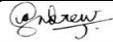
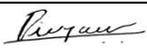
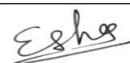
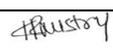
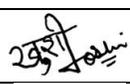
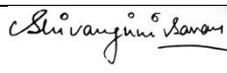
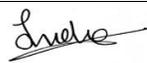
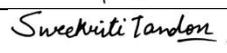


ART ON A BOX: SIVAKASI'S MINIATURE CANVAS

DISCOVER INDIA PROGRAM, 2020

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report titled “*Art on a box: Sivakasi’s Miniature Cavas*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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been invaluable and given us all memories we will continue to cherish long after this project is complete.

Abstract

Located in the Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu, the town of Sivakasi is known primarily for its flourishing matchbox, firecracker and printing industries. It is home to the largest number of matchbox manufacturers in India, employing thousands of workers across a number of factories. For years, the art on matchboxes, and the prints they display have represented certain cultural elements and have been used as a major medium of artistic expression. However, over time, the industry has seen major shifts with regard to production techniques, and this has consequently affected the nature of the prints on the matchboxes produced.

As globalisation and capitalism seeped into the industry with time, and mechanisation became increasingly prevalent, the prints on matchboxes began displaying more commercialised designs. Matchbox prints that once uniquely represented certain cultural, political or environmental ideas, soon began to adhere to simpler, more repetitive designs that were dictated by market success as opposed to artistic expression. These shifts have affected various stakeholders surrounding the matchbox industry, such as artists, factory workers and even local citizens. Our research aims to study changes in the making of matchboxes and matchbox designs over time. We seek to explore the many implementations of such changes through the effects it has on the various associated stakeholder groups. In essence, our research hopes to bring to light, how the craft of matchbox production and design has evolved over time, and what this change really implies in the present day.

Our information has been collected mainly through semi-structured and structured interviews, as well as through on field observations. The information is primarily qualitative in nature and to get a holistic understanding of the industry has been gleaned from a number of diverse stakeholders groups.

Through the analysis of qualitative data we were able to infer certain shifts that have occurred within the matchbox industry since its industrialisation. These changes have affected both the stakeholders and the products created. With the mechanisation of the industry the industry shifted from its once individualistic and cultural modes of production to a more commercial, capitalistic form.

Image No.	Caption	Source
1.	An example of Bazaar Art found commonly in all parts of India.	https://www.pinterest.com/pin/479000110348890528/
2.	Map of Sivakasi	http://sivakasinow.blogspot.com/2015/02/history.html
3.	Matchbox labels celebrating the independence of India from colonial rule	https://www.scoopwhoop.com/entertainment/23-indian-match-boxes/
4.	Common Bazaar art	DIP 2019-2020
5.	Artist at work; an example of Bazaar art	DIP 2019-2020
6.	Machinery seen at a matchbox production unit	DIP 2019-2020
7.	Depiction of Indian goddesses on matchbox labels in the mid-90s	https://seesaw.typepad.com/blog/2009/05/vernacular-art-matchbox-labels.ht
8.	Gandhi's famous Charkha was a prominent symbol of nationalism in India. Here, it is depicted on a matchbox label.	world-asia-india-36467415
9.	The family crest of the princely state of Bhavnagar on a matchbox label	world-asia-india-36467415
10.	Everyday objects and a national icon depicted on matchbox labels	DIP 2019-2020

11.	Cheetah fight original label design	https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/446771225511093299/
12.	Example of the Ship label imitation art	https://www.pinterest.com/pin/222435669069143603/
13.	Commercialisation of designs in the industry.	DIP 2019-2020
14.	ATM match box label an example of a standard print.	DIP 2019-2020
15.	Machinery found at a matchbox production unit; stretching wax	DIP 2019-2020
16.	Drying of matchboxes after they are stuck together through manual labour	DIP 2019-2020
17.	The making of a digital matchbox label	DIP 2019-2020
18.	Digitalization of the artistic process	DIP 2019-2020
19.	Imitation of the 'Balloon' matchbox label. This design is the most famous and most circulated in the town of Sivakasi	DIP 2019-2020
20.	Matchbox labels made to be exported to Kenya	DIP 2019-2020
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22.	Women in a packaging unit for Jamuna Matches, a subunit of Asia Matches	DIP 2019-2020
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24.	A local artist, who formerly painted on matchbox labels	DIP 2019-2020
25.	Prints in bulk for a matchbox label	DIP 2019-2020

26.	An elderly local woman in Sivakasi	DIP 2019-2020
27.	Local vendor in Sivakasi selling a balloon matchbox	DIP 2019-2020
28.	A woman making matchbox boxes at her home, a job she has been doing for more than 30 years.	DIP 2019-2020
29.	Depiction of women only as mothers and goddesses.	DIP 2019-2020

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the Topic

Matchboxes are a peculiar item. They permeated the fabric of our society as humanity's primary source of fire, and it is only with the recent inventions of lighters, and the use of gas and electricity, that they have begun to fall out of use. However, due to their extensive use across worldwide cultures and the tiny pictorial representations they bear, they serve as small cultural snapshots of what was happening at a particular place, at a specific moment in history. This bestows upon these tiny auxiliaries to our lives, a meaning that is seen when they are viewed as a collective. Matchbox labels, while often seeming arbitrary, do usually have a method and reasoning behind their labels, whether it is to attract new customers, or cater to those loyal to the brand. Producers sought to ride trends of what was popular amongst the public, by depicting images and icons from pop culture on these labels.

When one views matchbox iconography against the vast canvas of popular Indian Calendar or Bazaar Art, as shown in figure 1 (the presses popularised the art on commodities such as matchboxes, calendars, and so on that in Sivakasi), one can see the influences these art forms have had on the matchbox industry whether it be the color-saturated labels or the focus on deities and cultural phenomena.



Figure 1: An example of Bazaar Art found commonly in all parts of India.

When studying bazaar art, the town that is at the epicenter of the art form is Sivakasi, a town famous for its printing, firecracker, and matchbox industries. Sivakasi became a haven for these industries in the early 1900s due to the cheap labor available in the region as well as the favorable arid, climatic conditions for the production and storage of the chemicals that these industries require. With the prevalence of the printing industries of the town, it served as a place where artists could receive contracts from industries that needed visuals for their products. All this led to the development of Sivakasi as both an industrial town, but also a haven for artists who wished to produce works that could be marketed commercially.

1.2 Historical Overview & Geographical Information

Sivakasi is a town in the Virudhunagar District of the state of Tamil Nadu. The town is landlocked and lies only nine degrees above the equator, as shown in figure 2. This renders the town's weather arid through most of the year. In addition to this, it receives poor rainfall, just 32.8 inches, and has low groundwater reserves. These aspects, along with its infertile red and black soils, give Sivakasi extremely unfavorable conditions for agricultural practices. The population of Sivakasi relies primarily on the town's industries for employment. The primary language spoken, as across most of the state is Tamil, and this may prove a challenge as we do not have many fluent speakers working with us and may find it challenging to communicate.



Figure 2: Map of Sivakasi

The town post-independence has been primarily industrial and has grown along with the growth of its three primary industries, those of firecrackers, matchboxes, and printing. Sivakasi offered these industries perfect weather conditions for the storing and production of the chemicals required for their products as well as providing a surplus of cheap available labor in the absence of alternative work such as agriculture. In these conditions, these industries flourished and became the backbone of the town's economy, employing the majority of the population and increasing the migration to the town from the surrounding rural areas as people flocked to Sivakasi for work.

Today the majority of match and firework industries in Sivakasi are owned by the Nadar community, which before independence, were amongst the lowest castes in the district. However, due to large portions of the Nadar community converting to Christianity in the early 19th Century, they were able to receive a superior education under the British than their economically more well-off peers could receive (Kothari, 2014). By the early 20th Century, the Nadars had established themselves as a well-respected community of traders and farmers. At this point till 1920, all of India's matchboxes had been imported from Sweden, Japan, and Czechoslovakia.

Tracing the emergence of matchbox iconography in Sivakasi and the influences of bazaar art on its stylistic features and the topics depicted, the earliest figure one can determine the art form back to is an icon of Indian art, Raja Ravi Varma. One of India's most renowned artists, his style of art, fused Indian traditions and culture with techniques of European academic art. His work today is recognized globally and has been an inspiration to a number of artists over the years. Raja Ravi Varma is important to bazaar art because it was his style of color-saturated paintings that revolved around deities and epics of India, that many of the artists working in this field sought to imitate over the years (Jain & Thomas, 2007). In fact, prior to 1920, these paintings were so famous that Swedish matchboxes that were being imported to India began to copy them on their labels to increase sales in the country. His art was popular since it was non-elitist. It was possible for the common man to look upon one of his paintings and resonate with it and the culture it depicted. This universality allowed his art to spread far beyond the borders of the country, and its influences seeped into a number of spheres (Jain & Thomas, 2007).

