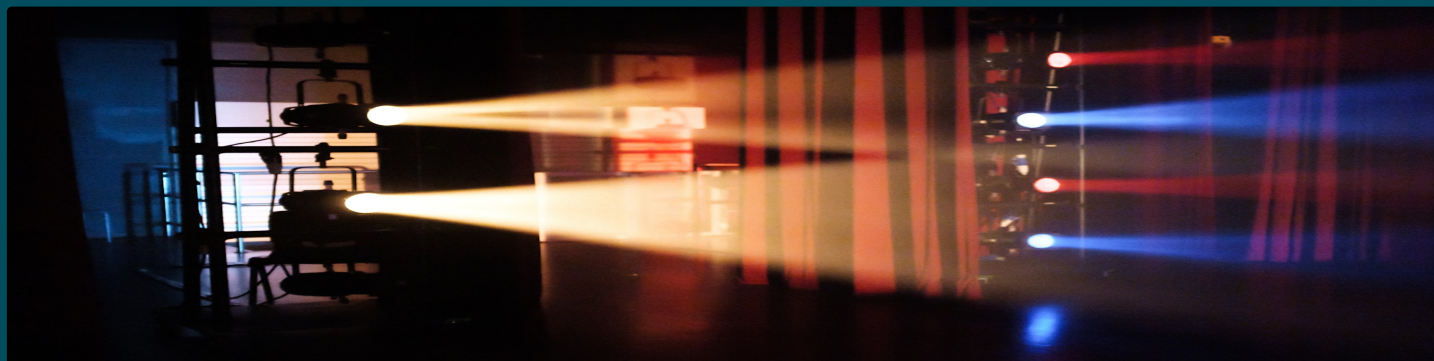




CONSUMER

Can Theatres Overcharge for Movie Tickets? The Madras High Court Says No

AUTHOR Asav Rajan Arora

PUBLISHED 26 June 2025

Introduction: When Going to the Movies Becomes a Legal Issue

Across India, cinema has long been more than just entertainment, it's a cultural phenomenon that brings people together. Whether it's a regional blockbuster or a much-anticipated pan-India release, the excitement of catching a film on opening day is shared by millions. Yet, that excitement is often dampened by a recurring issue: moviegoers being charged ticket prices far beyond the maximum rates prescribed by state governments, especially during the initial days of a film's release. In response to this persistent problem, the Madras High Court, in a recent judgment, took a firm stand against the unlawful practice of overcharging and emphasized the need for regulatory enforcement and consumer protection.

The Judgment: Upholding the Right to Fair Pricing

In *G. Devarajan v. The Special Tahsildar & Ors.* (W.P. No. 22844 of 2017, decided on 9 June 2025), Justice N. Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court addressed the issue of cinema theatres charging ticket prices in excess of the government-notified rates.

The petitioner, Advocate G. Devarajan, highlighted how certain theatres were collecting ticket charges well above the prescribed limit, sometimes as high as ₹300 to ₹500, particularly during major film openings. The Court held:

"Once the Government has fixed a rate for cinema tickets, theatre owners cannot fleece the moviegoers by collecting any excess amount from them."

While the State submitted that a monitoring committee was already in place to conduct joint inspections and initiate action against violators, the Court emphasized the need for effective and continuous enforcement. Importantly, the Court directed that:

- Theatres found in violation must be proceeded against, and
- Excess amounts collected must be refunded to affected consumers wherever feasible.

What Can Be Done?

The judgment is significant as a precedent, and as a roadmap for both consumers and cinema operators across India. Here's what individuals and businesses can do if confronted with this issue:

If You're a Moviegoer and Have Been Overcharged:

- 1. Preserve Evidence:** Always retain proof of the transaction, this may include physical ticket stubs, digital booking confirmations, payment screenshots, or email receipts from online ticketing platforms.
- 2. File a Complaint:** (i) Submit a written complaint to the District Collector or Revenue Department of the relevant district, (ii) Bring the matter to the attention of the state-appointed Monitoring Committee, which is responsible for overseeing cinema ticket pricing compliance.
- 3. Consumer Protection Channels:** If no action is taken by the authorities, you may lodge a complaint with the National Consumer Helpline (NCH) at <https://consumerhelpline.gov.in>, or Approach the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- 4. Social Accountability:** Consider raising awareness through social media, attaching screenshots of overpricing to draw the attention of state departments or regulators.

If You're a Theatre Owner or Operator:

- 1. Stay Updated on Pricing Notifications:** Regularly review the latest ticket pricing circulars issued by the State Government or District Administration, especially during festival or holiday releases.
- 2. Train Staff and Ticketing Agents:** Ensure that all staff members especially those involved in counter sales and online ticketing are aware of the pricing caps and instructed to strictly follow them.
- 3. Audit Your Booking Systems:** Collaborate with online ticketing partners (e.g., BookMyShow, Paytm, etc.) to ensure that ticket pricing software reflects the government-prescribed maximum.

Conclusion: A Step Toward Enforcing Everyday Consumer Rights

The Madras High Court's ruling is a welcome development in enforcing pricing discipline within the entertainment sector. It protects the average moviegoer from being unfairly charged and reinforces the principle that regulatory ceilings on ticket prices are not optional, they are binding.

This case is a reminder of how legal mechanisms can uphold everyday rights in familiar spaces like your local cinema. As regulatory enforcement improves and consumer awareness grows, such judgments have the potential to shape fairer market practices across India, ensuring that the excitement of watching a new film isn't clouded by unlawful pricing. For more details, write to us at: contact@indialaw.in

Related Practice Areas

Civil & Commercial Litigation