolution, Thomson Media Foundation University of Cardiff, UK, **Connecting Lines**, 2004

## 2003

- Official Selection, CDIT International Documentary Film Festival, Trivandrum, India, **Mathamma**, 2003
-