Bazaar art in Sivakasi grew with the growth of the town's industries, weaving together a vast web of agents, publishers, printers, consumers, and workers. The presses attracted the work of

commercial artists from across the country as they continue to do to this day. Matchboxes, calendars, and the other products of bazaar art provided a unique medium for the promotion of this art as they allowed these visuals to be commodified as well as being mass-produced. The mass reproduction allowed these images to be mobilized and circulated out of the control of temples and courts which had held power over them in the past (Jain, 2011)

Before 1920, when matchboxes were imported from Sweden and Japan, the prints were often catered to Indian customers, featuring Ravi Varma reprints, and visuals from Indian cultures in the style of bazaar art. Once local production began, matchbox artists began to diversify the topics on the matchboxes, experimenting with popular actors, national icons, and animals in the same style. The year India gained independence, matchbox labels printed images of the Indian flag, circulating the message of freedom, as seen in figure 3. Due to the quick and widespread circulation of matchboxes, one of the main functions of match labels (other than its practical usage) also became a medium to communicate with the masses. Very often, especially before the last decade, match labels have been spaces for furthering popular culture, political ideologies, and capitalistic agenda.



Figure 3: Matchbox labels celebrating the independence of India from colonial rule.

Matchbox labels are often arbitrary and seek to ride trends of what is accessible at the time in their efforts to sell. When a particular label gains popularity, usually several smaller, independent companies try to ride its success by imitating the label with minor changes in color schemes and alphabets (Gandhi, 2017). In recent years, matchbox sales have stagnated with the rise of electric and gas lighters (Gandhi, 2017). There has not been much research done on how this stagnation has affected both the art and the artists working within this industry, and we hope to gain insight

into how they have been affected and what measures they have taken in their efforts to keep their craft alive. Our cover page also depicts the shift in designs on matchboxes, from the colour to the font, and this shift in matchbox label iconography, which is also an important aspect of our research.

1.3 Research Question

As the art of matchbox making has changed with considerable rise in mechanisation over the years, the industry, matchbox label iconography and stakeholders within it have had to evolve as well. Our interest was piqued in tracing this change. Therefore, our research question is as follows:

To what extent has the matchbox industry been affected by rising mechanization and capitalism, and how has this affected the significance of traditional matchbox labels today?

We expect our research to add to the already rich trove of information regarding Sivakasi's art culture and its matchbox industries. Our aims and objectives will reflect the same.

1.4 Objectives:

- To add new information regarding how the industrialization of the matchbox industry has affected not only the stakeholders within the industry but also the iconography of Sivakasi's matchbox art.
- To look into how individual stakeholders within the matchbox industry have adapted to industrialization and the mechanical changes the movement brought along with it.
- To gain a better understanding of how gender roles in the matchbox industry have been affected post-industrialization.

1.5 Aims:

In order to meet our objectives well, we aim to:

- Interview several different stakeholders within the matchbox industry, including artists, factory owners, local vendors, collectors, and consumers. The varied perspectives of these different individuals will provide us with a holistic understanding of the matchbox industry.

- When on-field, not all the information we collect will be through interviews, we must also be aware of and observant of our surrounding environment at all times when working so as to pick up on any information which the individuals we are interviewing may not speak about openly.
- An approach we will adopt throughout this research is being open to new avenues of information such as different interpretations of the same matchbox label iconography.

1.6 Research Methodology

Taking into consideration that our study is based mainly on the knowledge of the people of Sivakasi, and our ability to interpret and analyze this information, a convenient method of conducting our research is through interviews. Our data is being collected through the use of camera equipment, phones for audio recordings, and notebooks for transcribing the information presented. The interviews will be structured based on the occupation and economic status of the interviewees, and semi-structured interviews will be carried out in most cases.

Most of the data to be collected is likely to be qualitative in nature, which will help us analyze the individual's relationship and interpretation of the art on matchboxes. Upon interviewing some of the managers of the matchbox companies, we expect to be provided with in-depth historical knowledge on the workings of the industry. This factual knowledge, in turn, would work toward increasing the validity of our outcomes.

Our sampling methods vary from convenience to snowball sampling. A lot of our interviewees, such as locals and workers of a particular factory, are picked off of convenience sampling, mainly due to reasons of proximity; many of the factories in Sivakasi are barred by restrictions on documenting the inner workings. Further, our main point of contact in Sivakasi, Mr. Yuvanath, is to guide us by expanding our sampling methods. Through snowball sampling, he is to gradually provide us with an increasing number of contacts around Sivakasi, which would be relevant to our research.

As mentioned earlier, interviews will take the primary mode of collecting data, making it significant to chalk out a list of our stakeholders and how we aim to approach them. Our stakeholders in this project are as follows:

1. Matchbox Label Artists

Matchbox label artists are the crux of the label making process, as they are the creative force behind the labels. We aim to gain insight into the label making processes before advancement in technology and how these artists have had to adapt to the introduction of mechanization and the influence of capitalism. Present-day matchbox label designers also fall under this category and they will be integral in understanding the way that labels are designed today. These interviews allow us to delve into the world of Sivakasi from a cultural aspect. We primarily seek to understand the authentic art styles within the town, their influence, historical prevalence, present-day standing, and the process of producing the art. We will be using semi-structured interviews so that we have enough space to carry forward a conversation while having a set structure in mind.

2. Label Printers

Label printers play an essential role: They print the art that goes on labels. Due to this, they possess knowledge about what kind of labels are printed and which region-specific labels are getting sent to or are accessible in. We will be using semi-structured interviews in this stakeholder group.

3. Matchbox Collectors

Matchbox collectors possess something many people in the industry may not: a drive and passion for decoding images on labels. They delve deeper into a label's story, giving a fresh perspective from outside the industry. The interviews with Matchbox collectors are going to be semi-structured and slightly informal so as to build a more conversational rapport.

4. Matchbox Manufacturers

Interviews with factory owners aim to enlighten us on the more historical aspects of the matchbox industry, and also provide us with the commercial dynamics of matchbox production. Here, the main aim is to learn about the production process of a matchbox, conceptualization of the matchbox design, and the changes within the industry over time. Other than this, our interactions with factory workers and workers at the cottage industries aim toward gaining insight into the process of their craft and the actual production of the matchbox. These interviews will once again be semi-structured in nature and will make for some of the most informative and pivotal interactions in our research.

5. Locals of Sivakasi

Our interactions with the local citizens are expected to follow a semi-structured interview format. Here, we will gain insight into the local people's views on matchbox art. We hope to investigate the thought process behind purchasing a particular matchbox, whether the design holds any significance to the people and many other questions that would put into perspective the present-day standing of matchbox art in Sivakasi.

6. Local Vendors of Sivakasi

Local vendors are the stakeholder group that is in direct contact with most of the stakeholder groups mentioned above. We will be able to get information on buying patterns of the locals in Sivakasi pertaining mainly to which design sells the best and why that may be. These interviews will be semi-structured. However, some of the interviews are expected to be informal.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Tracing the Emergence and History of Bazaar Art

Bazaar art, also known as calendar art is a specific art form that is widely known throughout India. In fact, it is so familiar that many overlook it as it hangs in shops, behind the doors of small houses, and sits perched on the dashboards of cars (figure 4). However, this type of art, despite having a nation broad appeal, has humble beginnings. It originates from the small industrial town of Sivakasi and historically goes back to the time of Raja Ravi Varma, a celebrated artist from the southern region of India. It was during Varma's time that Brahmin scripts were being translated in English and were reintroduced to the public. Although he began his work with portraiture and genre painting, he soon started keeping narratives of the Ramayana and Mahabharat as the primary focus of his work, and it was the focus on these Indian scriptures that provided the public a connection as his art became tangible forms of classic mythical Hindu scriptures. This caught the public eye, as his artwork catered to all the masses, literate or not, as one need not be literate to interpret and relate to art. In addition to this, his work was mainly celebrated by anti-colonial nationalists as it allowed for India's national history to be documented. Varma's work has a particular style that presented Hindu deities in a humanized manner and which is also the reason it was received very well by elite Indian Nationalists and Colonial administration (Jain & Thomas, 2007).



Figure 4: Common Bazaar art

It was due to the success of his work that led to Ravi Varma being one of the first to set up a Lithography press “The Raja Ravi Varma Lithography Press” through which he was able to fuse the two worlds of fine art and mass reproduction. It was the establishment of this press that acted as a invitation for other industries to plant their roots in the towns soil, today there are 520 certified printing industries in Sivakasi (Geetha, 2016). It is important to note that it is due to this printing of artwork that original works of art began to lose meaning and value. It was through his printing press that prints of his artwork began being circulated, individuals from all income groups were introduced to his art and were able to interpret it in their own way. It was not long before many local artists began creating their own versions of Varma's work that led to Varma's work becoming possibly the most bought, plagiarized, imitated, and recycled.

