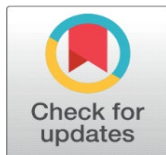
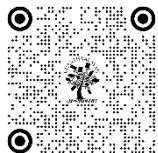


READING SILAPPADIKARAM IN THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES: A STUDY OF ITS PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Silappadikaram is a classic literary work of ancient Tamil society, believed to have been composed around the 5th century BCE by Ilango Adigal. It encompasses elements of Jainism, Buddhism, and other religious traditions then prevalent, and also it incorporates themes, myths, and theological principles from each of the belief systems. The epic offers a vivid portrayal of both virtuous and malevolent deeds, while exploring themes of joy and suffering. What sets *Silappadikaram* apart from other epics is that the text focuses on an ordinary couple, as opposed to kings and armies. The text painstakingly demonstrates the behavioural nuances of society, ranging from commoners to rulers. Love and separation, gaining and losing power, are recurring themes in Indian classical dramas by notable playwrights like Vishakadatta, Kalidas, Bhasa, and Bhavabhuti, etc. These plays were created with the intention of influencing society, specifically targeting individuals in positions of power and authority. However, post-colonial Indian theatre took a different approach, placing common individuals as protagonists in the plays. Works such as *Aadhe Adhure*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Hayavadana*, and *Sakharam Binder* address prevalent societal issues, with the central character being an ordinary person. The main aspects of modern theatre and the plays mentioned here primarily explore the everyday activities of common individuals and how they are influenced by other members of society, economic factors, and politics. This paper studies the contemporary relevance of *Silappadikaram* in modern theatre by drawing a comparison with these modern Indian plays.

Keywords: *Silappadikaram*, Modern Theatre, Identity, Sexuality, Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

Silappadikaram (the tale of an anklet) is one of the most important works of classical Tamil literature, composed by Ilanko Adikal in the 5th or 6th century CE, which is considered the Sangam period of Tamil literature [Parthasarathy \(2004/1993\)](#). The epic poem is believed to have been written in the city of Madurai, which was a center of Tamil culture and literature at that time. The name *Silappadikaram* means "the story of the anklet" in Tamil, referring to the incident that triggers the main events of the poem. It is a narrative poem that tells the story

of Kannagi, a virtuous woman who seeks justice for her husband Kovalan's wrongful execution. The epic is divided into three parts: the Puhar, the Madurai, and the Vanchi episodes. *Silappadikaram* serves as a valuable source for understanding the social and cultural history of ancient Tamil Nadu by providing a vivid portrayal of the customs, traditions, values, and challenges. In the epic, the rigid social hierarchies prevalent in ancient Tamil Nadu are depicted, including the division of society into different castes and the norms and customs associated with them. It highlights the challenges faced by individuals who navigate these hierarchies, such as Kannagi's struggle for justice despite her social status. The text offers glimpses into the roles and expectations of women in ancient Tamil society. Kannagi exemplifies the idealized virtues of a devoted wife, but she also demonstrates resilience and agency in seeking justice for the death of her husband. *Silappadikaram* provides insights into trade, commerce, and agrarian practices in ancient Tamil Nadu. A narrative follows Kovalan, a merchant, and emphasizes the importance of trade routes and markets to the economy of the region. There are various cultural practices depicted in the epic, including dance, music, and religious rituals, shedding light on the cultural fabric of ancient Tamil society. As an example, the Madurai Meenakshi Temple and its festivities play a prominent role in the narrative, reflecting the importance of religious institutions in people's lives. However, this paper aims to discuss the importance of the text in the modern context, specifically within the framework of performing arts, encompassing both folk and modern theatrical forms. The paper explores the theatrical quality of the text and the performative elements found within, highlighting their significance in addressing contemporary questions pertaining to the performing arts. Moreover, this paper exemplifies an interdisciplinary approach to classical Tamil text that resonates profoundly in today's multifaceted world of artistic expression and cultural inquiry.

Silappadikaram explores a wide range of themes, encompassing love, loyalty, justice, and fate. The central theme of the epic revolves around the pursuit of justice. The narrative follows the story of Kovalan, a young merchant, and his union with the virtuous Kannagi. Despite his love for the courtesan Madhavi, Kovalan's life takes a tragic turn when he is falsely accused of theft by a deceitful goldsmith. The goldsmith, who had stolen the queen's anklet, accuses Kovalan and convinces the king of Madurai to execute him. In a turn of events, Kannagi arrives in Madurai as a widow and proves Kovalan's innocence. Filled with grief and anger, she tears off one of her breasts and hurls it towards the burning city of Madurai. Kannagi's pursuit of justice ultimately leads to the downfall of the king and the city itself. An important underlying theme in *Silappadikaram* is the power of fate. The poem highlights the belief that human actions are influenced by destiny and that even the most virtuous individuals can face misfortune. However, it also suggests that righteous actions can alleviate the impact of fate and eventually lead to redemption.

