Abstract

Chaappa: A social study of how the lives

of ordinary workers are expressed

through Cultural forms.

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This project explores how the memory of the Chaappa system and the labour struggles of Mattanchery dock workers is represented through cinema, theatre, and literature. By analyzing Thuramukham (film), Chaappa (play), and Adayalam (novel), the study examines how cultural texts preserve marginalized histories that are often absent from official records. Drawing on the theories of collective and cultural memory by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, the project shows how these works transform lived experiences of exploitation and resistance into shared cultural remembrance. Rather than merely recording historical events, these artistic forms evoke emotional and ethical engagement, allowing contemporary audiences to connect with the struggles for dignity and justice. The study argues that remembering through art functions as a moral act and that cinema, theatre, and literature serve as living archives that sustain labour memory and contribute to Kerala's cultural consciousness.

CHAAPPA: A SOCIAL STUDY OF HOW THE LIVES OF ORDINARY WORKERS ARE EXPRESSED THROUGH CULTURAL FORMS

Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled “Chaappa: A social study of how the lives of ordinary workers are expressed through Cultural Forms” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Nandana C.Ajith, Assistant Professor (On Contract), Department of English.

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CERTIFICATE

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Introduction

One of the greatest ways human beings have been able to create and transform their social lives is through memory. Memory is an individual's reservoir of experiences. But also serves as an ongoing process by which individuals develop and maintain relationships between themselves and their past. As well as their present-day experience of each other and collective actions in the name of fairness and equity. Memory crosses boundaries (e.g., the transition of "old" memories into "new" memories), thus forming a continuum that connects individuals to historical events, experiences, and ways of being with those who share similar historical experiences. Through the act of remembering, it also serves as a mechanism to keep the experience of those who are no longer present alive. For many communities, including the communities of Kerala, memory serves as an ethical guide for individuals; consequently, the concept of memory provides individuals with a means to develop their understanding of the ethical notions of justice, dignity, and the collective responsibility individuals have to acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices of individuals from marginalized groups. Hence, this project acknowledges that memory is more than just the past; it is an ongoing dynamic construct that will continue to be developed, remade, and built through cultural expression (art, literature, collective experience). Memory preserves the humanity of those who have been excluded from the historical record.

The experiences of the workers from Mattancheri, especially those that were affected by the Chaappa system, give a strong representation of how memory affects the cultural conscience. Under a Chaappa system, metal discs were thrown into crowds of desperate workers and determined who would have a job for that day. This is an extreme

example of economic injustice and degradation of human beings. In addition to not receiving wages, workers lost their dignity, respect, and sense of security. Workers were forced into competition with each other for basic needs. Their fight for survival was based upon the pure chance of receiving a metal coin. Even with these struggles, workers from people of Mattanchery showed great courage, unity, and strength in their attempt to oppose these injustices. Finally, the aim to resist injustice was helpful in developing labor consciousness in Kerala and set the groundwork for future development. To remember someone is far more than merely recollecting their life as part of history. It is also a commitment to ensuring that their suffering and strength continue to exist in our collective culture and knowledge, as this is what helps to shape our future.

The history of marginalized communities, such as the Mattanchery dock workers, has been largely overlooked or ignored in the dominant historical accounts. The official history is primarily focused on the political, administrative, and economic aspects of history rather than the experiences of common people, particularly laborers. The intent of this project is to highlight the void created by this erasure by examining how cultural texts have preserved, modified, and shared memories through various forms of media for generations. *Adayalam, Chaapa*, and *Thuramukham* have been chosen because each of these showing the history of Mattancheri through cinema, play, and literature. These cultural texts allow us to revisit and recreate the lives of those who have been excluded from the traditional historical narrative. The cultural texts do not just tell a story about what happened, but they also reconstruct the emotional, social, and moral aspects of those events so that today's audiences can connect with the significance of the labor struggles of the Mattanchery dock workers.

Different forms of art including film, plays, and books support our ability to remember in different ways, yet remain collectively supportive of each other. *Thuramukham*, which was directed by Rajeev Ravi, demonstrates how all three forms come together to create a vivid historical experience using a blend of images and emotional realism. Viewers can see what it was like to work under extremely harsh conditions by witnessing the movie's crowded settings filled with dirt and the weariness on people's faces. Instead of stating it was unacceptable to be exploited, viewers can directly see and feel everything about their exploitation, the discomfort, anxiety, and hope in their lives. Through a combination of cinematographic decisions along with the way the film presents to its audience, this movie transfers us into the world of the laborers and presents their stories as something that is part of every human's life and not just as historical facts. The film, therefore, becomes a form of cultural memory where the past is transformed into something emotional and ethical for viewers.