Once Varma's press was established, it acted as a gateway for other local media to emerge that allowed for Sivakasi to develop their own style of art inspired by Raja Ravi Varma's work. This led to a form of artwork specific to Sivakasi, which is now referred to as Bazaar art(Geetha, 2016).

Bazaar art addressed a wide range of topics ranging from tourist art, pilgrim souvenirs, and a broad scope of local art. Prints from Sivakasi are known worldwide, so much so that copies of

Indian deities originating from Sivakasi have been found in West Africa during the time of World War I (Jain & Thomas, 2007). This suggests that the prints not only cater to Indian traders but go far beyond India and its borders. Sivakasi specializes in religious prints and is infamous for its unique style of making Indian deities. When it comes to the prints of Sivakasi, it is essential to note that the youth subculture plays a vital role as the artwork and prints change in accordance with the youth subculture (Geetha, 2016).



Figure 5: Artist at work; an example of Bazaar art

2.2 The Emergence of mechanical processes

The match industry of Sivakasi has a fascinating history behind it, ranging all the way back prior to when India gained its independence. It was in 1922 when two members from the Nadar community, P. Ayya Nadar and A. Shanmuga Nadar traveled to Calcutta where they learned the matchbox making process from Japanese traders, imported the machinery from Germany and returned to Sivakasi to set up the first matchbox factory (Kothari, 2014)

The two entrepreneurs started their business in Sivakasi after having learned and observed the craft of matchbox manufacturing from the Japanese in Calcutta. The Nadar was one of the few

communities at that time who were willing to take risks when it came to experimentation with business strategies. Nadar's taking into account Sivakasi's arid terrain and constant sunshine and average temperature of 28.6 °C ventured into establishing the match industries that soon began to blossom and grow by leaps and bounds in size. Today the small town of Sivakasi has over 640 matchmaking industries that are certified all due to the efforts of the Nadars and the industrial seed they planted in the town's soil (Jain & Thomas, 2007).

At the time, Indian nationalists were promoting nationalist self-help, and, as a result, matchmaking was projected to be a humble industry that served a national duty. The match industry at the time was appreciated to a great extent by the Indian Nationalists, primarily because it perfectly represented the cottage industry and relied on the skill of local artisans and resources. This further propelled its growth and allowed the industry to be expanded.

When India gained its Independence in the year 1947, the country moved towards economic planning. There was a need for small scale production as agriculture was failing to sustain local communities, there was a need for industrial growth and an ample supply of domestic labor. The matchmaking industry seemed to be a perfect fit for the country's need at the time; in addition to this, the town of Sivakasi itself was suffering from significant scale unemployment due to the decline of the cotton industry.

The mechanical process in Sivakasi came much later, despite the success of the industries. It was unwise to introduce machines, as with the introduction of mechanization comes large scale unemployment. Thus, in order to avoid massive scale unemployment, harmful subsidies were applied, penalizing factories that used machines. However, factory owners began to find loopholes within the system and began to abide by such penalties through the process of subcontracting with smaller units. Despite the government's best attempts, Sivakasi's matchbox industries became mechanized, with the manufacturers ensuring that their costs were as low as possible while keeping the production at an optimum level (Geetha, 2016).

Today the matchbox industry of Sivakasi is intensely mechanized, although there remains, of course, some need for human labor. However, the machines handle, for the most part, the bulk of the production. Long gone are the days where match box industries functioned through small workshops in people's homes, industries presently are large scale and driven by a need for increased profits. Today the machine handles 80% of the labour and a measly 20% is done via manual labour (Jain & Thomas, 2007).

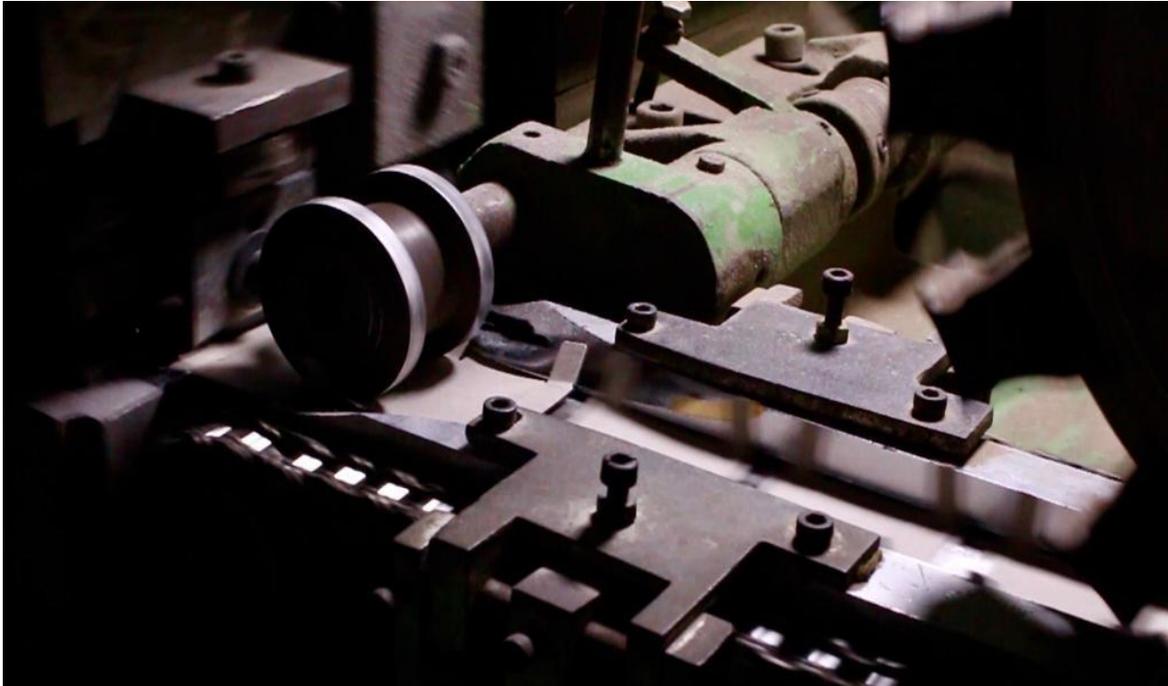


Figure 6: Machinery seen at a matchbox production unit

There are still some things in common that matchbox industries now share with those from the past. Although there are many who dabble in matchbox production, it is essential to note that most enterprises run on family ties and are passed down from generation to generation. Many of the industries that we see today were established decades ago during the years that followed after independence, and the success of matchbox manufacturers today is due to the reputation earned by the previous generation of matchbox manufacturers that built the industry from the ground up.

2.3 Popular Culture, Politics and Imitation on Matchbox Labels

An individual matchbox may not have much insight to offer, but when put together, stories spill out of them. Matchbox labels are necessary snapshots of history printed on tiny canvases, telling tales of mass significance such as India's independence, while drawing light to objects as mundane as a clock. Earlier matchboxes manufactured in India consisted of representations of various gods and goddesses (figure7) and also images of India's different princely states, old coins,

and faces of rulers. (Gowri S, 2018). However, matchbox labels tend to vary drastically in accordance with the geographical location they hail from.



Figure 7: Depiction of Indian goddesses on matchbox labels in the mid-90s

To elaborate on the above statement, the following are a few examples. In the late 19th century USA, matchboxes were primarily used for advertising shows and products. Another critical use of labels was to carry out messages of public interest. Alternatively, Swedish matchbox labels, which were exported to Imperial Britain, reflected the ambition of Imperialist Britain, displaying images that fed their dreams of power (Geetha, 2016) and imagery of the exotic other. Matchbox labels from Czechoslovakia further attest to the usage of matchbox labels to spread political messages. In the 1960s, Czechoslovakian labels carried images of various famous world leaders such as John F. Kennedy (of USA), Ben-Gurion (of Israel), and Nasser (of Egypt) (Geetha, 2016). Labels from the Soviet Union catered to the virtue of socialist technology and labor (Geetha, 2016). However, matchbox labels have also often turned into pieces of art, whether it is depicting paintings by Raja Ravi Varma in India or the showcase of La Fontaine's fables on labels in France. Taking the above information into account, it can be stated that in all its various forms, matchbox labels have been used since the very beginning to convey an idea. They are vivid and striking, delivering a clear message to the user. No form of art just 'happens to be made.' It is a product of its time. Just like films, matchbox labels are influenced by the power structures and dominant narratives of the time they are born in.