Silappadikaram holds the significance as a Tamil literary work and serves as a valuable resource for comprehending the culture, society, and history of ancient Tamil Nadu. Notably, the poem provides a captivating portrayal of gender roles and relationships. It presents a nuanced perspective on the position of women in ancient Tamil society, depicting them as active and independent individuals rather than passive dependents under male guardianship. Kannagi, the poem's female protagonist, emerges as a resilient and fearless woman who ardently fights for justice, ultimately toppling a corrupt king. In contrast, Kovalan is portrayed as impulsive and reckless, driven by his pursuit of pleasure and wealth. Moreover, *Silappadikaram* offers insights into the intricate social hierarchies prevalent in ancient Tamil society. It showcases a diverse range of social classes, from

commoners to royalty, illuminating how individuals navigate their positions within these hierarchies. For instance, Kovalan, being a prosperous merchant, utilizes his wealth and influence to curry favor with the ruling elite. Conversely, Kannagi, a commoner, employs her intellect and strength to challenge the corrupt king and bring about justice.

The poem also grants glimpses into the religious and cultural practices of ancient Tamil society. It underscores the central role of religion and spirituality in the lives of ordinary people, highlighting their efforts to forge a connection with the divine in their daily existence. Furthermore, *Silappadikaram* underscores the significance of art and literature in ancient Tamil society, showcasing how these expressive forms were employed to convey moral messages and reflect the prevailing values of the era. In addition to its rich socio-political and economic elements, *Silappadikaram* holds historical importance as one of the world's oldest surviving epic poems. It provides a detailed account of the Pandyan, Chera, and Chola dynasties that once flourished in ancient Tamil Nadu. That is, all the three ancient Tamil kingdoms have been found mentioned in the narrative text not merely as casual reference but intertwined with the story - story begins from Poompukar, the capital of the Cholas, then it moves towards Madurai and ends in the land of Cheras land. The division of the text itself is seen as evidence for it that while Puharkkandam (Puhar Chapter) mentions the events that happened in the city of Puhar that falls under the Chola kingdom, Maduraikkanadam (Madurai Chapter) portrays the events that happened in the city of Madurain in the Pandya kingdom and Vanchikkandam (Vanchi chapter) presents the events that happen in the Chera kingdom. [Subramanyam \(1977\)](#), [Noble \(1990\)](#), [Dikshitar \(1978\)](#), [Dikshitar \(1939\)](#), [Kapoor \(2023\)](#). However, this study primarily focuses on the performance perspective of the poem, seeking to delve into its performative aspects and implications.

2. THEMES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *SILAPPADIKARAM*

Love, separation, and the acquisition or loss of power are recurring themes in Indian classical dramas, shared by playwrights such as Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bhavabhuti, and Shudraka, among others. These themes serve as narrative devices to explore the human condition and portray the challenges and struggles individuals face in their personal and public lives. *Silappadikaram*, being a significant narrative with meticulous descriptions and the incorporation of narrative formulas, exemplifies the principles of narratology found in modern literature. It recounts the simple yet elegant romantic dynamics among the married couple Kovalan and Kannagi, as well as Madhavi, a renowned dancer, and the daughter of Chitrapathy, who becomes Kovalan's mistress. When viewing the story from a performance perspective, Madhavi emerges as a prominent character. She is a talented dancer who began her training at the age of five and achieved mastery by the age of twelve. Madhavi's performance at the annual festival in Kaveripoompattinam signifies the importance of such festivals, stage performances, and prize distributions (where she received a Royal Medal and 1008 grams of coins), among other elements. Kovalan falls in love with Madhavi after witnessing her captivating performance at the annual festival, which is depicted in contemporary popular culture such as cinema and theatrical performances.

Silappadikaram holds importance as it offers theories on the origin of dance. The *talaikkol* used in Madhavi's performance symbolizes Jayanta, the son of Indra, and is a significant element of her debut public performance, known as *Arangetram* (staging of first performance). The misdeeds of Jayanta, who was cursed by sage

