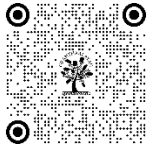# DECODING BUDDHIST IMAGERY: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN 'PAPILIO BUDDHA' AND 'MADRAS'

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism, a religion and philosophy founded by Gautama Siddhartha, (Buddha) around 2,500 years ago, has been utilized as a counter-hegemonic force to challenge dominant socio-political structures in India. By embracing Buddhism, individuals and communities can resist and subvert the oppressive structures and ideologies that have been used to marginalize and exclude them. This research analyzes how the films "Papilio Buddha" (2013) and "Madras" (2014), deploy Buddhist themes and motifs to critique socio-political issues, particularly Dalit struggle, resistance against caste oppression and Rights. The objectives of this research are to investigate how Buddhist symbols and imagery address social and political issues and to explore the significance of Buddhism in forming political identities and promoting collective resistance. Furthermore, this research examines the political symbolism of Buddhism in the films "Papilio Buddha" and "Madras", Through the insights of B.R. Ambedkar who argued that Buddhism has emerged as a counter–hegemonic force to the oppressive Brahmanical system, perpetuating inequality and social injustice by applying Saussurean semiotics and structuralism theory to interpret the deliberate application of Buddhist symbolism in these stories, highlighting the power of film as a medium for political discourse.

Keywords: Dalitism, Buddhism, Feminism, Dalit Feminism, Madras, Papilio Buddha, Cinema

1. INTRODUCTION

B.R. Ambedkar (1957) (Hereafter called Ambedkar) in his work "The Buddha and His Dhamma" presents an ideal perspective on the Buddhist genesis in India. Ambedkar posits that Buddhism emerged as a counter-hegemonic response to the oppressive Brahmanical system in India. According to him the Brahmanical system is the birthplace of social inequality and injustice among society. Key aspects of Ambedkar's interpretation include, Counter to Brahmanical revolution which Ambedkar conceptualizes Buddhism as a revolutionary movement that challenged the dominant Brahmanical ideology, which legitimized social hierarchy, Graded inequality, casteism, and ritualism. Ambedkar highlights Buddhism Challenging the Vedic authority because Buddha is against rebirth and God so it rejects the Vedic

authority and the Brahmanical claim to the exclusive interpretive power, thereby subverting the existing power dynamics. Ambedkar emphasizes the Buddha's emphasis on Dhamma (righteousness, ethics, and morality) as a novel moral order that transcended the Brahmanical system and its ritualistic Graded inequality and hierarchical structures. Ambedkar believed that the Buddha's teachings repudiated the intention of innate superiority or inferiority based on birth, thereby challenging the caste system and promoting social equality he addressed that Buddhism Rejects caste-based inequality or any kind of inequality which is against Humanity. Ambedkar acknowledges the Buddha's encouragement of critical thinking because it contrasts with the Brahmanical emphasis on blind faith and dogma. Ambedkar views Buddhism as a multifaceted movement that aims to transform Indian society and challenge existing power structures, extending beyond spiritual realms to encompass social and political dimensions. Through this view, Ambedkar seeks to reclaim the Buddha's teachings as a vital tool for social liberation and human emancipation, particularly for oppressed marginalized and communities in India. Furthermore, In "The Buddha and his Dhamma", he reveals his precise comprehension of Buddhism and how it is from a social and political standpoint. About caste, Ambedkar said that the doctrines of Buddhism are a means of liberation that transcends caste and that practicing it is a way to escape India's caste structure. Put succinctly, it is the application of Buddhist principles and tenets in social contexts. Ambedkar (2011) believed that Buddhism offered a way out of India's repressive caste system. He believed that caste boundaries were a barrier to the manner of Humanity found in the teachings of the Buddha and Buddhism offered equality and social justice to all in common. Ambedkar further highlighted the universal ethical concepts of equality, compassion (karuna), non-violence (ahimsa) love, and that are inherent in Buddhism. These ideas, in his opinion, are essential to creating a society that is filled with humanity. Buddhism was interpreted by Ambedkar with more emphasis on its ethical teachings than on its ceremonial elements. Ambedkar critiqued the ritualistic practices that had gradually infiltrated Buddhism. Instead of focusing on outward rites and ceremonies, he promoted a return to the essential teachings of the Buddha, which emphasized inner expansion, moral behaviour and mindfulness. Social justice has a philosophical and moral foundation in Buddhism. As a guiding notion for building a just society where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, he viewed the Buddhist idea of "Dhamma"—the natural rule or truth. Ambedkar further emphasized the Sangha as being crucial to the preservation and dissemination of the Buddha's teachings. He saw the Sangha to be a source of ethical direction and moral dilemma for individuals and society at large. Ambedkar's conversion (yelo) to Buddhism in 1956 was a momentous occasion in Indian history that demonstrated his dedication to the teachings and values of Buddhism. He announced in the1930s about his conversion but he converted in 1956 almost it took 20 years to research Buddhism and his morals and ethics. He suggest his followers to use Buddhism as a tool for social change, self-empowerment, and self-respect, particularly the Dalits. "The Buddha and His Dhamma" offers Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism as a route to ethical life, social justice, and personal freedom. His observations continue to spark debates over Buddhism's applicability to today's social and political issues.