Just like the foreign labels discussed above, labels in India have also always had a robust communicative aspect to them, representing the popular culture and political ideologies. In 1905, during the movement for Bengal's partition in India, the Swadeshi movement was at its peak, and this reflected onto matchbox labels. Companies started pumping out labels with imagery of the Charkha (figure 8), popularized by Mohandas Gandhi, with writings in vernacular languages.

The nationalist fervor consuming India at the time was represented on matchboxes, asking Indians to boycott English goods in languages the British were alien to and to purchase Swadeshi items. Moreover, the royal family of the princely state of Bhavnagar (Gujarat), created matchbox labels with their royal crest on it for their own personal use, as seen in figure 9. (Hemmady,2016)



Figure 8: Gandhi's famous Charkha was a prominent symbol of nationalism in India. Here, it is depicted on a matchbox label.



Figure 9: The family crest of the princely state of Bhavnagar on a matchbox label

As capitalism expanded its reach, capitalistic intentions and values seeped into the imagery on matchboxes. With products that had a clear value in usefulness, such as matchboxes, trade labels were demanded to add value to mundane products. Labels had to be able to enhance conventional products such as apples, a loaf of bread, a clock, a box of peas, a key to name a few. They had to harbor a desire and curiosity for these products, increasing their consumer value. In London, sellers of rare goods, such as tea and cocoa, commissioned a label that said 'Great Mughal.' Exotic imagery sold their products well, and matchboxes circulated fast, and their reach was extensive. Similarly, booksellers in London sported portraits of 'dignified' writers such as John Dryden and Joseph Addison, to attract a high-class readership. In late 19th century India, images on labels served a similar purpose. However, instead of just enhancing the product, designers intermixed a web of visual associations. For instance, beedi packets or textile vendors and incense stick vendors often used images of gods and goddesses, chubby babies, and famous actresses to sell their products. More often than not, the manufacturer put his own face on the labels.

Derived from calendar art, images such as the ones mentioned above not only enhance the product value but also inculcate the product into everyday shared traditions through the visual appeal of them. A single matchbox does not just remain a matchbox; it becomes a canvas with a culturally relevant message. "A flute playing Lord Krishna endorsing gripe water for children not just sold the product, but also managed to seamlessly associate it with the god's own enchanted and mystic childhood." (Geetha, 2016) Anything that was found to be an integral part of the fabric of Indian culture was adapted into the imagery on labels. For example, Gandhi's face was used to sell packets of beedi, even after he objected to it because his face sold the beedi manufacturers' product. Imagery like this linked commerce to intangible ideologies, much like how marketing works today. Labels became integral in combining shared cultural appreciation and commercial goodwill.

Matchbox labels hold a very distinct ability by providing an intersection for various social and graphic meanings/messages. Indian labels have depicted images of the mission to the moon, India winning the cricket world cup, heroes and villains (mainly male) from 90s Bollywood, humdrum messages of 'help fight tuberculosis' and objects as mundane as keys. Labels facilitated the deep desire for modest consumption of items that today we consider every day, like a TV, cup, cycle, pistol, etc. Labels included designs of popular political leaders and other prominent personalities.

(figure 10) Through these labels, the imagery of these products permeated into the working middle-class sector of India, framing working-class aspirations.

However, another inference could be that designers and artists in Sivakasi picked up icons available around them, as people can only create what they have experienced.



Figure 10: Everyday objects and a national icon depicted on matchbox labels

Match labels featuring smoking pipes and rolling dice appeal to those who smoke cigarettes and beedi, validating their habits, which connote to a culture of hedonism, practices often unwelcome in the Indian public context. When Indians opened up their own match industries, they were viewed as useful visual exemplars. Today designs on match labels both mimic and re-work oriental imagery. For example, instead of royalty (kings, queens, sultans), we now have sportsmen. Similarly, actresses replace 'exotic' dancing girls. However, a type of imagery that has remained stagnant is that of animals. Animals are heavily used on match labels, both in the past and today. Oriental imagery traveled from India to Europe, like the Indian woman that appears on Swedish matchboxes, created by Raja Ravi Varma and his band of followers, in order to incite nationalist fervor through propaganda on calendars and prints. Similarly, Indian match labels also drew inspiration from western labels such as Swedish labels portraying camel, ship, and a pair of birds, to name a few examples. Additionally, Indian matchboxes have a separate communicative aspect to them, unique to the region. Indian matchbox brands have a tendency to spawn off of a successful

brand and create innumerable look-alikes, which bounce off of each other. These imitated matchboxes sell widely in the Indian market.

Imitation art swept the matchbox industry post-industrialization. Smaller match companies noticed that certain types of designs sold astonishingly well in certain regions. With copying art becoming as easy as the click of a button, imitation became a fast and assured way of economic gain. While imitation of art and designs happens in many sectors of work, within the matchbox industry, imitation operates openly. Designers are only required to make seven changes (however minor) to sell the design as their own. Tracing this practice back, imitation art became much more prevalent after Raja Ravi Varma's establishment of the 'Raja Ravi Varma Lithography Press' in Sivakasi. Through this, artists were able to bring together the formerly separate worlds of fine art and mass reproduction, as mentioned earlier. It is argued that due to the practice of printing artwork, originality in art began to lose the stature and value it previously held. Due to the widespread practice of imitation in matchboxes, the cultural significance of labels, as mentioned above, has drowned in the clutter surrounding art on matchboxes. For example, there are more than 30 imitations of the Ship brand of matchboxes alone, with minimal variations in color or lettering.

However, in some cases, designs on matchboxes have been imitated and adapted to fit specific geographical locations and ideologies. Taking the example of the Cheetah Fight brand, there are 36 imitations of this type of matchbox. The original shows a man clad in a dhoti, wielding a sickle and tackling a cheetah, as seen in figure 11.

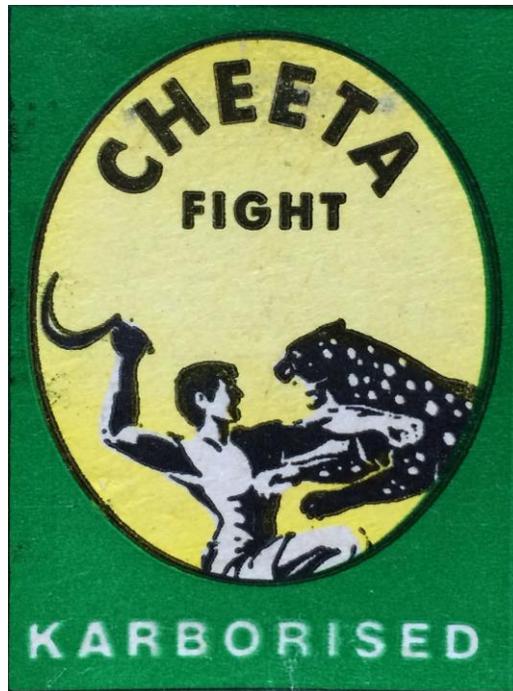


Figure 11: Cheetah fight original label design

The imitations use identical color schemes of green and yellow but show diversity such as *Cat food* wherein a leopard meets a squirrel, *Reeta fight*, which features a woman with a whip and a leopard and *Circus Walaw* which is a tamer and a lion. Imitations can also be used to trace the trends in the market at the time. Usually, whichever design is imitated the most, sells the most in a particular market. However, that completely differs from region to region. Similarly, on the matchbox label carrying the 'Ship' design, one can see multiple imitations, shown in figure 12. The changes are as small as a deliberate spelling error like 'Shit' or 'Shib'. The design changes very little, while minor changes allow it to pass copyright laws.



Figure 12: Example of the Ship label imitation art

2.4 Labour Roles and Gender within the Industry

The match industry, as an unorganized sector of work, has always been very labor-intensive. In order to make a single matchbox, there are about 7 to 8 different factories, all of which do different steps in the process. The labor demographic of the match industry has drastically shifted. While child labor used to be rampant, today, it has reduced by 80%, and the demographic today mostly consists of elderly women. A large number of this product can be done at one's home with ease. It is here that many women are employed in the match industry, to do processes such as sticking a matchbox together and catering to assembling them.

Even women who do not work from home primarily do two tasks: paste the labels and fill the matches (Gandhi, 2017). Older women are heavily employed at match industries because younger women do not want to do work that is repetitive and monotonous. Moreover, the wages are low in match factories, and even lower for female workers. This is primarily because females are usually employed with flexible hours, keeping in mind their 'familial obligations.' Many women entered the match industry as child laborers and continued doing the same job, in most

cases, in the same company, even in their old age. However, even though women make up a significant demographic of the workforce, it is not likely many of them are employed at factories, with the exception of a few such as Graham Match Works Factory. However, a lot is still unknown in regard to the positions at which men and women in the match industry are placed and how those power structures come into play, not only in terms of labor but also in terms of equal representation on label art too. This is primarily because it was found that most label artists, especially graphic designers in Sivakasi today, are male and not female.