Agastya along with celestial nymph Urvashi, become part of the curse's ritualistic symbolism and are also incorporated into worship practices. *Silappadikaram* mentions numerous dance forms within its text, including *Alliyam*, *Kodukotti*, *Kudaj*, *Kudam*, *Pedi*, *Kadayam*, *Pandarangam*, *Mal*, *Tudi*, *Marakkal*, and *Pavai*. Many of these dance forms are associated with gods and deities such as Shiva, Muruga, Kama, Durga, Krishna, Lakshmi, and Indrani. The first six dances are performed in a standing position: *Alliyam* depicts Lord Krishna's triumph over a mad elephant, *Kodukotti* portrays Lord Shiva's dance after destroying the triple cities of demons, *Kudaj* represents Lord Skanda's victory over demons, *Kudayam* is performed by Kannan after securing the release of his grandson Anirudh from Banasura's prison, *Pandarangam* illustrates Shiva's dance to entertain Brahma following his victory over the demons' triple cities, and *Mal* describes the wrestling match between Bana and Lord Krishna. The remaining five dances are performed in a lying position: *Thudi* depicts Skanda's dance after defeating the demon Suran, *Kadayam* portrays Indrani's dance at the north gate of Banasura's palace, *Pedu* showcases Manmathan's dance in the guise of a eunuch to secure the release of his son Anirudh, *Marakkal* represents Goddess Durga's dance with stilts when facing poisonous creatures sent by demons, and *Pavai* depicts Goddess Lakshmi's dance against warring demons. *Silappadikaram* also makes several references to performance-related terms such as *natya* (dance), *ranga* (stage), *pindi* (body movements), *varam* (tune), *karanam* (dance sequences), and *mandala* (circular formation). It is believed that some of the dance principles from Natyashastra were adapted for Tamil settings, as evident from the dance terminology used in *Silappadikaram*. The text also presents three types of dancers that can be compared to modern-day classifications: *kaval ganika* (women guards), *kalattiladumkutti* (dancers in the military camp), and *adalkuttis* (dancers who perform *ahakkuttu* or sringara dances like *padams*). In this context, Kapila Vatsyayan notes that "It appears that by the time of the *Silappadikaram*, the three-fold classification of dancing girls as ganikas, kuttis, and adalsiladi—corresponding to the later classifications taliyilar, patiyilar, and devaradiyal—had come into vogue" [Vatsyayan \(1968\)](#), 213-214.

The section on *Arangetram* holds importance within the text and provides detailed coverage of various elements such as Madhavi's dance teacher's proficiency and skills, accompanists such as singers and musicians, and crucially, stage management details. *Silappadikaram* mentions two distinct types of dances based on *akam* and *puram*: *Ahakuttu* and *Purakuttu*, respectively. *Akam* comprises twin concepts such as *Vasai* (satire) and *Pugal* (praise), *Vettiyal* (performed before kings) and *Poduviyal* (performed before ordinary people), *Vari* and *Vari Shanti*, *Shanti* and *Vinodham*, and *Aryam*. *Shanti Kutthu* is further divided into *Chokkam* or *Suddha nrttam* (pure dance, later known as *nritta*) and incorporates the 108 *karanas*. *Mei Kutthu*, on the other hand, encompasses *Desi*, *Vadugu*, and *Singalam*. *Purakuttu* has three modes: *Perunatai*, *Charyay*, and *Bhramari*. The inclusion of various *Kutthus* in *Silappadikaram* indicates its significance as a text that reflects modern performance types. Furthermore, the beauty of the text lies in Aranketrukkathai, which presents its content in the blended mode of *Iyal* (prose), *Isai* (music), and *Natakam* (drama), collectively known as *Muttamil* (three forms of Tamil language). Scholars have recognized parallels between Tamil and Sanskrit traditions on this level. *Kutthu* is extensively detailed in the text, with *kravi kutthu* and *aichiyar kutthu* being discussed in depth. Dance forms like *kodukotti* and *pandarangam* are regarded as sacred to Shiva, *Tudi* to Murugan, *Marakkal* to Kottravai, *Pavai* to Lakshmi, and *Kadayam* to Indrani. Dance varieties such as *Marakkal*, *Pavaikootu*, and *Kodukotti* remain popular till date, for example, *kudamadai* (*Karagattam*) and *marakkaladai* (dummy horse dance). These dances are now classified as folk arts

Vatsyayan (1968), 213-214. Interestingly, the description of dances and *koottu* is not limited to Aranketrakkathai alone; other sections of the text mention dances performed by hunters, cowherds, and tribal communities. Vettuvavari, popularly known as the dance form of hunters, is depicted as Salini, born into the Maravar clan, beginning her dance with appropriate gestures, and becoming possessed by divinity, with her hair standing on end and hands raised aloft. She continued to dance, moving from place to place, astonishing the foresters... she then proclaimed these unfulfilled vows Vatsyayan (1968), 213-214.

3. INDIAN PLAYS - POPULAR THEMES

The theme of love held a central position in the plays written by playwrights like Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Bhasa, etc. Love was often portrayed as a transformative force capable of uniting individuals, but also capable of driving them apart. Kalidasa's play "*Shakuntala*" exemplifies this theme, with the love story between King Dushyant and the hermit Shakuntala taking centre stage. The play illustrates how love can transcend social barriers and bring together people from different backgrounds. However, it also emphasizes the repercussions of forgetting love and underscores the significance of memory and remembrance in relationships. In Bhavabhuti's play "*Uttararamacharita*," the departure of Sita from Ayodhya serves as a pivotal event that leads to the ultimate conflict between Rama and Ravana. The play delves into the emotional turmoil experienced by Sita as she leaves her home and is compelled to adapt to a new life in the forest. The theme of gaining or losing power emerges as another prominent motif in classical Indian dramas. These plays often portray the struggles individuals face when attempting to acquire or retain power, along with the ensuing consequences. Bhasa's play "*Charudatta*" exemplifies this theme, featuring a central character who is a poor Brahmin. After saving the life of a courtesan, he attains power and wealth. However, his newfound authority comes at a cost, as he becomes the target of jealousy and deceit from those around him. These themes serve to explore the human condition and depict the challenges and struggles individuals encounter in their personal and public lives.