2. POLITICAL ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA

Buddhism has performed a sizeable function in shaping India's social and cultural cloth. Its political implications are still debated among scholars. Rajan (2020) argues that Buddhism is a political pressure in India. He cites the Buddha

himself as a political leader who challenged the present social order. The Buddha encouraged for equality and justice (NaradaThera, 1964). However, Sharma (2019) disagrees stating that Buddhism is a faith now not a political ideology. Its focus is on private liberation, no longer political power (Keown,2013). While it's far genuine that Buddhism's middle teachings are apolitical, its historical and modern-day packages in India advocate otherwise. Emperor Ashoka for example, used Buddhism to unfold his empire's affect. He also promoted peace (Singh, 2017).

Similarly, Dr. Ambedkar a Buddhist chief utilized Buddhism as a political tool to fight for Dalit rights. He additionally focused on social justice (Sangharakshita, 2016). These examples display how Buddhism has been hired as political pressure in India, challenging Sharma's Assertion. The relationship among Buddhism and politics in India is complicated and multifaceted. While its middle teachings can be apolitical its historical and current applications endorse that Buddhism has played. Buddhism keeps toplay full-size function in shaping India's political panorama. Ambedkar's (2011) philosophy of Buddhism is based on purpose and analytical reasoning. He valued Buddhism's attention on the use of reason inquisitiveness and firsthand expertise to realise the essence of lifestyles and the suffering of humans. In "The Buddha and His Dhamma," he emphasized the Buddha's teachings as logical and empirical approach of addressing lifestyles's crucial inquiries and often criticized Hinduism. In his works he talked about its discriminatory policies and caste-primarily based social order. He considered Buddhism as a releasing alternative. It gave a extra equitable and compassionate manner of dwelling. At the identical time, it rejected the harsh elements of Hinduism. His work sparked a resurgence of interest in Buddhism among underserved organizations and paved the manner for the founding of Buddhist institutions. New agencies prioritized social trade and schooling. Ambedkar's Buddhist teachings nonetheless serve as an thought for social justice campaigns and tasks. They enhance equality and human rights nowadays.

3. MADRAS AND PAPILIO BUDDHA

Across the world, individuals adhering to religions other than Buddhism often possess statues or artistic representations, sculptures, or paintings of Buddha in their homes, places of worship, and even in their vehicles, showcasing these in aesthetic forms. Some individuals choose to keep Buddha's statues in meditation poses. While numerous films utilize Buddha's statues to enhance mise-en-scène, only a handful in Indian cinematic history delve into representing Buddha's ideology, portraying him as a revolutionary figure, and exploring the cultural values, morals, and ethics associated with Buddhism. On a global scale, it becomes evident that many of the films by South Korean director Kim Ki-duk serve as philosophical investigations grounded in Buddhism. These movies delve into the individual psychology of the country's people, employing Buddhism and the symbolic imagery of Buddha as elements intertwined with the prevailing culture. In Tamil director Mysskin's films like "Thupparivaalan" and "Psycho," there are subtle allusions to Buddha, exploring themes of humour, wisdom, patience, love, mercy, and sacrifice. For instance, in "Thupparivaalan," there is an ironic scene where a Buddha statue, symbolizing non-violence, is placed in a hotel, and a fight ensues against it with various weapons, including knives. In "Psycho," the protagonist, named Gautham after Buddha, consistently appears beneath a painting resembling a Bodhi tree, symbolizing wisdom, compassion, and grace. Regrettably, only a handful of Indian films have utilized Buddhism or Buddha as symbols of emancipation and the pursuit of truth. Notable among them are "Papilio Buddha" and "Madras."