2.5 Gaps found in Literature Review

When tracing the emergence of art on matchboxes in Sivakasi, there are gaps in the chronological timeline of how the art has developed. While information exists regarding matchbox iconography that India used to import prior to local indigenous production, and regarding the initial growth of bazaar art and its preoccupation with deity-oriented artwork; there remains a lack of credible research regarding the significance of this art in the present day context and how it has adapted and evolved over the years with the changes that have taken place within the industry. While the form and style, as well as the topics that bazaar art depicts, have been analyzed by scholars in the past in texts such as *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, this research does not delve into how matchbox artists adapted these styles and techniques for their own use to depict a variety of images.

Our research aims to fill in these gaps that are present in the existing literature, in an effort to construct a complete timeline, that clearly charts the emergence of matchbox art in Sivakasi and how it has developed and evolved through the years. We would also focus more on trying to understand the changes the art and the artists have undergone in recent years in their efforts to adapt to both the mechanization and the stagnation of the matchbox industry.

As mentioned earlier, a significant gap in literature arises whilst attempting to connect Sivakasi's various art forms and styles, with the concept of matchbox design. In other words, while Sivakasi is a town booming with authentic art history, it is also a haven for matchbox production; and in the past, while these two industries have been studied in parallel, not much research has been done into them being potentially connected.

Certain gaps found upon reviewing the literature, and specific dynamics which our research aims to explore, have formed for a list of objectives that largely dictate the course of our study:

- Understanding the past and present-day significance of matchbox art held by both the buyers as well as the manufacturers.
- Explore the bazaar art style of Sivakasi and the extent of its influence on and connection to matchbox designs.
- To examine the process of match and matchbox production, as the processes leading up to particular printing art on the box.
- Understanding the reasoning behind specific matchbox designs (for instance, why is the color scheme of yellow and red so popular for matchbox prints?).
- Identifying how changes with time (such as mechanization of factories) have influenced art on a matchbox (its style and production process).

Chapter 3: On-Field Observations

The art of matchbox making has evolved considerably over the years, with changes in mechanization within the industry. We seek to understand how these changes have affected all those within the industry, from artists, to producers, to the consumers. Furthermore, we want to look into if the labels still bear significance today as they played a significant role in the initial success of the industry. After our on-field observations, we realize that the mechanization of the industry has affected the stakeholders within it in a multitude of ways. We are trying to gain a better insight into these effects while also analyzing how this industrialization has changed factors such as the role of labels, consumer habits, and how the industry has adapted in recent years with the decrease in domestic demand.

3.1 Changes in the significance of art and the role of labels

Earlier on, the art and design of matchboxes used to hold immense cultural significance. A lot of the designs on the matchboxes paid attention to conveying particular social, political, and environmental messages. With time, changes took place in the manufacturing processes of matchboxes, with regard to mechanization in the industry. This meant that matchboxes that were once produced and assembled by hand now took to being made by machinery in bulk. In turn, the culture-centric art on the boxes saw a shift, and the designs became more and more commercial (Figure 13). Consequently, these changes had an effect on the type of art printed on the matchboxes, as the once culture-centric prints shifted to a more commercialized design.



Figure 13: Commercialisation of designs in the industry.

Changes in the significance of art and the role of matchbox labels have both impacted one another in the course of time. Murugakani, a freelance artist, is working in Sivakasi for over 50 years, sharing with us his insights into the changing designs on matchboxes over the years. He expressed to us that before mechanization took the industry by storm, the matchboxes produced were each unique in their design, and companies did not mimic other company's prints. This seems to highlight the main shift in the industry, where commercial aspects, consumer demands, and competition between brands dictate the art printed on the matchboxes. Progressively, many of the boxes manufactured by various companies have started resembling similar designs, with differences only in the color schemes used.

In another interview with Rajrajan, a graphic matchbox designer working at Bilal matches, we gained insight into the idea behind the relatively newer matchbox designs on the market today. Many of the brands today mimic the designs of more popular ones, in order to make them appear more credible to the buyers. Hence, commercial success has taken priority in the industry and triumphs in the printing of more unique art designs on matchboxes. Competition between labels have heightened this significance of commercial success, and possibly undermined the artistic aspects of matchbox design. This adds a stark contrast to the earlier production methods, where matchboxes held more cultural value, and their prints included freedom fighters, messages on environment conservation, and anything relevant to the socio-cultural aspects at the time.

Matchboxes were chiefly used to spread messages about conserving the environment, political struggles, and to celebrate authentic art styles such as those based on Raja Ravi Verma's 'Bazaar Art.' In all, such a shift within the significance of the art and the role of labels within the industry can be explored further by its impacts on the primary stakeholders affected.

As mentioned earlier, artists who create art through traditional methods face numerous challenges in the light of mechanization within the industry. The similar commercial designs on matchboxes seemingly undermine the artistic value of more traditional prints- compromising the significance of the message they intend to reflect. Since traditionally created art has seen a decline with time, artists employed within this profession faced changes with regard to their work and were forced to adjust to the evolving nature of the industry.

Some artists have had to adapt to the increasingly digital mode of matchbox designing. For instance, Rajarajan from Bilal Matchboxes has been a computer designer, experienced in creating digital pieces for the past 20 years. Upon interviewing him, we were told about how the process of creating matchboxes has, in fact, become more relaxed with time due to computerization. Earlier on, the process used to be relatively more elaborate and included detailed steps such as separating the prints into different colors manually. Now, as Rajarajan mentions, computers have automatized many of these steps and reduced them to much simpler work. He mentions that earlier on, people made designs without stencils, and hence the prints were unique since duplicating was not an easy task. Further, he talks about the differences between commissioned work overtime. Nowadays, clients wish for their prints to resemble those of favored brands, and the prints often include advertisements on the boxes. On the contrary, earlier commissions used to include more detailed and specific ideas for prints, and as a result, the prints produced were relatively more original. The work of the artists and the styles that they adapted to, hence, saw many changes over the years.

Matchbox collectors are another stakeholder one can consider being impacted by these changes. They often seek to find unique designs and matchboxes of various sizes, colors, and prints. This pursuit seemingly faces hindrance nowadays due to similar designs between brands. Bani Thappa, a Pune based matchbox collector, shared with us her experience with collecting matchboxes in the present day. She mentioned how there is "no art left on matchboxes," and how she "craves to find matchboxes apart from 'ATM, 'AIM' (Figure 14) and other standard prints." The struggle to obtain originality in matchbox designs is an issue highlighted by Mr. Yuvanath as well. While interacting with him, we learned how in the present day, only those matchbox

companies which have been around for more than 60 years possess original designs, whereas the newer ones are mere duplicates of those prints.



Figure 14: ATM match box label an example of a standard print.

3.2 The manufacturing processes

Prior to going on the field, we had already learned of the industrialization of the matchbox industry through our secondary research. On-field we seek to understand how this industrialization has affected the individuals working within the matchbox industry, including artists, factory owners, employees, as well as those selling and consuming the products.

It was during the period of 1992 to 1993 that the process of mechanization was introduced in India. Prior to this matchbox, production was, for the most part, manual. As previously mentioned, industries such as the matchmaking industry had set up their base in Sivakasi primarily due to the abundance of cheap manual labor due to the significant scale unemployment rates. However, as time went on, the industry began expanding. Most manufacturers developed more focused goals on increasing production and reducing costs. At that time machines seemed to be the easiest method to do so, they are perfectly economical in the sense that having purchased it once there is little to no need for more economic input. This naturally seemed to be more attractive to the manufacturers as the previous method of production relied only on manual labor that was evidently less efficient. Although manual labor tackles the problem of unemployment, it is more expensive when compared to machines as when production increases, so do the number of

workers, and so does the number of paychecks to be handed out. As a result, factory owners and manufacturers started gravitating more towards machines.

Other than the economic aspect of this, it is also essential to consider the factor of human error that comes hand in hand with human labor. In the case of machines, there is little to no error. The introduction of machines in the industry naturally affected the process of label making. Prior to this, each label was handmade and hand-painted, fully utilizing the skill of local artisans, this allowed for the labels to have individual uniqueness and allowed for the artisan to give the label his own personalized touch. Labels before mechanization were used by artists as a platform to express their work and skill. With the introduction of machines, this changed. From the aspect of the manufacturers, this method of label making was hardly financially smart and was, in the long run, more time-consuming.

The factory owners and manufacturers began taking a different approach, and it was not possible for them to entirely phase out human labor. Thus, they introduced a mechanism that was a fusion of machinery and human labor. Unfortunately, the work of artisans making the labels were cut down majorly and replaced by printing machines. This changed the role of the labels altogether, and they went from an art form that was used to convey messages to the masses, keeping in touch with the youth subculture yet still putting forward the factories' name to just displaying the factory's name.