In addition to Sanskrit *Kavya* (poetry) and literary texts from the time of Natyashastra, *Silapathikaram* stands out for providing concrete evidence of a solo dancer and her art. The poem portrays either the female protagonist or antagonist as accomplished and trained dancers, indicating a period in which dance forms thrived. It demonstrates the existence of patrons who supported and safeguarded the arts as well as the artists themselves. This reflects a progressive dimension of society that allowed women to pursue dance as a profession and showcased their talents on public platforms. For the dance theorist and historian Mandakranta Bose, the dance was indeed an evolving art as evident in textual references. And for him, the dramatists and authors such as Kalidasa, Vararuci, Bhavabhuti, Harsha, Rajasekhara, Damodara Gupta, Jayanta Bhatta, and Alamkarikas such as Dandin, Bhamaha, Bhoja, Sharadatanaya, Sagarandin, etc., have used numerous terms to denote dances that utilize body movements for the expression of ideas and emotions, and that are absent in Bharata's work - indicating their subsequent developments, suggesting an expansion of the art of dancing Mandakranta (2002).

The Indian theatre scene has always served as an active arena for social commentary and cultural critique. The plays written and staged in India during the late 20th century marked a significant shift as common individuals became the protagonists, and societal issues took centre stage. Four plays that captured the imagination of both audiences and critics were "Aadhe Adhure" (Halfway House),

"Ghashiram Kotwal" (Ghashiram, the chief police officer), "Hayavadana" (Horse face/Horse headed), and "Sakharam Binder" (Sakharam, the Binder). The rationale behind selecting "Aadhe Adhure," "Ghashiram Kotwal," "Hayavadana," and "Sakharam Binder" in relation to the text lies in their thematic depth and cultural significance. Each of these plays offers a profound exploration of human psychology and confronts the prevalent social and cultural challenges of their respective times. "Aadhe Adhure" delves into the complexities of familial relationships and societal expectations; "Ghashiram Kotwal" critiques power dynamics and corruption; "Hayavadana" explores the intricacies of identity and desire; and "Sakharam Binder" addresses issues of gender and personal autonomy. By analyzing these plays, the text aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between dramatic literature, psychological inquiry, and socio-cultural commentary, thereby enriching the discourse on these themes within the context of the chosen text. Each of these plays delved into the complexities of the human psyche and delved deeply into the social and cultural challenges of their respective times.

4. AADHE ADHURE: THE QUEST FOR COMPLETENESS

"Aadhe Adhure," written by [Rakesh \(1999\)](#), is a notable example of a realistic modernist play. The play delves into the lives of a middle-class family, exploring their struggles with unfulfilled aspirations, insecurities, morality, societal norms, individual freedom, and internal conflicts within the family unit. The protagonist, Savitri, is an ordinary woman and mother of three who possesses a good education and puts in immense effort but fails to provide her family with a respectable standard of living. Dissatisfied with her life, she desperately seeks solutions to her problems, resorting to dubious business practices, socializing with wealthy men, and manipulating her boss to secure a job and stability for her unemployed son. Savitri strives to balance her work and home life while enduring an abusive and unemployed husband. Despite her relentless efforts to improve the family's lifestyle and social status, she faces constant disappointment. Within the family, Savitri confronts conflicts, including with her husband Mahinder. Her son Ashok rejects the support of her boss to enter the workforce due to his disdain for him. He spends his time flipping through magazines and randomly tearing out images of figures like Marilyn Monroe and Audrey Hepburn. Savitri's elder daughter Benny had left home years ago and returns to find her marriage in turmoil. Her younger, more rebellious daughter Kinni displays precociousness and disobedience, preoccupied with exploring adult relationships. In the play, nearly every character is engaged in conflict with one another. After years of coexistence, the family reaches a point where they find themselves unable to live with or without one another [Saraswat \(2014\)](#). In the play, the character Savitri experiences a deep dissatisfaction with her life and yearns for a sense of fulfillment. "Aadhe Adhure" delves into themes of loneliness, disillusionment, and existential angst, which were relatively new in Indian theatre during its time. The play examines the intricate relationships and conflicts among family members as they grapple with finding their own identities and pursuing happiness. The confined living space and financial struggles further intensify their tensions, resulting in explosive arguments and bitter confrontations. Through the characters' struggles and conflicts, the play raises poignant questions about societal expectations, gender roles, and the true meaning of happiness and fulfillment in life. The play concludes with an open-ended ending, allowing the audience to interpret the characters' destinies and reflect upon the thought-provoking issues presented throughout the play.

