Matches are universally available throughout India and come in boxes with labels pasted on them. Matches and labels have been manufactured under cottage-industry conditions, famously in one locality – Sivakashi in South India – which is also a centre where fireworks are made, the logic of this symbiosis being of course that match heads and fireworks require similar expertise and similar materials. As for the printed images on the matchbox labels they are decorative and colourful and draw on a vocabulary of widely recognisable images and objects, also invoked in poster and calendar art emerging at much the same time; Sivakasi is also one centre for production of these related products of popular visual culture. Further, matchbox labels constitute a compendium of the tastes and attitudes of those who made them and of those who use them. Used all around India Sivakasi matchboxes exemplify the workings of translocality and transregional processes of creation, production and reception that operated throughout India in the 20th century if not earlier. The images on the labels represent popular notions of the decorative and are suggestive of what is desired or popular. They are elements which the presentation will examine through an analysis based on an old album containing hundreds of these labels.

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