Figure 15: Machinery found at a matchbox production unit; stretching wax

Sona Matches, a factory we visit while on-field, provides us with a view of a more labor-intensive production chain as most factories in the past would have had. This factory produces wax matchsticks as opposed to wooden matchsticks, which can be produced with much more ease and in much larger quantities as their production is very quickly mechanizable. While this factory uses machinery in the initial stages to stretch the wax and cut the matchsticks, as seen in the figure above, the entire process is carried out by a workforce of over fifty laborers. The dipping of the matchsticks, as well as the filling of the boxes, the sticking of the labels, and the packaging of the boxes, are all being carried out manually (figure 15). When we interview the owner, he tells us that his factory's production remains exceptionally reliant on the number of workers that come in. His workforce is over fifty in strength, but most of them work in agriculture as well, and when that sector has success, a number of them do not come in, which significantly decreases his levels of production.



Figure 16: Drying of matchboxes after they are stuck together through manual labour

While on-field, we also visit a number of factories that rely primarily on machinery for their production, such as Arasan Match Factory. Vinod Kumar, the third-generation owner of the factory, speaks to us at length about the difficulties of trying to get ahead in a business with so many competitors. He says that his company has begun to import their wood from Belgium because of its better quality in an effort to gain an edge over the competition. He also informs us of how the printing process for their labels has changed drastically over the decades. Initially, the labels were printed using lithography and then stuck on to the matchboxes manually. However, with the digital advancements in printing and the availability of foreign technology, his company was able to import offset printing equipment, which decreased the amount of labor required in the production process and saved them costs. In most of these machine-intensive factories that we visit while on the field, the entirety of the production change from the cutting of the splints, to their dipping and then packaging is mechanized, with labor-only being required to handle the machines and in some intermediary stages in the process such as collecting the wooden splints and setting them out to dry. In Arasan Match Factory the workforce as compared to Sona Matches is only about twenty labourers for the entire process, due to the machinery that greatly reduces the labour required to maintain the factory's output.

Thus, one can see that for the factory owners, this shift in the manufacturing process from a labor-intensive approach to an industrial model is beneficial if they can afford the sizable initial

investment that the machinery will command. It is beneficial to the owners as it not only dramatically increases their production capacity, allowing them to sell more and earn more profits, but it also allows these owners to decrease their production cost significantly in the long run as they do not have to employ labourers in such high numbers. However, for factory workers, this shift affects them adversely as the number of jobs available in the factory significantly decreases if the owner shifts from a labour-intensive approach to an industrial model.

To further understand how the artists who create the matchbox labels are affected by this shift in the manufacturing process, we spoke to artists in Sivakasi who work for some of these companies as label designers. F. Murugakani, a freelance artist who has been working in Sivakasi for over fifty years and has worked for a number of different companies under contract, spoke about how his manual style of art is slowly losing its relevance due to digital designers. He said that in the early days of the industry, when indigenous production had just begun in Sivakasi, he used to receive numerous calls from matchbox companies asking them to design their labels. This was because in the early stages when the labels were printed using lithography, the artwork had first to be created on a flat surface from where it would be printed on to others. However, he stated that in recent years, he no longer receives these calls due to the fact that most matchbox labels nowadays are designed digitally, and so artists who create art traditionally are not usually contacted for these contracts any longer.

At Bilal Matches, another factory in the town, we meet Rajarajan, a graphic designer who has been designing matchbox labels digitally since the year 2000. (figure 16)



Figure 17: The making of a digital matchbox label

He tells us that the old methods of printing, such as lithography, were prolonged, and mass-producing prints through these methods took an extremely long time. He says that initially, when offset printing began, there was high demand in Sivakasi for artists who could design labels digitally. The mechanization of the industry allowed him to mass-produce his works on a massive scale at a much faster pace than the older methods of production would have allowed. However, he also laments the fact that the digitalization of the creation of the art has led to an increase in the number of copycats as it is much easier to change color schemes and minute details on a digitally created label than one created manually.

The digitalization of the artistic process affects artists who create art traditionally as they may not be able to adapt to this new form (figure 17). This is problematic as clients today want their orders to be created in a specific manner. Artists like Murugakani, are forced to now create art for different brands or attempt to sell their work themselves. Digitalization also makes it easier for other artists who are well versed in the form to make changes to an individual's work and pass it off as their own or as imitations looking to ride the success of the original. However, for artists who are able to adapt to this new form of creation, another avenue of sales and mass reproduction opens, as they are now able to create works that will be reproduced on a massive scale in a short amount of time and distributed far and wide.



Figure18 : Digitalization of the artistic process

3.3 Changes in consumer behavior

Prior to going on the field, we had gleaned some information regarding past consumer behavior towards matchboxes from our secondary sources. Matchbox labels were often the driving force behind the sales of a particular brand, as most earlier scholars such as Jain agree that once a customer is attached to a brand, it is challenging to make them switch. The labels play a large part in this brand association in the minds of the consumer. Matchbox manufacturers often make slight modifications or changes to their labels when trying to market them in a new region or to a new demographic. For example, Vinod of Arasan Matches tells us that his company's brand of "We two" matches that are extremely popular in South India, had to be rebranded to "One Six" when being marketed in North India so as to cater to the new customer base. Another factory owner of Sona Matches tells us that they create labels for different states bearing the region's demographics in mind. He tells us that in West Bengal, moving horses sell well on matchboxes; in Andhra, the consumer's look to color more when purchasing a matchbox, and bright, fluorescent colors often sell better.

Thus, one can see that consumer behavior regarding matchboxes may vary from region to region, as the taste of the consumer varies. However, in recent times, we learned that the label does not play as significant a role as it used to in the past. While most of the factory owners did agree

that the labels do continue to help in building loyalty to the brand, they stated that in the past, they served a much larger purpose as new and innovative labels could serve to attract new customers as well. They state that today the quality of the product, the matchsticks themselves, is what serves to attract and create a loyal customer base. Mr. Vinod of Arasan Match Factory, when speaking of his company's product, states that his matchboxes are consumed almost extensively across South India due to the quality of the matchsticks which have been carburized, rendering them waterproof. These matches are popular among individuals living in coastal areas, especially fishermen, as they are not as quickly affected by the damp and the spray as regular matchsticks, allowing them to be used by these individuals in severe weather conditions.

Imitation art or copycat labels are another side effect of the changes in consumer behavior. When interviewing local vendors across Sivakasi, they all stressed the importance of capturing the market in a region. They tell us that despite numerous match factories being present in Sivakasi, only one brand of matchboxes is sold across the town to its residents, which is the Balloon brand. They said that once the consumers of a region become used to a particular brand in their everyday lives, they tend only to purchase this, which leads to other brands having to search for different markets. This leads to significant profits for the brand, which establishes control over a region as they usually monopolize supply in the town or district. It is this success that, in turn, leads to imitation art (figure 18).



Figure 19: Imitation of the 'Balloon' matchbox label. This design is the most famous and most circulated in the town of Sivakasi.

When a particular label or brand gains success, smaller independent companies look to ride this success by creating a similar-looking label or brand that consumers may mistake for the more famous original. Consumer behavior is critical for these imitation artists as they have to be aware of which brands are selling well. Not only must they be capable of modifying the labels in a manner that legal action cannot be taken against them by the larger brand that they are imitating, but they must also modify it so that a consumer of the original is attracted to the similarity in the design.

3.4 Foreign Influence

In recent years as the demand from within India has decreased for matchboxes, the factories of Sivakasi have begun to produce matchboxes for export in order to keep their profits steady. In the factories we visit, we find matchboxes that are being made for countries in South America such as Peru and Brazil, African countries including Nigeria, Kenya, and Zambia as well as for European countries such as Spain. This was not something we were aware of prior to going on the field, and it opens up a new avenue for our research to see how this demand from outside India is affecting the stakeholders of the industry as well as the iconography of the town.

The factory owners we interview regarding this foreign influence are obviously pleased about it, as their profits are increasing the more demand they receive from outside India. Ganesh Kumar, who owns Srinivas Printers, tells us of how his company has begun to produce labels for Africa and how his company's Lion brand matchbox is known across the continent. He also tells us that the labels play an essential role in building a customer base abroad and that when they print these labels, they usually do not print that they were made in India as these would decrease sales. He further elaborates that it is crucial to consider the culture of these other countries when designing the labels, which is why most labels exported to Africa bear the mark of one of their native animals, whether it be a lion, elephant or rhino, as seen in figure 19. The Pentazul matchboxes that are made for Peru have the logo of a Sun rising over a valley, referencing the Incan Sun Festival of Inti Raymi that takes place in Peru every year, which helped to popularize them within the country.