5. HAYAVADANA: A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND DESIRE FOR FULFILLMENT

The play "Hayavadana" (lit. horse-headed) written by Girish Karnad in 1971, holds a significant place in modern Indian literature as it delves into themes of identity, love, and desire. Set in medieval India, the play revolves around the story of two best friends, Devadatta and Kapila, who both develop feelings for the same woman, Padmini, who serves as the protagonist. The power dynamics among these three main characters serve as a crucial aspect of the play. Devadatta, a Brahmin, possesses linguistic and poetic skills, and holds a position of power and privilege in society. Kapila, on the other hand, is a wrestler, strong physically but belonging to a lower caste, and lacks the same privileges as Devadatta. Despite being married to Devadatta, Padmini becomes the object of affection for both men, leading to a competition for her love and attention. Padmini, caught in the middle, struggles to make a decision for herself [Karnad \(1997\)](#). "Hayavadana" offers a unique blend of myth, folktales, and contemporary Indian society, tackling themes such as identity, love, and the quest for fulfillment. The play also delves into the power dynamics between men and women within society. Padmini, despite being a strong and independent woman, finds herself constrained by the societal expectations and limitations imposed upon women in ancient India. She is expected to be submissive and obedient to men, without the agency to make her own decisions. This places her in a challenging position as she navigates her own desires and emotions while also grappling with societal norms. Another prominent aspect of "Hayavadana" is its exploration of the concept of identity. The play raises questions about whether identity is determined solely by physical appearance or if it is shaped by inner qualities such as intelligence and kindness. It also probes the influence of social status on one's sense of self-worth. The search for completeness emerges as another vital theme within the play. Each character embarks on a personal quest for something that they believe will bring them a sense of wholeness—be it love, intelligence, or physical perfection. However, they ultimately come to realize that true completeness can only be attained through self-acceptance, recognizing that external factors cannot provide lasting fulfillment.

6. GHASHIRAM KOTWAL: THE ABUSE OF POWER AND THE CORRUPT NATURE OF POLITICS

The play "Ghashiram Kotwal," (police chief Ghashiram) written by Vijay Tendulkar in 1972, is set in 18th-century Pune and revolves around the story of Ghashiram, a man who ascends to power as the kotwal (police chief) of the city. However, his corrupt and ruthless methods of maintaining order ultimately lead to his downfall. The drama begins by introducing the morally corrupt state of the Brahmins in Pune, who hold positions of power. The dishonest chief of Pune, Nana Phadnavis, visits the lavani dancer Gulabi, where Ghashiram is employed [Balsing \(2019\)](#). Ghashiram's intellect impresses Nana. The next day, as a Brahmin, Ghashiram attends the Peshwa's feast to collect alms. However, he faces mistreatment, is falsely accused of pickpocketing, and is sentenced to prison by the Pune Brahmins. This incident fuels Ghashiram's desire for revenge. To accomplish his objective and secure the position of Kotwal from Nana, Ghashiram trades his own teenage daughter, Gauri. Once appointed, he enforces strict regulations on the city, indiscriminately imprisoning individuals for minor offences. Nana turns a blind eye to the grievances of the commoners who complain about Ghashiram, as he is

deeply infatuated with Gauri. As the situation escalates, the Brahmins ultimately lodge a complaint with the Peshwa. The Peshwa summons Nana, who orders Ghashiram to be killed [Tendulkar \(2014\)](#). The play's protagonist, Ghashiram, undergoes a transformation from an ordinary man to a powerful figure in society. He offers his daughter Gauri to Nana Phadnavis in exchange for the position of Kotwal, utilizing the corrupt system to his advantage. The play delves into themes of power, politics, and the exploitation of power. It offers a critical portrayal of the Peshwa regime, highlighting how the ruling class manipulates and exploits ordinary individuals for their own gain. "Ghashiram Kotwal" serves as a potent critique of power abuse and the corrupt nature of politics. Ghashiram's rise to the position of kotwal is not based on merit, but rather on his willingness to engage in any means necessary to achieve his ambitions. He resorts to bribery, blackmail, and even murder to climb the social ladder, prioritizing his own interests over the welfare of the people he is entrusted to serve. From its onset, the play establishes a power dynamic between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins in Pune. Ghashiram initially faces suspicion and is treated as an outsider by the Brahmins. However, as he gains power and influence, he exploits his position and manipulates the system to his advantage. He employs his authority to eliminate adversaries and solidify his position, resorting even to the murder of a woman who rejects his advances. As Ghashiram becomes increasingly corrupt, the play delves into the conflict between individual desires and societal norms. Ghashiram's insatiable thirst for power and wealth drives him to commit progressively heinous acts, which he justifies as necessary for maintaining order in the city. The play juxtaposes his actions with those of other characters who attempt to resist the oppressive power structure of Pune. Nana Phadnavis, for example, confronts Ghashiram and suffers the consequences for challenging him. Throughout the play, Tendulkar emphasizes the role of social and political hierarchies in perpetuating corruption and injustice. Ghashiram's actions receive support and protection from influential figures in the city who turn a blind eye to his crimes as long as he serves their interests. Moreover, the play highlights the gendered aspect of power dynamics, as Ghashiram's actions are facilitated by the subjugation of women and the objectification of their bodies. [Tendulkar \(2009\)](#)