The film "Papilio Buddha," written and directed by Jayan K. Cherianreleased in 2013, explores the predicament of landless Dalits, flaunting the violence committed against them and the political convolutions entwined with their struggles. The film lays bare the brutality faced by oppressed Dalit and tribal communities as they seek to assert their rights under the Indian Constitution. Rather than heeding the voices of the marginalized, the Government employs deceptive tactics through the police and other agencies. The film underscores the government's attempt to silence politically conscious individuals within the oppressed society, hindering Dalits from reclaiming their rights burdened by caste stigmas. The deliberate labeling of the community as Naxalite-Maoist terrorists further suppresses their uprising. "Papilio Buddha" fearlessly depicts the harrowing reality of gang rapes against Dalit women, boldly amplifying the voices of the voiceless within the society. The use of masks and false saviors in the film prompts numerous questions, with the narrative not only raising these questions but also providing answers, both directly and symbolically. Notably, Buddha and Buddhism emerge as powerful symbols of liberation for the Dalit people.

Director Pa. Ranjith's film "Madras" was released in 2014. The plot conveyed through elegant cinematic language, revolves around a wall in the area inhabited by Dalit people and the generations-long political struggle to capture and retain control of that wall. The film underscores the significance of education in prompting necessary questions and fostering awareness, addressing socio-political needs. The Prevention of Atrocities of Untouchability Act, enacted in 1989, aimed to prevent violence and brutal attacks against Dalits. Most Dalit political parties and movements in Tamil Nadu emerged in the post-1990 period, coinciding with the time when the events of this movie transpire. The rise of Dalit empowerment is documented in the film, critiquing the Dravidian political parties of Tamil Nadu. It accuses them of neglecting caste-based dominance even after assuming power, exploiting Dalit individuals as mere vote-bearers and slaves."Madras" shattered the longstanding superstition in Tamil cinema that addressing Dalit life and politics would not be commercially viable. Surprisingly, the film achieved commercial success with widespread support, sparking debates in the political arena. By challenging the stereotypical portrayal of Dalit characters in Tamil cinema and presenting authentic representations on screen, the movie transformed itself into a cinematic role model.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The relationship between Buddhism and politics in India has been a subject of interest for students. Research has proven that Buddhism has performed a great function in shaping India's political panorama (Rajan, 2020). The Buddha himself changed into a political chief who challenged the present social order and recommended for equality and justice (NaradaThera, 1964). One of the earliest studies in this topic changed into conducted by Tambiah (1992), who explored the connection among Buddhism and the spirit cults in North-East Thailand. Examine the discovered that Buddhism was used as a political tool to legitimize the power of the nation. Similarly, Ling (1980) tested the relationship among Buddhism and politics in Sri Lanka and discovered that Buddhism became used to promote nationalism and ethnic identification. In India, Emperor Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism had a significant impact at the political landscape.

Singh (2017) found that Ashoka used Buddhism to unfold his empire's have an effect on and sell peace. Similarly Ambedkar, a Buddhist chief, utilized Buddhism as a political tool to combat for Dalit rights and social justice (Sangharakshita,2016).

Recent research have additionally explored the political components of Buddhism in present day India. Sharma (2019) determined that Buddhism is often used as a political device by way of people and groups to further their own interests. Kumar (2018) observed that Buddhist leaders in India have been instrumental in promoting peace and nonviolence.

Gombrich (2006) explained the social history of Theravada Buddhism and discovered that it has been shaped by using political and social elements. Ambedkar (1956) also emphasized the political and ethical aspects of Buddhism in his book "The Buddha and his Dhamma".

The interplay between Buddhism and politics in India has been profound and multifaceted. Historically, figures like Buddha and Emperor Ashoka utilized Buddhism to challenge socio-political norms. In modern times, leaders like Ambedkar have harnessed Buddhism for social justice and political reform and the present time research too highlights how Buddhism has been employed as a political tool to shape the social identities. These studies reveal that Buddhism continues to play a significant role in influencing political and cultural landscapes in India.

