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Silapathikaram teaches respect for human rights: U.S. scholar

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From Our Staff Reporter

MADURAI, Dec. 8.

Mr. Eric Edwin Millar from New York, who is on a 650-km trek from the Kaveripoompattinam coast of Thanjavur to the Kannagi temple of the Tamil Nadu-Kerala boundary, is now in Madurai. He is expected to stay here for about six weeks.

Mr. Eric Edwin said he had taken a pledge to make all the Prime Ministers and Presidents of the world know about the Tamil classic "Silapathikaram" since "the story teaches respect for human rights." He would organise a symposium on "Silapathikaram" in front of the Meenakshi temple here. A discourse on the classic will be delivered with traditional story telling techniques.

What made Mr. Eric Edwin to undertake the long trek? He said he would walk in the footsteps of Kannagi so that he could have a peaceful chance to meditate about the story. Asked how he felt footing the journey so far, Mr. Edwin said Prince Ilango Adigal had written that Kannagi and Kovalan came to Madurai through Kodambalur and that en-route they were received with enthusiasm and hospitality by the maravar tribals. But today, these people were

a caste. At Kodambalur he met the descendants of maravars and took food with them.

Talking about his field of scholarship, Mr. Edwin explained that he was a scholar on "story-telling, worldwide" — its history and technology. Story-telling was known as oral narrative. It was a type of folklore, which was a category within anthropology.

What made him choose "Silapathikaram" as also Tamil Nadu? Mr. Edwin said he liked the story because it began as an all-too human love story. It developed into a story of social and political violence, of justice in Madurai and finally, a story about divinity, god, and the entire universe in Kerala. Thus, it illustrated a connection between these different spheres of human experience.

Also, he had come to Tamil Nadu to study the traditional story telling techniques as the oral tradition here was alive, vital and rich. It was making a successful transition into the electronic age. In addition, its influences could be seen on the modern media — cinema, radio, television and newspapers.

Mr. Edwin said that after visiting the Kannagai temple he would visit Kerala and finish the project some time next October.