7. SAKHARAM BINDER: AN EXPLORATION OF SEXUALITY, POWER, AND PATRIARCHY

"Sakharam Binder," (Sakharam, the Binder) the play written by Vijay Tendulkar in 1972, delves into the themes of power, gender, and morality. The play narrates the story of Sakharam Binder, a bookbinder who resides outside the confines of societal norms, engaging in sexual relationships with multiple women. However, his unconventional lifestyle leads to conflict and violence, ultimately resulting in his own downfall. Sakharam introduces himself as an individual who has rejected traditional roles and societal norms, striving to live life on his own terms [Wadikar \(2011\)](#). Sakharam's rejection of societal norms is most evident in his relationships with women. He holds the belief that marriage is a social construct that restricts individuals, and instead, he seeks women who are willing to cohabit with him and fulfil his desires without the need for marriage. Additionally, he advocates for women to break free from the confines of traditional gender roles imposed by Indian society and encourages their freedom of expression. Tendulkar portrays Sakharam Binder's character issues, which predominantly revolve around violence. These conflicts arise from interpersonal and personal relationships, vividly reflecting the characters' tendency towards violent expressions throughout the play. The central

theme of the play revolves around the relationship between the protagonist, Sakharam, and his seventh and eighth mistresses, Laxmi and Champa. These three characters hold pivotal roles in the narrative, shaping its entirety. Dawood, Sakharam Binder's Muslim friend, is a secondary character in the play, initially portrayed as composed during the first act. However, his deceitful nature becomes evident later on as he engages in a relationship with Champa, Sakharam's eighth mistress, betraying his friendship with Sakharam Binder. Faujdar Shinde, Champa's husband, is similarly depicted as a violent individual who subjects his wife to abuse while under the influence of alcohol. The play concludes with Sakharam's downfall, as the women he has taken in depart from his life, and the repercussions of his violent past catch up to him. These characters are portrayed as individuals prone to various forms of violence, including physical, psychological, political, sexual, and verbal violence [Sharma \(2019\)](#).

Through the character of Sakharam, Tendulkar illuminates the significance of power in relationships and its potential to oppress and exploit others. The women in the play bear the brunt of Sakharam's whims and desires, underscoring the power dynamics embedded in their interactions. The play exposes the pervasive violence and exploitation endured by women in the name of tradition and societal norms. Moreover, it prompts to question the responsibility of individuals in perpetuating these oppressive systems and emphasizes the necessity for resistance and rebellion against them. The play engenders crucial inquiries regarding the essence of human relationships and the intricate nature of power dynamics, abuse, and gender roles within Indian society. It challenges conventional patriarchal norms and underscores the urgency for a more nuanced comprehension of human relationships. *Silappadikaram* shares common themes with "Aadhe Adhure," "Hayavadana," "Ghashiram Kotwal," and "Sakharam Binder." These works collectively delve into the complexities of human relationships, the repercussions of one's actions, and the quest for fulfillment and identity. Mohan Rakesh's play "Aadhe Adhure" explores themes of marital discord and societal expectations. It portrays the struggles of a middle-class Indian family and the conflicts that arise from the husband's inability to provide for his family. Similarly, *Silappadikaram* also addresses marital discord and societal expectations, depicting Kovalan's abandonment of his wife Kannagi due to his pursuit of wealth and material pleasures. Girish Karnad's play "Hayavadana" delves into themes of identity and the human search for completeness. It narrates the story of Devadatta and Kapila, two friends who both love the same woman, Padmini. Kapila becomes consumed by his desire for Padmini and sacrifices his own identity in a desperate attempt to win her love. Similarly, *Silappadikaram* portrays Kovalan as being consumed by his desire for wealth and material pleasures, leading to his tragic downfall. Vijay Tendulkar's play "Ghashiram Kotwal" explores themes of political corruption and power struggles in 19th-century India. It narrates the story of Ghasiram, a corrupt municipal official who ascends to power through deceit and manipulation. Similarly, *Silappadikaram* addresses themes of justice and power struggles through Kannagi's quest for justice following her husband Kovalan's wrongful execution. In "Sakharam Binder," another play by Vijay Tendulkar, themes of gender roles and societal expectations are examined. The play portrays Sakharam, a bookbinder who takes in and mistreats women abandoned by their families. Similarly, *Silappadikaram* presents Kannagi as a strong and independent woman who challenges societal expectations and norms. Overall, these works collectively explore universal themes of human relationships, consequences of actions, and the search for completeness and identity, albeit through different cultural and historical contexts.