4.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of this study are

- To examine the political symbolism of Buddhism in the films "Papilio Buddha" and "Madras".
- To Analyze how these films deploy Buddhist themes and motifs to critique dominant socio-political structures.

This paper employs the films "Papilio Buddha and Madras"appreciably referencing structuralism movie principle. Structuralism: Analyzing the underlying structures of human culture and consciousness and more structuralism movie concept, affords a sturdy analytical tool to dissect the layers of which means in "Papilio Buddha and Madras" through a structuralism film theory lens adds depth to the interpretation of these cinematic narratives. This observe pursuits to analyze how Buddhism and Buddha's doctrine are portrayed politically and branded inside the storyline of the movie. Applying structuralism movie concept enhances the analysis of political symbolism in "Papilio Buddha" and "Madras," emphasizing the function of symbols in conveying ideological conflicts, electricity dynamics, and the complexities of identity illustration within cinematic narratives.

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, incorporating Saussurean semiotics and Roland Barthes' semiotics ideas to analyze the political symbolism of Buddha in the movies "Papilio Buddha" and "Madras". By examining the signs and symbols used in the films to convey meaning, this approach focuses on the interactions between the signifier (the physical form of the sign) and the signified (the concept or meaning associated with the sign). Saussurean semiotics views signs as comprising the signified and the signifier, enabling an investigation of the complex interactions between them within the context of the films. Additionally, Barthes' semiotics divides sign meanings into two categories: connotative meaning (implied or suggested meanings) and denotative meaning (literal interpretation), facilitating an in-depth examination of the cultural and ideological representations in the movies. Through a detailed exploration of specific scenes or elements in the films, this study aims to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the cinematic narrative and provide insights into the broader themes

and messages inherent in the films. By closely analyzing these semiotic discourses, this study seeks to shed light on the nuanced ways in which the filmmakers convey and construct the political identity of Buddhism, providing a deeper understanding of the complex interplay among signifiers, signifieds, and underlying structural elements within the cinematic text.

5. BUDDHA'S POLITICAL SYMBOLISM IN PAPILIO BUDDHA AND MADRAS FILMS

This section delves into selected extracts of semiotic Analysis from the films, providing a concise examination of their significance. The focus is on utilizing semiotic analysis to study the political identity of Buddhism portrayed in the films. Through a detailed exploration of specific scenes or elements, the paper aims to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the cinematic narrative. The semiotic approach employed facilitates the interpretation of symbols, signs, and their interplay, contributing to a deeper understanding of how Buddhism's political identity is represented within the context of the films "Madras" and "Papilio Buddha." By closely analyzing these semiotic discourses, this section seeks to shed light on the nuanced ways in which the filmmakers convey and construct the political identity of Buddhism, providing insights into the broader themes and messages inherent in the cinematic narratives.

6. POLITICAL SYMBOLISM OF BUDHHA IN THE FILM PAPILIO BUDDHA
6.1. SEMIOTICS OF PAPILIO BUDDHA (PORTRAITS AND SONG)

Figure 1

Figure 1 Portrait of Aiyankaali, B.R. Ambedkar, Buddha

Figure 2

Figure 2 Dalit Women Manjushree

Figure 3

Figure 3 Portrait of AiyanKaali and Protest

Figure 4

Figure 4 Portrait of Buddha in Vehicle

Figure 5

Dhammam saranam gacchami

Figure 5 Statue of Buddhar at Protest and Song

Figure 6

We should not let Ramadas go on with his hunger strike
If we let that happen, they will evacuate us.
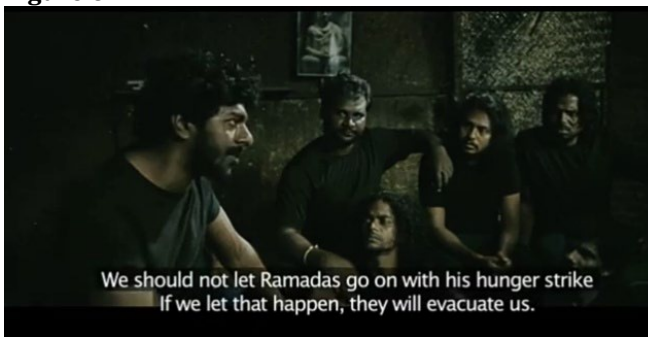
Figure 6 Portrait of Buddha at Discussion

Figure 7

Figure 7 Portrait of Buddha in Order to Replacing the Ideology

Figure 8

We hereby declare that we are giving up
Hinduism and its caste.