Figure 20: Matchbox labels made to be exported to Kenya

However, there are also added costs when it comes to exporting to other countries as he informs us. While India does not enforce strict safety regulations on the production of matchsticks, the quality demanded by countries in Europe, such as Spain, is much higher. To meet the safety regulations of these countries, owners often have to invest in machinery and technologies to produce matches of a higher quality. For example, in Spain all matches have to be carburized, which means that they have to undergo a heat treatment that makes them more resistant to the damp, Mediterranean conditions as well as making them safer to light, as the burning embers remain attached to the matchstick and do not fall to the ground. If these companies wish to create products for export they must invest in technologies that allow them to create products that meet the standards of these foreign countries.

We speak to Rajarajan, the graphic designer for Bilal Matchboxes, and ask him what he has to keep in mind when designing labels for different countries and cultures. He said that the clients who ask him to design the labels are usually from these countries, and they tell him what they want quite explicitly. If given the license to operate freely as well, he says he usually is constrained by the fact that he does not know this culture or language and so is not confident in creating something he knows would attract individuals from that culture or country. He says that while he enjoys

working on designs for other countries as it gives him an opportunity to create labels in different styles, he prefers to create them with instructions given to him by the client first, as this helps to guide him through the process.

Thus, we can see the influence of foreign demand on Sivakasi's matchbox producers. When domestic demand fell, this foreign export is how most of the large matchbox manufacturers managed to supplement their sales. It has played an essential part in keeping the industries alive in Sivakasi. In addition to this, this demand has influenced the artists and designers of Sivakasi who design for these companies, as they have to design labels for different cultures, which means that they have to learn to adapt different styles into their artwork so as to appeal to the individuals of these cultures. These new styles only add to the already vast iconography of Sivakasi's wide range of art.

However, when talking about the iconography on foreign labels today, the shift in the type of iconography is visible. As referenced in chapter 2, early match labels which were made in India to be exported usually depicted very oriental imagery as it was considered to be 'exotic' and fed fuel to the fire of Imperial nations and their imperialistic values. Oriental imagery spoke of a person's class and stature, as it resembled the hierarchy of the power structure between the east and the west. However, images exported to Europe today tend to lean towards the common capitalistic theme of giving significance to an item. Putting a mango on a matchbox with the title mango aims to tell the consumer that mundane products have more substance than we know. Companies today use match labels to make their name known in the market. (figure 20)



Figure 21: Jio and Maaza use matchbox labels to spread awareness of brand name. There is high use of animals on matchbox labels.

Moreover, most instructions designers get today are for them to meet specifications of the country's grand designs, keeping in mind their own culture and people. However, the exoticization of the East is not unfamiliar in western countries today. It is done in other ways, like the marketing around the practice of Yoga. The west's open fetish with the 'exotic east' is no longer openly acceptable, which is why labels with exotic imagery are no longer exported and, therefore, are no longer produced.

3.5 Gender roles within the industry

While on-field, we visit a number of factories that are mainly industrial, where machines carry out the majority of the processes. There are still workers in these factories, but in low numbers, usually operating the machinery. However, it becomes clear to us after the first few factories that there is a clear divide based on gender, in the production chain that these factories employ. The men are employed in the primary stages of the production chain, where heavy machinery has to be operated to slice the matchsticks and dip them in the chemicals. These are generally the better-paying jobs in the factories, as the machinery takes some skill to operate, and owners are willing to pay more to workers who can do so.

The women in most of these factories are not involved in these stages that involve heavy machinery and skilled work. In almost all the factories, they are employed in the final stages of the production chain, mostly assembling or filling the matchboxes by hand, as seen in figure 21. This work is monotonous and does not pay as well as the jobs operating the machinery. Most of the women working in these factories were middle-aged or older as the younger women usually do not want to do such monotonous work.



Figure 22: Women in a packaging unit for Jamuna Matches, a subunit of Asia Matches

This division of labour is visible to us in most of the factories we visit, however in Sona Matches, which employs a labour intensive production chain it is the most evident. Here the workforce is made up of over fifty daily wage labourers. Over seventy five percent of this workforce is women and they are primarily employed performing manual labour, filling the boxes with matches, sticking on the labels and then packaging the completed boxes in sets of eight. The factory employs

over thirty-five women in these latter stages of production, while it employs only around ten men, most of whom operate the machinery that stretches the wax and cuts the matches from it.

The difference between the past methods of production and today is that in the past, the entire production chain was a manual process, which meant that even the initial steps required a large workforce of many laborers so as to maintain the desired output. However, with the advances in technology, most factories have mechanized these initial processes, but while the same could be done for the later assembly and packaging stages, this is not the case. When we asked factory owners why this was so, they avoided the question, but we inferred that by employing women laborers in these latter stages, who do not need to be paid high wages, these companies are able to cut down on their production cost more than if they were to invest in machinery to mechanize these stages.

Outside the factories, women play a minimal role in the matchbox industry. All the artists and designers that we meet are men, and when we inquire if they have any female counterparts, we are met with surprise, as if somehow our question is not appropriate. While Sivakasi has been a haven for artists who wish to commercialize their work for decades, the women of the town do not have much say in this art and do not have an opportunity to create it.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

While initially researching the topic of matchboxes and matchbox art, we came to develop certain expectations with regard to what we might observe on-field. In our later stages of research and post-field analysis, these preconceived notions with which we initially approached our topic were changed by the new information we received. Discussing the main themes and objectives of our research in the light of our pre-field hypothesis, as well as our on-field observations, will give a more wholesome perspective to our research.

4.1 Change in label roles post-industrialization

As mentioned before, with industrialization came the spread of capitalistic values. The very idea behind matchbox labels and designs saw a shift in motive. Prints that once represented expression through artistic design now began to lean toward fitting design criteria that promised commercial success. Today, the main finding is that the artists themselves have no choice but to think in terms of economics and commercial aspects while designing a label. This instantly limits their free expression. The nature of labels and prints, as we found today, are no longer determined by the artists themselves, but by the ever-changing market, demands, and preferences of the buyers.

Further, as globalization progressed with time, it marked an evident change in matchbox designs, in terms of the cultural references and fonts displayed in the prints. The primary question that arises is this: is art on labels art for art's sake or art for the sake of commercialization? Today, designs on labels cater to capitalistic agendas and seem to have lost the artistic touch that made older matchboxes. This is done with the simple use of imagery and font to highlight a certain message. For example, the fonts and aesthetic of matchbox labels transformed from multiple objects, fonts and texts on matchbox labels to very simplistic design and bolder fonts. Figure 22 is an example of a matchbox label before rise in mechanisation and figure 23 is an example of a similar type of matchbox label after.



Figure 23: Imitation Art

As seen in figure 23, while the key image is in the center, there are a lot of aspects such as the multiple texts and fonts that distract the eye from the key itself. Moreover, this label portrays themes of nationalism with the use of Hindi lettering and the swastika symbol on all four corners. On the other hand, the image beside, it portrays the key centrally and only says the title of the image itself and the name of the company in the main text. The only other text is about the use of the product itself. Moreover, elements of Western culture (and products that represented them) started gaining more and more popularity within Indian markets, and hence dictated, to a large extent, the prints on matchboxes. For instance, many matchbox labels started including prints inspired by American films such as 'The Avengers.' Hence, foreign cultural references began seeping into the designs of many labels, in an attempt to find commercial success, as dictated by popular trends within the market.

4.2 The Effect of Mechanisation on Identified Stakeholders

Mechanisation is a global phenomenon that has affected almost every sector of life today, and the matchbox industry is no exception. Every identified stakeholder group has been affected by this in different manners. This is further elaborated on below.

1. Artists

Artists have been widely affected by the rising mechanization in the matchbox industry, as mentioned before. Due to digital printing, many artists that were previously sought after for their intricate paintings on matchbox labels ran out of business. Out of frustration and lack of jobs, they either moved from Sivakasi or diverted their focus away from the matchbox industry. Today, digital artists that work in Sivakasi for match labels do not have much creative freedom. They are given a brief by their client who views and reviews the artists' work at each step. The only space

the artists today can show their creativity is how they maneuver around copying labels and the kind of colors they can use. Most importantly, creativity lies in how to change enough things about design but still remind people of the original label.



Figure 24: A local artist, who formerly painted on matchbox labels

2. Label Printers

Label printers are a stakeholder group that really reaped the rewards of the mechanization of the matchbox industry. The more digitized prints became, the faster they could print and increase their income. As seen in figure 25, prints began to be produced in bulk through mechanisation. Most label printers print all kinds of labels, not just the ones that go on matchboxes. Their job is merely to print what their clients give them, and due to being able to print in bulk, printing businesses in Sivakasi are profitable and have boomed.



