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## Jai Bhim Movie Review: Suriya is Riveting as Advocate Chandru in This Gripping Watch



Filmmaker T.J. Gnanavel's latest venture Jai Bhim, sees lead actor Suriya in one of his career-best performances as Advocate K Chandru, who fights for a hapless tribal woman.

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**GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN**

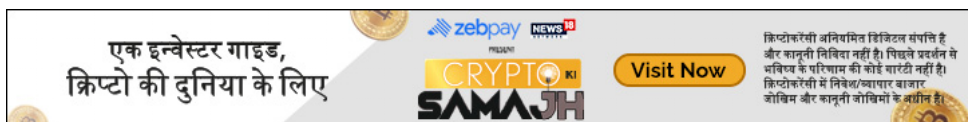


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Director: T.J. Gnanavel

**Cast: Suriya, Prakash Raj, K. Manikandan, Lijomol Jose, Rajisha Vijayan**

Custodial violence and even deaths are not uncommon in India. We have seen the Baghalapur blindings in 1979-80 when 31 prisoners had acid poured into their eyes. They were maimed for life. It was one the darkest blots on India's police/judicial system. There have been many other cases of torture and killings (encounters, for instance) by the men in Khaki. Yes, lawyers have fought for the victims and helped redress the heinous wrongs perpetrated by cops. One such was Advocate K Chandru, who went on to become a Madras High Court Judge. One of the cases he handled as a lawyer involving tribal people in a Tamil Nadu village created a huge stir in the police force and the judiciary. The year was 1993, and T.J. Gnanavel's latest directorial offering on Amazon Prime – Jai Bhim – focuses on this landmark case Chandru fought and won.



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Although nearly three hours long, it manages to keep us gripped. There is not a moment that drags. On the contrary, I felt that the last 20 minutes appeared rushed with the writing – also by Gnanavel – trying to answer a whole lot of questions. Maybe, this section could have been more elaborate by editing out portions from the earlier parts.

Nevertheless, Jai Bhim is thrilling, and could neatly fit into the crime noir with layer after layer peeled to reveal a horrifying truth. It is horrifying because it exposes police atrocity – in its worst form – on the powerless and illiterate Irula Tribals, who eke out their living by catching rats and snakes.

Gnanavel presents a moving contrast between the police and the Irulas. While cops ruthlessly ravage even a pregnant woman, disrobing another in the lockup, the tribals care about life and Nature. They do not want to kill snakes that may have entered a house, preferring to catch and release it in the woods. They do not want to kill a baby rat. It must live, they feel.

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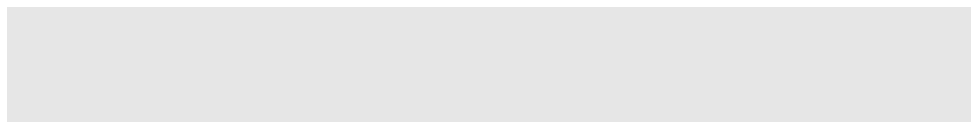


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Some may find a slight narrative imbalance. While the men in uniform seem almost demonic, the tribals appear almost angelic and squeaky clean. This may not be always the case.

However, a tremendous effort has been made to keep the movie from slipping into high-strung melodrama. The High Court scenes, where a Habeas Corpus petition is heard, are restrained and actually realistic – shorn of the exaggerations we see in many Indian films.

And the performances are top class. Suriya probably gives his career best as Chandru, who takes up the case of a poor, hapless pregnant Irula woman, essayed with admirable restraint by Lijomol Jose. As Sengani, she is just brilliant essaying a woman distraught when she finds her husband, Rajakannu (another compelling performance here by K. Manikandan), missing after he had been accused of a jewellery theft and picked up by the police. He is taken to a lockup where he is mercilessly beaten to elicit a confession. "I am not a thief", he repeats in vain!



Is Rajakannu guilty? If not, who is? These are answered at the end – a little unclearly though. But the plot has much more to tell us, happily in a controlled sort of way. Even the police violence is not allowed to tip over. A good piece of scripting, and fine acting with Suriya effortlessly slipping into the character. Much of his hallmark mannerisms is missing. And that is a good thing. I am happy we did not see Suriya the hero, but Suriya the advocate who puts his heart and soul into a case to bring justice to a downtrodden woman.

Streaming on Amazon Prime from November 2, Jai Bhim is not to be missed.

*(Gautaman Bhaskaran is author, commentator and movie critic who has watched hundreds of movies both at home and outside at film festivals like Cannes, Venice and Tokyo among others.)*

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