Chaapa, a play created by M. S. Sivakumar, draws on the traditional style of Chavittunadakam as a means of accessing the memories of dock workers of Mattancheri. With its rhythmically driven movements and expressive quality, this style provides a way to communicate the history of many people on the docks. The experience of watching Chavittunadakam takes an individual to understand the history and puts it into their body and mind through acts of creative expression. The performance encourages its audiences to engage with the past through active participation in a shared experience. By bringing the actions of performers and audience together into a communal setting, *Chaapa* is a collaborative space in which the shared memory of dock workers becomes accessible to all.

Adayalam is an example of how Abdulla Mattanchery employs language, imagination, and culture to define the way of life for workers in the settled community of Mattanchery, a village in southwestern India. Using oral traditions as well as the prevalent dialect of the region and drawing upon social experiences that were local to the writer and the author, the text of *Adayalam* creates its own history through storytelling. It also creates an avenue for the reader to closely follow the personal experiences, fears, dreams, and perceptions of the characters and develop a relationship with them. Readers gain access to the psychological environments of the community and therefore experience these memories first hand. The message of *Adayalam* is that memory can be both external and internal. That is the way in which we experience how our own memories creates the way we perceive everything else, including ourselves, the world around us, and where we fit in the timeline. When Adayalam uses strong imagery and powerful emotions, the reader will be able to connect to the real stories of those who live on the margins of society.

Together, this group of three cultural works demonstrates the ways that memory works at multiple levels, individual, collective, and cultural. The personal level includes the memory stored by one person, as well as the memories of families. It is a memory that belongs to the individual or family. The collective level includes the memories created when people come together to share their stories and participate in rituals and traditions. The cultural level includes art, literature, monuments, and performances that transmit or preserve cultural memory. This project also draws from theories of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs, who contends that memory is created by and dependent on the social groups to which we belong and how our relationships to each

other shape our perception of the past, as well as theories of cultural memory proposed by Jan Assmann, who argues that the stability of material forms of culture preserves cultural memories over very long periods. These theoretical explanations provide a foundation for understanding how the memory of the workers in Mattanchery will continue to survive through both the family's stories and artistic expressions that link communities emotionally and intellectually to their shared history.

The objective of this project is to show that remembering is a moral obligation. To remember what it was like for the workers in Mattanchery means to validate their existence as human beings, to bear witness to their suffering, and to honor their contributions. Remembering is also a means of resisting the silence of the dominant historical narratives and affirming the dignity of the oppressed. By examining Thuramukham, Chaapa, and Adayalam, this project shows that remembering is more than just like an archiving of memories, and also it is an active force that creates identity, culture, and social justice.

This study illustrates that the combination of film, theater, and literature enhances our understanding of memory through a multidimensional approach. Each of these mediums supports and preservers the history through its independent contributions to society. Film evokes emotional responses from the many. Theater creates a sense of belonging through performing together, and literature provides insight into one another's thoughts and feelings. When these three artistic forms are combined, they provide a comprehensive and profound representation of the way that the labor movement has shaped our social identity in Kerala, and further, that memory is not only about preserving the past but also about influencing the future through learning from the moral

lessons of history. The stories of Mattanchery's workers remain relevant to all people because of the similarity of their experiences in their quest for justice, equality, and the right to be treated with dignity as human beings.

Ultimately this introduction establishes the entire project as an examination of how memory shifts through time and across different forms and communities. The objectives of the project through *Thuramukham, Chaapa, and Adayalam* are to demonstrate to today's people that the memory of the past continues not only in the form of historical fact but also as a means of connecting generations together through artistic expression, cultural expression, and the emotions generated from these experiences. Remembering the history of the labor-related struggles, endured by the people of Mattanchery will not only allow us to accurately record of the history but also serve as a means to build cultural identity, by promoting ethical responsibility among others, and enhancing social understanding. This study illustrates the vitality of being alive through memory, in its current embodied state, representative nature, collaborative nature, and continued growth and evolution through community involvement. By remembering these struggles, we are continually reminded that we are still essentially connected to the persons who created or helped create the society in which we live today.

Chapter 1

Memory Studies and the Recollection of Forgotten Histories.