Figure 8 Portrait of Buddha at the Time of Oath

Figure 9

Figure 9 Portrait of Buddha at House of Protagonist

Figure 10

Figure 10 Portratit of Buddha at the Time of Protest Announcement

Figure 11

Figure 11 Portrait of Ambedkar in the Area of Protest

Figure 12

Figure 12 Portrait of Buddha and Gandhi at the Place of Protest

Figure 13

Figure 13 Portrait of Gandhi

In a pivotal scene from the movie "Papilio Buddha," the portraits and tribute are songs are a two strong element which convey the political identities within the conext. In a particular scene from Papilio Buddha Dalits, strategically place Portrait of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Aiyangali and Buddha in centre of their living area, singing songs that praise their sacrifices and hard work. (Fig:1). The narrative takes a grim turn when a Dalit woman named Manjushree becomes a victim of gang Sexual assault by non-Dalits, sparking a major political outcry. Dalit communities unite to protest for justice on behalf of Manjushree and their land right, prompting the government to employ various strategies to suppress the Dalit struggle. Amidst this tension, some Gandhians attempt to visit Dalit settlements in a bid to bring peace and to stop the protest. (Fig:2,6,10,12)

In anticipation of this, Dalits convene and decide that embracing Buddhism, as advocated by Babasaheb Ambedkar, is the path to a lasting solution for the age-old atrocities inflicted upon them. As a symbol of their intensified struggle, they decide to install a statue of Gautama Buddha in the centre of their area. (Fig:5,8). Gandhian volunteers trying to stop the protest, in response to the Gandhian volunteers' actions, at last in the forsaken situation Dalits express their dissent, which is then set ablaze. Despite the prior emphasis on peace and non-violence, the police department, collector, and the Gandhian crowd resort to indiscriminate violence against the Dalits after this incident. (Fig:12,13)

The repercussions are severe, with women and children becoming victims of the brutality the irony is no Gandhian Volunteer had try to stop the atrocities. Subsequently, the images of Ambedkarand Aiyangali are burned, and the Buddha statue erected as a symbol of liberation is forcibly toppled and vandalized. This poignant scene exemplifies the complex political symbolism surrounding Buddha and Buddhism within the film, reflecting the harsh realities and struggles faced by the Dalit community in their pursuit of justice and liberation.

Semiotics of Madras

Figure 14

Figure 14 Sculpture

Figure 15

Figure 15 Costume, Colour and Ideology

Figure 16

Figure 16 Discussion

Figure 17

Figure 17 Potrait of Buddha

In the film "Madras," the character Anbu meets a tragic end, initially believed by all to be the result of an enemy attack. Kali, profoundly affected by the loss of his confidant, undergoes a slow process of recovery, only to stumble upon a shocking revelation. Contrary to popular belief, Anbu was not defeated by enemies but fell victim to treachery. The screenplay intricately weaves a crucial scene where Kali discovers this truth, and it unfolds with both aesthetic and symbolic qualities. This pivotal moment unfolds in a hotel, and it is noteworthy that the scene commences with the focus on the head of the Gautama Buddha statue. (Fig:1) Kali, accompanied by his beloved Kalaiyarasi, arrives at the hotel. Kannan, the one who killed Anbu, and Mari, the traitorous accomplice, are already present, engaged in discussions about party alliances and funding for election expenses. (Fig:3)

The director seamlessly intertwines the love affair playing out externally with the political machinations occurring inside the hotel through the expert screenplay. As Kali and Kalaiyarasi leave the hotel, they pass by another Buddha statue within the premises. (Fig:4)

It is only after this moment that Kali, the protagonist, becomes aware of the truth surrounding Anbu's murder – a betrayal for political gains. The deliberate placement of the Buddha statue in this sequence prompts contemplation on whether it was a mere coincidence or a deliberate choice by the director. Such a scene, where the revelation occurs after passing a Buddha statue, could indeed be a carefully planned and thought-out cinematic device. An analogous passing scene can be observed in the director's earlier film, "Attakathi," suggesting a deliberate choice in utilizing this particular visual motif. In the film "Attakathi," the protagonist Deena, who is depicted as someone who can overcome any challenge naturally, is shown running to overcome his love failure.