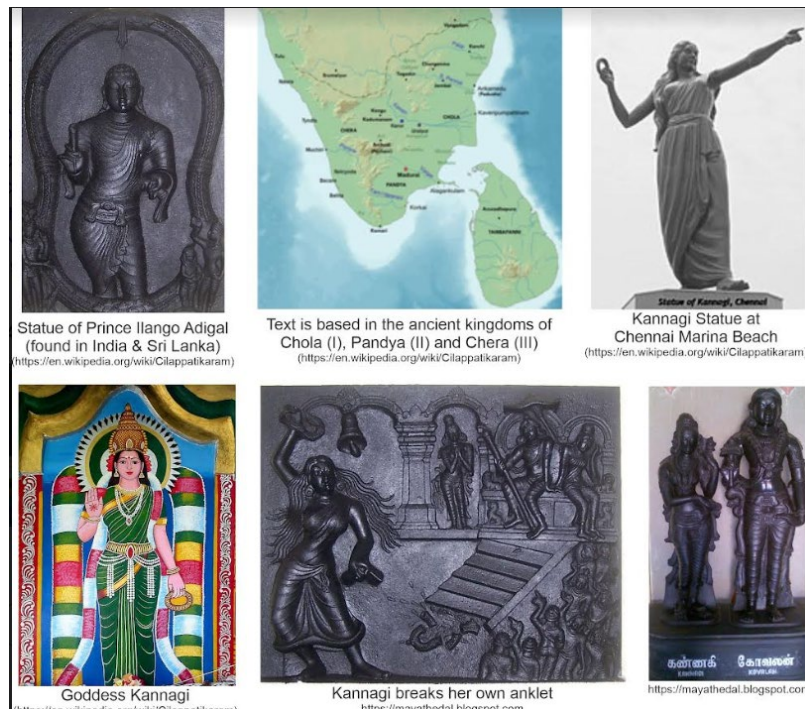
8. CONCLUSION

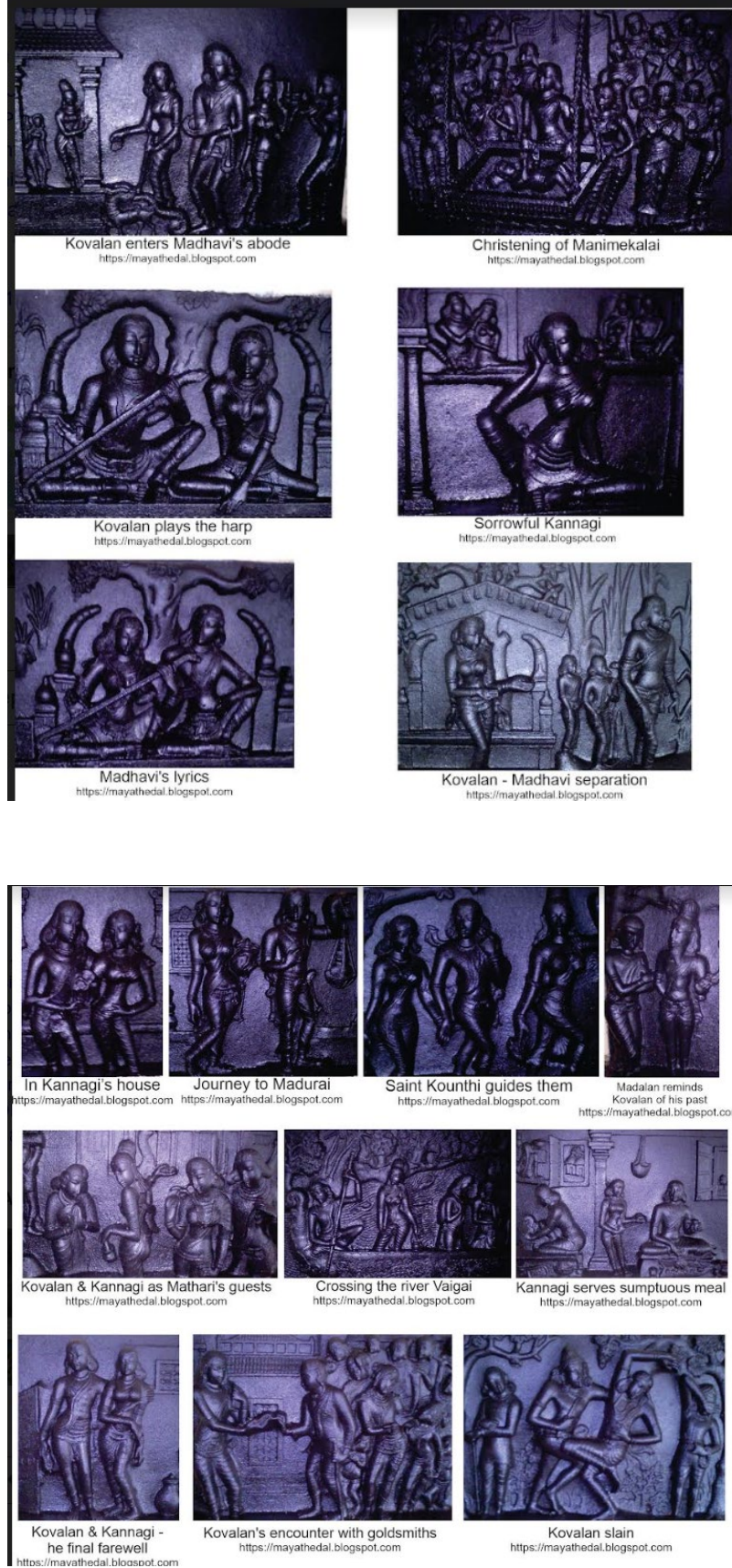
In general, *Silappadikaram* is a profound and intricate work that provides a captivating insight into the social and cultural norms prevalent in ancient Tamil society. By depicting gender roles, social hierarchies, and religious and cultural practices, the epic poem offers a nuanced and enlightening perspective on the values and beliefs of that era. It delves into significant topics such as feminism, women's empowerment, social justice, human rights, and cultural identity. *Silappadikaram* stands as a crucial cultural and literary artefact, extensively studied in the field of performance studies, and revered by scholars and readers alike for its enduring significance. *It is treated* as a pure literary text that is devoid of any political context or activities constructed around the politics of the kingdoms in a direct way. However, it subtly deals with the socio-cultural and political life that can be seen from Kannagi's reaction and the Madurai king's response in admitting the blunder he committed. "Am I the king? I listened to the words of a goldsmith! / I alone am the Thief! Through my error / I have failed to protect the people / Of the southern kingdom. Let my life crumble in the dust. / He fell down in a swoon. His great queen / Shuddered in confusion, and said: / There is no refuge / For a woman who lost her husband." / (The Silappadikaram: the Tale of Anklet, tr. Parthasarathy (2004/1993): 189-190, quoted in Kapoor (2023):167-168). Then, "When the lord of the Vaigai saw the dust on her body, / Her dark hair undone, the single anklet / Blazing in her hand, he lost heart. / Her words Pounded his ears, and he gave his life." / (The Silappadikaram: the Tale of Anklet, tr. Parthasarathy (2004/1993): 190, quoted in Kapoor (2023):168). The fair and impartial judgement is being upheld through these lines and the whole text is configured to prove this point, and the kings of those time had been sensitive to well-being of the people through their moral and ethical life. It is presented in three books (*kandams*), further divided into stories (*kathairs*), with each *kandam* named after the location where the story takes place, such as *Punarkkandam*, *Maduraikkandam*, and *Vanchikkandam*. The text comprises twenty-five stories and five song cycles: The love songs of the seaside grove; The song and dance of the hunters; the round dance of the herdswomen; The round dance of the hill dwellers; and The benediction. The inclusion of *patikam*, although considered a later addition, holds significance not only for this text but also for other literary works. It signifies the poetic intent to elucidate certain truths, such as the consequences faced by even kings if they violate the law and the commendation of the virtuous wife by great men. It also underscores the manifestation and fulfillment of deeds. The poem is named Cilappatikāram, the epic of the anklet, as the anklet symbolizes the illumination of these truths Adigal (1992), 21.