Memory is not merely the act of contemplating the past. Memory is part of our identity as individuals and as community members. Memory ties us to a history that includes the experiences, struggles, and stories of those who came before us. Through memory, societies can hang into significant pieces of who we are as identities, values, and cultures while sharing them from one generation to the next. In the absence of memory, the lessons of the past can simply float away, along with the voices of those who had hoped for as well as struggled to create, a better future.

Unfortunately, not all struggles are remembered in the same way. In many cases the stories of marginalized people are often forgotten; no one preserves them. When a memory is lost from the collective memory of a society, they lost a part of themselves: the lived experience, courage, and morals of those who either quietly or bravely faced struggles at some point in their lives. Preserving memory involves not only "recording history" but also evoking the struggle that helped shape the world we live in today. Remembering the past gives reflection and understanding of the present and can act as a foundation toward creating more than just and aware of society.

The history of labor movements and social struggles in the state of Kerala is one of those stories that may become lost to memory if not shared out into the world. This is why *Thuramukham, Chaappa* and *Adayalam* are so important. *Thuramukham*, through its drawing on cinema, allows audiences to witness, feel, and think of the wonderful and resilient lives that workers lived. It imparts a history with the humanity of people rather

than historical meaning alone. *Adayalam* delivers similar meaning through its literary portrayal of moments of struggle and resistance, while allowing readers to find and feel a connection to the past. And *Chaapa,* was a despite minimal staging, the expression, movements, and narrative created a strong connection with the audience. And it also give a powerful engaging to the audience. It clearly convey the pain and resistance of oppressed laborers. Despite should we end the memory of these past or current struggles, the world will have lost stories important to us now.

This research analyzes how memory is represented in the three works and its significance. By way of engagement, discussion, and storytelling, we can consider how this work makes history matter today and encourages an emotional and intellectual investment for its audience. The act of remembering also holds personal and cultural significance. Recalling our challenges and sacrifices is a way to honor the labor and sacrifices performed on our behalf and provides another layer of insight into the society in which we exist. *Thuramukham, Chaappa* and *Adayalam* are examples of works that invite us to witness history through the eyes of those living it, making it, somehow, more relatable and real.

Memory is not only recognizing itself in relation to past personal lived experiences but also it is an active, evolving process of connections with communities, histories, and cultures. It assists in our understanding of ourselves and our evolving identities in relation to our histories. In society, memory also plays an important role in retaining the lived stories, struggles, and achievements of people, facilitating the preservation of important events that otherwise would be lost in time. Memory as a field of study is therefore pertinent to the inquiry of both individual lived experience and

collective histories and has increasingly become a dominant concern in the social sciences and the humanities.

Maurice Halbwachs was a foundational thinker in the field of memory studies and was among the first to coin the term "collective memory." Halbwachs asserts that memory is not necessarily individual; instead, it is defined, sustained, and even reconstructed in relation to social groups. Our memories are shaped by the communities we belong to, whether that community be a family, neighborhood, workplace, or society in general. For example, when thinking about a history of labor struggles in a place like Kerala, workers were fought for rights. Remembering this episode of history is supported by an individual's memory but also relies upon some collective stories and songs and oral accounts that may be shared in relation to a space or community. Collective memory promotes a connection to the social past and to comprehending an ongoing context of struggle as well as a process of shared memory. If collective memory did not exist, it would be possible for history, an accepted understanding of such, to remain as simple as being forgotten.

While Halbwachs studied social groups and their memory practices, Jan Assmann has introduced the concept of cultural memory. Cultural memory is still something different; it indicates the ways societies actively try to share memories and preserve knowledge and experiences of the past over generations. Culture generates memory of significant events, achievements, and struggles in society through social symbolic means, retaining knowledge over a long period of time. Cultural memory, as posited by Assman, is dependent upon memory practices associated with rituals, monuments, literature, and various other cultural markers that contribute to continuity. The act of memory is not

only about remembering but also crafting the very way in which we remember the past and how to read the memory. For example, in Kerala, songs and dramas depicting the labor struggle or social struggle represent much more than memories associated with historical social struggles or historical elements but serve as markers and ongoing memories for contemporary social struggles.