Figure 25: Prints in bulk for a matchbox label

3. Matchbox manufacturers

Like label printers, matchbox manufacturers have greatly benefited from mechanization. They are able to make bulk orders and export them easily due to how globalization has taken over the world. However, laborers in these factories have faced the most amount of struggle. Machines replaced much of human labor. While human labor is still highly used in this industry, it is now only to operate the machines and assemble different parts of matchboxes. The number of employees employers are willing to take is significantly low, as they do not need many people at factories. Machinery has considerably reduced the unrelenting effort put in by laborers. On the contrary, it has affected the demand for labour itself, putting people out of work.

4. Matchbox collectors

While matchbox collectors do not have any direct monetary stake in regards to the shift in mechanization in the matchbox industry, they are the ones analyzing labels for cultural significance and messages. With mechanization, collectors have expressed that they struggle to find innovation on labels. While collecting imitation labels is fun for some time, it quickly becomes

tiresome, and they have to hunt for older labels to increase the diversity in their collection. However, new labels from different regions of the world show vast diversity too, but collecting them is not a very tangible possibility.

5. Locals

Much like collectors, locals do not have any monetary stake attached to the matchbox industry. However, the locals are the ones who create demand for individual labels through how they consume them. Due to this, the industry is being shaped entirely by consumer demand. Moreover, many locals also had a favorite design based on what appealed to the eye, and the discontinuation of specific designs was often disheartening.



Figure 26: An elderly local woman in Sivakasi

6. Local vendors

Local vendors did not suffer much with the onset of mechanization within the matchbox industry. Their demand and selling patterns in relation to matchboxes remained more or less stagnant.



Figure 27: Local vendor in Sivakasi selling a balloon matchbox

4.3 Relevance of the Labels in the Present Day

The primary question that arises is this: is art on labels art for art's sake or art for the sake of commercialization? Today, designs on labels cater to capitalistic agendas and seem to have lost the artistic touch that made older matchboxes. This is done with the simple use of imagery and font to highlight a certain message. The primary question that arises is this: is art on labels art for art's sake or art for the sake of commercialization? Today, designs on labels cater to capitalistic agendas and seem to have lost the artistic touch that made older matchboxes. This is done with the simple use of imagery and font to highlight a certain message, as demonstrated through figure 22 and figure 23 above. Even though the artistic value of matchbox labels has declined, they still possess the power of creating and embodying messages, open to public interpretation. Many people in Sivakasi prefer certain designs on matchboxes based on what catches an individual's eye. Some designs resonate with people while some do not. Regardless, labels are the point of attraction when consumers decide which matchbox they want to purchase. As mentioned before, each region has a specific design that is highly favored. This confirms that labels have a pervasive power on society as a whole.

4.4 Segregation of gender roles in the matchbox industry

As mentioned in the previous chapter, labor in the matchbox industry is very clearly divided in terms of female labor and male labor. Women tend to be given work in the areas of packaging and collecting materials from assembly-line machinery. On the other hand, men are employed to tasks that require heavy lifting and are usually placed at levels of power, such as the manager of the factory. This is primarily because of pre-existing gender stereotypes that still prevail in Sivakasi. While progress for women is splattered across media stories on the internet, that ideology is still trying to seep into the everyday Indian mentality. Due to this, women laborers are usually given part-time work as it allows them to cater to their familial 'duties' in a more relaxed manner. Moreover, many women are also employed in their homes so that they can be around their families at all times, as shown in (figure 28).



Figure 28: A woman making matchbox boxes at her home, a job she has been doing for more than 30 years.

Men, on the other hand, are given full-time work as it is not expected of them to be at home and look after the family, they are simply expected to work and provide for them. However, the option to work from home or part-time is helpful to many women in Sivakasi, because even if they are willing to work all day, societal norms make that extremely difficult to do so. On the other hand, these stereotypes hold the women of Sivakasi back from even striving for a job higher up in the hierarchy. In our time there, we did not meet a single female manager or factory owner, and that is solely due to the fact that there are none.

Similar to the labor in matchbox and match factories, most artists and graphic designers in Sivakasi are male. Once again, we did not meet a single female designer. The lack of female designers does one major thing: it creates a lack of female representation in the label designs. All-female characters on matchbox labels in Sivakasi are either goddesses or women with flowers. Females are depicted through the male gaze, and this spreads stereotypical messages through the labels. The way that jobs are represented on matchbox labels can be an example of this. On labels, most jobs such as a sportsman or a farmer are only related to men on the labels. With labels that depict females on them, they are depicted as *dulhaans* or Mother India (Figure 29 and 30). Actresses that are depicted are also only depicted for their beauty or sensual and visual appeal. Due to this, there is a single narrative being played out on a loop, not only on the labels but within the matchbox industry itself. Moreover, the people that buy these labels see the same stereotypes ingrained into them depicted on labels, and this can only confirm them. There are next to no artworks that are circulated as fast and widely as matchboxes, that can negate the common man's gender-biased narrative.



Figure 29,30: Depiction of women only as mothers and goddesses.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Suggestions for Future Research

For any future researchers interested in the matchbox industry and Sivakasi's art culture, there are still a few unexplored avenues where one could focus their research. While our project covers the effects the mechanization of the industry is having both on Sivakasi's matchbox iconography and the stakeholders of the industry, and there remain a few gaps in the literature that we are unable to address due to a number of limitations we faced such as the language barrier, and the short duration of time we spent on-field. Future researchers can look into the following areas:

1. Establishing links between Sivakasi's matchbox iconography and its bazaar art: We were unable to establish reliable connections between the style and form of bazaar art and how it has influenced the matchbox iconography of Sivakasi, due to the fact that we were unable to contact many traditional artists other than Murugakani who spoke only Tamil. Therefore, we were unable to get multiple perspectives on the linkages between these two forms of art; however, these links are clear and can be established through further research.
2. The possibility of innovation within the industry: With a product as simple and small as a matchbox, there seems to be a finite amount of improvement that the product can undergo. However, the industry remains extremely competitive even today, which will lead producers to innovate so as to get ahead of the competition, these methods of innovation can be clearly understood through further research.
3. The current state of the laborers: With the mechanization of the matchbox industry in the recent past, a number of individuals have been displaced from their places of work, due to them being replaced by machinery. We were unable to find out how these individuals have adapted to these changes and how they now earn a living as we mainly focused on factories that were mechanized and were unable to meet many displaced workers. However, there are sure to be many in and around Sivakasi, and with further research, their plight can be understood.
4. The contrast between the cottage industry and the mechanized industry can be further explored. While many of the factories have been mechanized, there remain a few where laborers perform the majority of the process. These can be studied to understand the

differences that arise in each product due to the difference in the industry. We were able to visit only one factory, which was labor intensive; however, for future research, if more were to be visited, a clear contrast between the two forms of production could be analyzed.

5. The Matchbox industry in the context of Sivakasi: Apart from the printing and firecracker industry, the matchbox industry forms the third pillar of the industrial establishment of Sivakasi. How these industries contribute towards developing a particular type of culture, revolving around the dominant industries present, could be looked into while researching further. To what extent does the predominance of the matchbox industry in Sivakasi hold actual significance in formulating the specific culture of the town?

5.2 Concluding Statements

Matchboxes are so highly integrated in our daily lives, that giving them a second thought does not occur to most of us. However, the reality is that to make one complete matchbox, with the box, matches, label and chemical dipping, is a long-drawn out process requiring 5 to 6 factories to complete it. In the Re. 1 matchbox that one buys, there goes a lot of sweat, hard work and creativity.

As highlighted in the above sections, matchboxes and matchbox labels saw a considerable shift post-industrialisation. While machinery affected people's jobs it also brought with it more precision. One of the biggest shifts came in the label making process, with the iconography shift as discussed above. While many stakeholders such as matchbox manufacturers and designers embraced this shift, local artists started to lose their source of livelihood. Like any industry, the matchbox industry has drastically changed. What remains is this: these little canvases always have and always will carry messages far beyond the use of decoration. It may not always be apparent to people, but matchboxes will remain as snapshots of history, telling tales of oppression, pride, independence and enjoyment.

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Glossary

- 1) Match box: A match box is a small box usually made of cardboard that houses match sticks. It usually has a picture in the form of a label on its front. On the side of the matchbox is a scratch pad that is used to light the matches.
- 2) Matches: A match essentially consists of a short thin wooden stick that is dipped slightly in two flammable compounds, when this compound is struck against a scratch pad or a rough surface it ignites and can be further used to light items.
- 3) Match box labels: Match box labels mostly consist of pictures that are printed on the front of the matchbox, these labels mostly contain the name of the company along with some type of logo or design with reference to the company. It is the primary tool used to gain the consumers attention and is the selling point of the matchbox itself.
- 4) Dulhan: Indian word for bride.
- 5) Matchbox label artist: Artists that created art on matchbox labels
- 6) Matchbox label designer: Graphic designers that create matchbox label designs today.