Although the text is considered parallel to Sanskrit literature, it contains mentions and references to numerous Sanskrit epics, legends, and puranic texts. In this regard, Zvelebil's statement is relevant, as he describes *Silappadikaram* as the "first literary expression and the first ripe fruit of the Aryan-Dravidian synthesis in Tamilnadu" Rani & Shivkumar (2011), 79-99. *Silappadikaram* holds a significant place in popular culture, with film adaptations based on its content. Additionally, it has attained spiritual and religious significance among the people, with Kannagi being deified and worshipped in many parts of South India. However, the text possesses contextual relevance from a performance standpoint, necessitating an in-depth exploration of its contemporary relevance in folk and modern theatre. This discussion aims to initiate further exploration in this direction.

In addition to its rich intertextuality with Sanskrit literature and its enduring cultural and religious significance, the performative aspects of *Silappadikaram* warrant further examination to fully appreciate its contemporary relevance. The text's narrative complexity and dramatic elements suggest its potential for adaptation and reinterpretation in various forms of theatre, both traditional and modern. By delving into its performative dimensions, scholars and artists can uncover new layers of meaning and relevance that resonate with contemporary audiences. Exploring how *Silappadikaram* is enacted and experienced on stage can provide valuable insights into its enduring appeal and relevance in today's cultural landscape. Therefore, while acknowledging its historical and literary importance, it is crucial to expand our analysis to encompass its performative aspects, thus paving the way for a deeper understanding of its continuing impact and significance in both scholarly discourse and popular culture. Another point that needs to be mentioned about the text is that though it introduces Madhavi as a central character who had been trained rigorously in music, dance, and the poem composition, through the reflection of social attitudes on the artist, the text introduces the twist in the story. Therefore, Kovalan's movement towards Madhavi is not accidental rather it is the narrativization of social attitude towards arts and artists. However, the text constructs and projects Madhavi not as an ordinary woman performer, but as a morally upright woman who proves her moral and ethical character by returning all the wealth of Kovalan stolen by her mother without the knowledge of either Kovalan or Madhavi.

Finally, to the credit of the text apart from the performative elements, it is considered as a secular text when compared to other contemporary texts such as Manimeghalai, Civaka Chinthamani and Vilaiyapathi. Further, the moral or justice the text establishes through the neat description of the story is relevant in the modern context, for instance, "Arasiyal pizhathorku aramkootru avathum" that reads as for those who have committed injustice in ruling/politics, it is believed that the justice itself will turn as demon of death. Kapoor (2023), 166.







CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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