The process of remembering collective memory occurs through various channels. Among the oldest and most powerful preservation methods is oral tradition. The stories told by elders, songs, folk presentations, and theater performances are like containers of experiences from people in generations past. Thus, oral traditions, or storytelling methods of communication, act as a way of preserving memory and history. In Kerala, other art forms, such as Chavittunadakam and traditional songs, while local storytellers provided mechanisms for preserving historical and social memory for many decades. In addition to oral traditions, there are letters, government documents, newspapers, and historical accounts that offer a more tangible and verifiable act of remembering memory. They provide the evidence of past events and allow for a few different instances of studying past events.

The art and literature have an important role in keeping memories alive. Novels, films, plays, etc., each have a unique form to capture both the emotional and rational aspects of history. They link past experiences so others can identify with the struggles and victories of the previous generations. For example, *Thuramukham*, *Adayalam* and *chaappa* illustrate how art and literature act as memories in their own right. They do not simply recount the past. These pieces allow the viewer or reader to experience the emotions, choices, and sacrifices of history. These narratives carry forth the challenges

faced by ordinary people to work against amnesia, promoting a collective consciousness about the historical act itself that is part of history's reality.

Ultimately, memory studies give us an approach to understanding how societies remember and why these memories are important. When we examine Halbwachs and Assmann, as well as the methods of preserving memory that occur in oral traditions and more recently in written forms and in art and literary genres, we are able to better appreciate how the past is incorporated into the present. In the context of this study, memory studies allow us to analyze how *Thuramukham, Chaappa* and *Adayalam* memorialize the histories of labor struggles in Kerala. The presence of these texts allows us to know our histories and what is important about those histories and allows experts to bridge the past and the present by making that history contextualized, significant, and alive for those in the present when they read *Thuramukham, Chaappa,* and *Adayalam*. These texts reminds us that memory is a living thing from framing to retelling and to sharing. Memory contributes to a living cultural identity.

Talking about the past is not merely saying something about time or what happened. It means talking about lives, struggles, and sacrifices that have shaped who we are today. To achieve the past in many ways, to ensure that their memory doesn't fade away. All generations have carried and continue to carry stories of the generations before them, and these stories help us understand who we are. When we do not, we lose our connection to our roots. Remembering this means more than just paying respect to them; it also means realizing the hardship and aspirations they endured.

This is the reason books, plays, films, and even songs are so critically important. They are not simply artworks or forms of entertainment but they are vessels of memory.

Many official histories glorify the victories of the powerful, but the history carries weight, more heavily in the lives of ordinary people, the worker, the farmer, the women, and the children whose stories are seldom included in textbooks. Literature and film provide a platform for these marginalized voices. The suffering, the bravery, and the resistance that might otherwise be forgotten are made accessible to us through literature and movies. Engaging the past, therefore, is not only about finding facts, it is about remembering the feeling, the spirit, and the humanity of those who came before.

Adayalam, the book *Chaappa*, the play and *Thuramukham*, the film, are powerful illustrations of this. Each serves as a living record of memory. *Adayalam* is more than just a story; it embodies the heartbeat of the communities who were exploited but still fought for dignity. The words on the pages of the book don't merely inform us; they make contact with us, because you are reminded that those oppressed were, in some ways, human beings trying to survive and resist. Likewise, the story told in *Thuramukham* becomes both history and reality on the screen. We witness the cruelty of the Chaapa system, the despair of unemployed laborers, and the never-ending struggle for justice. Seeing it is not the same as reading a report; it's like being there with those employees, experiencing their frustration, struggle, and hope. It's possible that you can still feel the past in your bones. And play *Chaappa* refers to a theatrical representation of Chaappa system, a cruel labor system.

This project is my small intervention to illustrate how such works achieve the past for us. In comparing *Adayalam, Chaappa* and *Thuramukham,* I want to demonstrate that memory lives on not solely in some dusty archive, but also in the pages of a book and in the frames of a film. Both of these works necessarily continue to keep alive the forgotten

histories of the laborers in Mattanchery, and as they do, they ensure that the struggles of the laborers are not lost to time. In this respect, the project itself becomes part and parcel of this chain of memory, it is also a way to achieve the past.

In a world that changes rapidly and replaces old stories with new distractions, remembering is even more essential for us today. Forgetting our past not only means that we lose history, it also entails a loss of wisdom and warnings our past may afford us. Achieving the past involves ensuring that the sacrifices of the past continue to shape our present actions (instead of reliving them). *Adayalam*, *Chaappa* and *Thuramukham* remind us that we can hear a conversation about the inextricable link between art and memory while also hearing the voices of those people who will never be forgotten.

