

A Review on Suzhal The Vortex

Any Indian story worth its' salt masala needs a scoop of ritual and religion, a dash of romance, a persistent whiff of intrigue, a pinch of corruption and big dose of 'family-bonds'. In short, it should quench the average Indian's craving for Drama that has until recently been reflected only on the big screen. Telly viewers who have been fed repetitive loops of saas-bahu khichdi are now being more realistic and mature content thanks to OTT.

'Suzhal, The Vortex' a limited series showing on Amazon Prime ticks all the boxes and then some. Created by Pushkar and Gayatri, who also made Vikram Vedha (2017), Va-Quarter Cutting(2010) and Oram Po (2007), Suzhal is a series of eight episodes set in a green and serene fictional town called Sembaloor in South India. The yearly festival of Mayan Kollai to appease a fiery and demanding goddess Angalammann, forms the colorful backdrop for this thriller.

The story has four central characters and revolves around their past, present and their families. Regina Thomas is an apparently strict Police Inspector, but with a morally crooked compass. Her Achilles heel is her teenage son. Regina's protégé-cum- lackey, Sakkarai, an intelligent and charming man is the second character. It is his dogged pursuit of the truth that brings us to the true perpetrator of the crime. The third is Shanmugam, a Leftist union leader whose commitment to the worker's welfare commands loyalty and respect from them. He is, however, dismal with personal relationships and his family bears the brunt of this. The last is Vadde, the rich, powerful owner of the local factory which is the source of employment for most of the locals. His heir-apparent and only son, Trilok is an insipid person and a source of puzzlement and disappointment to him.

The series opens to two central events in the town – an agitation for higher wages by workers at the local factory and the excitement of the festival of the goddess. Workers at the local factory, led by the union leader Shanmugam, are agitating for their demands, when the local police resort to a brutal lathi charge ordered by Inspector Regina and implemented by her protege, Sakkarai. Vadde, the owner of the factory is calmly observing the rampage from a safe vantage point.

Hours later, in the midst of Goddess's festival procession after sundown, an explosion is heard at the factory. There is a fire which destroys the factory, but luckily there is no human casualty. Emotions run high and the union leader is arrested by the police. From here, the story goes off on a seemingly unconnected tangent as the teenaged daughter of the union leader goes missing. Footage uncovered from CCTV cameras reveals that she has been abducted by the occupants of a car from a bus-stop close to the factory site a short while before the explosion.

Sakkarai, Regina's trusted man is investigating the girl's disappearance and comes across evidence to indicate that Regina's son had been stalking the missing girl. Questioning him proves difficult as Inspector Regina's son is incommunicado while on a trip with friends since the night of the explosion. His friends are found by the police, but Regina's son has disappeared. It is now certain that he was behind the girl's disappearance. A wounded tigress guarding her prey, Regina tries to muddy the waters and protect her son.

Numerous threads of mystery are dangled with each episode, apparently unconnected, including the possibility of elopement of the union leader's daughter and the Inspector's son. The sexual perversion of Vadde's son and his obsession with teenage girls is explored, a secret online admirer of the missing girl is unearthed and the involvement of the girl's

aunt in adultery and blackmail comes to light. The insurance investigator who strongly suspects arson as the reason for the factory explosion also adds to the mystery. As more and more secrets tumble out in every episode, the mystery deepens.



What is the connection of the coaching class teacher and why does he know where the missing girl's phone is hidden? Who set the fire at the factory? Did the union leader do it as revenge or was he framed? What guilty secret is Nandini, the elder sister of the girl hiding and why does she have mysterious fainting spells? Who is the religious fanatic who practices black-magic deep in the forest and why does he have a large amount of cash in his dwelling? Why does Vadde's son go regularly to a secluded bungalow and who does he entertain there?

At the center of every storm is a vortex that is seldom seen, but is nevertheless the origin of the upheaval. The storyline follows the trail of evidence and aftermath of the past and leads the viewer to the shocking climax. Roughly translated, according to Google, Suzhal means 'Environment or Ambience'. At the vortex of this storm of crime is the environment of the victim, the family and society that creates conditions that hide perpetrators and facilitate gruesome consequences.

India is one of many countries that have a long tradition of worshipping Goddesses and revere and even fear them, but continues to exploit, oppress and underestimate their womenfolk. The tragic irony of this is underlined in this story.

Although the original language is Tamil, the dubbing in other languages is good and does not detract from the nuances of the dialogue or local flavor of the narrative. If anything, it demonstrates that 'content is king' and that arguments about the North-South divide are claptrap. Amazon Prime which released the series in the end of June 2022 had the foresight of dubbing and subtitling in over 30 languages

Stories with an Indian context are definitely appealing. But Suzhal goes slightly overboard with the festival for a prolonged period of time in each episode. At times, one wonders at the relevance of prolonged shots of the festival.

Consequently, it loses the suspense and nail-biting thread of events at crucial junctures.

Cleverly written to engage the viewer with a cliff-hanger at end of each episode, binge-watching is a serious possibility with Suzhal.

Sriya Reddy (Inspector Regina), Aishwarya Rajesh (Nandini), Kathir (Sakkarai), Parthibhan (Shanmugam) have done a marvelous job with their acting performances.

I would give it four stars and recommend that the viewer be

over 18 years.

Definitely watch-worthy.

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<https://www.cinestaan.com/movies/suzhal-the-vortex-50135>

<https://www.quora.com/Could-Suzhal-The-Vortex-the-Amazon-original-web-series-make-Tamil-movie-content-become-more-global-What-are-your-thoughts-about-it>