Figure 18

Figure 18 Portrait of Ambedkar on Wall

During this pivotal moment, as he passes by a wall adorned with a picture of Ambedkar, the director presents the subsequent scene where in Deena attains a prestigious position as a teacher. The symbolism here suggests that, according to the director, for a Dalit to achieve success, there is an implicit need to cross paths with Ambedkar at least once in their lifetime. This consistent use of symbolism and codes in each film reflects the director's underlying ideology. Following Pa. Ranjith's "Madras," his subsequent films, including "Kabali," "Kaala," "SarpettaParamparai," "Dhammam," and "Natchathiram Nagargirathu," incorporate symbols like Buddha and Madurai Veeran as ideals and political representations. Notably, in "Kaala," a Buddha Vihar serves as a gathering place for crucial decisions, emphasizing its significance. Hence, the scene in "Madras" where the protagonist Kali passes by a Buddha statue, discovering the truth about Anbu's murder, is not accidental. Similar to Deena in Ranjith's "Attakathi" overcoming Ambedkar, Kali, the hero of "Madras," comprehends the truth only after encountering the Buddha. The image of Buddha, previously depicted as a symbol of truth realization, naturally takes on a political dimension in the subsequent scenes of the film. As the hero identifies Kali as a traitor and people pour blue colour on the wall, symbolizing the power that the picture has gained throughout the film, this scene becomes a representation of Dalit unity against caste dominance and oppression. In a parallel vein, in "Papilio Buddha," Dalit individuals thwart attempts to manipulate the politics of Dalit emancipation proposed by Ambedkar. This particular scene is portrayed as a gathering where Buddhism transforms into a potent political weapon, exemplifying the resilience of Dalit communities against systemic oppression

7. CONCLUSION

In the cinematic realm, the depiction of Buddha has long been confined to a limited sphere of wisdom, compassion, and contemplation, often serving as a mere aesthetic device. However, the films "Madras" and "Papilio Buddha" daringly shatter this convention, harnessing the potent symbolism of Buddha and Buddhism to convey a profound ideological message that transcends the spiritual domain. By masterfully weaving Buddhist iconography into the narrative fabric, these films skillfully unearth hidden truths and convey a nuanced political commentary, thereby challenging the conventional cinematic treatment of Buddhism. The directors, particularly Pa. Ranjith, have strategically deployed the image of Buddha as a symbol of resistance, epiphany, and political liberation, thereby re-contextualizing its significance and expanding its representational scope.

These films constitute a groundbreaking shift in the cinematic representation of Buddhism, exemplifying the medium's capacity for nuanced political and social commentary through symbolic expression. By leveraging the universal appeal of Buddhism, "Madras" and "Papilio Buddha" shed light on pressing social issues and inspire transformative change. The directors of "Madras" and "Papilio Buddha" have successfully re-phased of the cultural and political significance of Buddha, transforming it into a powerful symbol of hope, resilience, and political empowerment from aesthetic and mise-en-scene in cinema by their unique narration.

These directors have not only challenged the conventional cinematic representation of Buddhism in cinema but also rooted the way for a new wave of films which promote social change and cultural renewal in Indian Cinema. These films have elevating it to a symbol of collective struggle and liberation. They have created a cinematic language that speaks to the hearts and minds of audiences, inspiring a new wave of filmmakers to harness the power of symbolism to drive

social change. Moreover, "Madras" and "Papilio Buddha" exhibit a daring and cutting-edge storytelling technique that employs Buddhism's Universal appeal to shed light on societal challenges and spur revolutionary change.

These films deftly unearth hidden truths and offer a subtle political commentary by integrating Buddhist symbolism into the narrative fabric, thus disrupting the typical cinematic portrayal of Buddhism. Ultimately, these films constitute a paradigmatic shift in the cinematic representation of Buddhism, exemplifying the medium's capacity for nuanced political and social commentary through symbolic expression. By reconfiguring the cultural significance of Buddha, the directors of "Madras" and "Papilio Buddha" have created a powerful symbol of hope, resilience, and political empowerment, one that inspires social change and promotes cultural renewal.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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