Every research project requires a perspective to look through. This study sees the framework in terms of memory studies. Memory is not just an objective memory of a single person, it is about how memories are shared collaboratively by whole communities. The French theorist Maurice Halbwachs called this group memory. He wrote about how memories are never formed in isolation. Memories exist in groups to which we belong (families, friends, neighborhoods, and communities). For example, a grandmother in Mattanchery may tell her grandchildren about the "Chaappa system" even if the children never actually saw it in action, that story becomes part of their memory. In this way, memory persists, and it lives on in stories passed down from grandparents to grandchildren.

However, memory is not just the product of spoken stories. It also resides in cultural forms that endure after the moment. Jan Assmann called this cultural memory. Contrary to memory practice in everyday talk, cultural memory is stored in more lasting

forms, such as books, songs, religious rituals, art, cinema, and monuments. As a kind of memory container, these cultural forms keep memory alive that might otherwise dissipate. Novels like *Adayalam*, play *Chaappa*, or films like *Thuramukham* do exactly this. They contain memories of workers' struggles, the injustices they faced, and the spirit to survive the injustices. They take lived experiences and preserve them so that even those who are removed both spatially and temporally can reach them and connect to the lived experience of that history.

This concept is very much connected to what I have described as achieving the past. To achieve the past is to keep it in hand, to ensure it is not lost. Memories do not simply retain themselves; they are understood only when we move forward by passing them on, whether through tales, through writing, or through some other art form. This is why art, literature, and film are so critical. They are not simply works of creativity but are often repositories of memory. They transmute pain, hope, and resistance into the temporalities of possibilities we can read, see, and feel. In this transmutation is the resistance to being forgotten.

Through these frames, *Adayalam*, *Chaappa* and *Thuramukham* are more than forms of a book, play and film. These are living archives of memory. *Adayalam* gives form, through words, to the everyday reality and struggles of a community. It brings those lives to the surface, always ensuring silence. *Thuramukham*, likewise, uses image and sound to allow us to witness history not simply as disembodied facts but as something we are moved by as an emotional experience. In watching the film, we do not simply learn of exploitation; we feel it as the chaos of thrown bodies. In *Chaappa,* through their exaggerated facial expressions and body language it explores the realities

pictured in the history. *Adayalam*, *Chaappa* and *Thuramukham* are, in their own way, acts of achieving the past.

This is a framework for the analysis in the next chapter. *Adayalam*, *Chaappa* and *Thuramukham* are not only a novel, play or a film; I will regard them as memory bearers. Collective memory gives us a glimpse into how these communities remember together, as cultural memory gives us insight into how the memory is held and shared into the future. The idea of realizing the past is also something that highlights the significance of this remembering, especially for marginalized voices that have been excluded from dominant, official histories. Through this lens, the project will illustrate that art, literature, and cinema are not merely reflections of the past but rather ongoing processes for reconstructing the past. They keep alive the experiences of workers in their struggles in Mattanchery. With this, they remind us that to remember is a kind of justice, and to forget is to give away a part of yourself.

Memory serves as the connection to the struggles of the past and our understandings of what is happening in the present. In terms of memory studies, we are meant to recognize that remembering is not a solitary act but something that is lived and shared within social communities. Halbwachs' notion of collective memory allows us to recognize how groups keep stories relevant through everyday communal sharing. Assmann's cultural memory is helpful for us to understand how stories are kept alive in tangible forms like in books, rituals, performances, films, etc. from one generation to the next. This leads us to the important realization that coming to grips with the past is never automatic, but rather, a task to which societies dedicate their energies in terms of recollection and preservation.

The struggles of the past is gives voice to individuals who might otherwise become lost. For example, the workers of Mattanchery were exploited and struggled to live with dignity, but without memory, all their suffering becomes immediately forgotten. Achieving these struggles within cultural forms provides continuity, ensuring their lives continue to be part of our collective history. That's where literature and cinema come into play as cultural forces of memory. *Adayalam, Chaappa* and *Thuramukham* are not simply accounts of matters that occurred; they are containers of memory. Having transformed personal experiences of suffering into a narrative and images, achieving and remembering gain weight in cultural memory, and the bravery, suffering, and resistance of generations past are not forgotten.

The art, literature, and cinema help us more to preserve the past. It is about making sense of the present and offering some possibility for the future. Memory studies enable a process that situates the past not only within those who lived it but also seizes it for those who are living it. With this consciousness, part three will move from theory into practice. It will look closely at *Adayalam, Chaappa* and *Thuramukham* to examine how these artistic productions convey memory, protect past struggles, and encapsulate the past through their narrative.

Chapter 2

Historical Background and Context.

The history of the coastal region of Kerala, especially Mattanchery in Kochi, carried memory of struggle, persistence, and solidarity. The working class in this region was shaped by the tides of colonialism, capitalism, and social change. Kochi, the port city connected with trade and cultural exchanges, became a site of oppression for many to the point where dignity was traded for profit. The story of Mattanchery is not only about trade and commerce; it is about the fellow humans, men, and women, who quietly endured while maintaining the docks of Kochi. The film *Thuramukham*, the play *Chaapa,* and the novel *Adayalam* collectively recall the buried histories and offer the solace that remembering is a form of justice.

To comprehend the conditions that these works arise from, it is necessary to return to the port of Kochi in the early and mid-twentieth century. In the 1940s and the 1950s, every morning, thousands of workers would gather at the harbor in search of work for the day. The labors were worked for the stevedoring companies. There was a cruel employment system which was structured through what is now called the Chaappa system. Under the Chaappa system, contractors or supervisors (kankaani) would stand above the workers and toss small, metal tokens, referred to as Chaappa, into the crowd below. The workers who managed to catch the Chaappa were the only people who would be allowed to work for the day. The rest would return home hungry. This practice, which stripped people of their humanity, turned people into competitors, who fought over tokens of survival. It represented everything that was vile about the colonial labour structure, namely insecurity, humiliation, and the stripping of all human value.

Jawaharlal Nehru's government implemented the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1948, to provide rights for dock workers in ports throughout India. The Act sought to eliminate the exploitative casual labor system in ports by providing regular employment, guaranteed wages, and increased conditions through a system of registration and regulation. However, this act was not put into effect in Mattancheri, Kerala. Workers in the Cochin port continued to work under the Chaappa system, whereby each morning employers would toss metal tokens (chappas) into a crowd of workers, and only workers who picked up a token were guaranteed work that day. This degrading and uncertain process produced extreme resentment among the laborers. Drawing on socialist and communist ideas, workers began to form unions and called for the enforcement of Nehru's 1948 Act in Mattancheri. Workers were not only demanding wages but also dignity and recognition as workers. The failure of the government to bring this act led to protests and Mattancheri firing of 1953.

During a protest, police opened fire towards unarmed laborers. Numerous people were wounded, and many of them died. Saithali, Syed and C.X. Antony are three among them. According to the book *Adayalam,* Saithali's death emerged as one of the rallying cries for the labor movement in the area. Also during that time Syed was at home eating rice when he heard the firing; he ran out with rice in one hand and a stone in the other. The portrayal of this incident in the play *Chaappa* is overwhelming to the viewers. His death represented the ordinary worker caught up in a significant confrontation and paying the ultimate price. In contrast, according to Antony, he died for a different reason than the two, as he died more because of the violent repression that took place afterwards rather than as a product of the firing and killing that took place. It represented a very significant

threshold in Kerala's collective memory of the past. It marked the beginning of renewed political and social consciousness in Kerala, which allowed workers a slightly new sense of dignity in their work. And contributed to Kerala's new emerging image, becoming regarded as a land of labor movement and people's struggle.

Thuramukham is a Malayalam film directed by Rajeev Ravi, was scripted by Gopan Chidambaram and is explicitly based on the stage play (Thuramukham) by his father Chidambaram. *Thuramukham* is not just a representation of historical events, but it is a lively recreation of memory through art. *Thuramukham* is based on the context of the Chaappa system. It portrays the struggle of dockworkers and their families. Also it depicts the nature of economic exploitation toward them. But it also celebrates the dignity and strength of the exploited class. Through its brilliant and striking visuals, natural performances, dynamic filmmaking editing, and the use of local dialect, it is a cinematic homage to Mattanchery. Rajeev Ravi's direction balances realism with poetry, allowing the viewer to both see and sense the chaos, dust, and despair of the port. The role of mymu acted by Joju George shows a strong face of protesters.

Thuramukham is remarkable because it brings together emotion and history as well. The workers are placed at the center of Kerala’s present identity instead of being treated as marginal and incidental to the present. The film engages in true stories and memories that have been passed on from generation to generation, including the stories of the firing, the hunger, and the triumphs of unity. The story of the workers is preserved through the act of remembering together. *Thuramukham* is doing this while adding to the cultural tradition of remembering together, which pre-dates the camera.

The history of Mattanchery's labor resistance has not come to an end with the film representation in Thuramukham. On the other side of the screen, M. S. Sivakumar's play, *Chaapa*, embodies the same history through the art of performance. The play accesses the history of the Chaappa system of Mattanchery and the 1953 conflict. He uses Chavittunadakam, an art form found in Kerala, to express their fight. Sivakumar changes the meaning of Chavittunadakam, originally a folk form used for heroic and religious stories, to a language of remembrance and resistance. The main character Antony Aashan, a man who has dedicated his life to his art is unable to sustain his family with the meagre income. This forces him to search for work under the Chaappa system at Thuramugam port, where he joins a group of revolts protesting against the exploitative practice and ends up getting caught in the crossfire and killed. After his death, Anthony Aashan comes to his daughter in a dream and tells Mariakoch who loves being a part of Chavittunadakam, “Vishappaanu ketto eettavum valiya samaram, pakshe vishannirunnalum nee nadakam kalikkenam” (*Chaapa* 25:32-25:45) which acts as a core message in the play. However, M.S Sivakumar tells that his intention in directing Chaappa was not to give any particular message to the audience, but rather was an expression of his art. The historical character of Syed, a man so dedicated to the cause of the revolution that he went protesting with rice in one hand and a weapon in the other, is split into two characters in Sivakumar’s play — Abu and his mother Kinnathathi, played by Anumol Joseph (Kinnathathi) and Nice Maria (Abu).

On the stage, each footstep of Chavittunadakam shows the struggle of the laborers. Every step speaks for their frustration and sense of togetherness. Every musical chant becomes a communal cry for dignity. The performance carried the sound and soul

of resistance. The clang of the chappas and the slush of the performers' feet merged together into the same beating heart of art and pain.

By means of this reimagining, Chaapa builds on the act of remembrance already initiated by *Thuramukham*. This piece demonstrates that history is not only remembered through film or writing but also enabled through the living body of performance. Here, Chavittunadakam becomes more than entertainment; it becomes testimony to a traumatic ancestral past. The art form that once played for divine battles now stands out for the rhythm of human struggle. Sivakumar's adaptation thus transforms cultural heritage into social commentary, ultimately reminding us that traditional performance can still speak to the pain and pride of the present. The play *Chaapa* combines history with folk theater to show the voices of the Mattancheri laborers who have been forgotten. It is a reminder that memory does not just exist in archives or museums but also lives through songs, movements, and performances that continue to ring through time.

While *Thuramukham* represents collective memory through cinema, and *Chaapa* represents it through performance, Abdulla Mattanchery's Book *Adayalam* represents memory through language and imagination. The Book's title, which means "mark" or "identity," also underscores how history leaves traces that can never be erased. Set in the same cultural landscape of Mattanchery, the book contemplates the lives of ordinary people who are intertwined with the larger history of the place. Abdulla Mattanchery's narrative style draws upon oral tradition and local idioms and voices a community that has been mute in history.

The novel *Adayalam* shows the struggles of labor workers of Mattancheri and the remembering of the 1953 Mattancheri firing. P.G Antony's lines "Kattalanmar nadu

barich kattil theemazha peythappol pattalathe pullayi karuthiya Mattancheri marakkamo"(*Adayalam13)* is also mentioned in the book which serves as a strong statement by the protesters towards the oppressors. It reminds us that places may change, and time may pass on, but the memories of pain and struggle still remain. With this novel Abdulla Mattancheri has shown Mattanchery as a place of resilience and strength. *Adayalam* does not depict history as a series of events but as a lived experience. The novel depicts how memories endure through words, stories, and characters' emotional landscapes. The memory it produces stands next to *Thuramukham* and *Chaapa* as another way to get at the past, and it is another way to ensure that the working class struggles remain part of Kerala's cultural consciousness. By taking historical wounds and fashioning them in a narrative art form, Abdulla Mattancheri ensures that readers are not just learning the past but feel its resonance in their present lives.

Movie *Thuramukham*, play *Chaapa*, and novel *Adayalam* shows us that, how an art can work as a living archive. They show how memory is not a record that is fixed in time but a process of retelling. Cinema, play, and literature each preserve history using a specific language. Visual, performative, and textual, while others act with the same intention to resist forgetting. The people from Mattanchery who were denied a voice because of their oppression and poverty now speak to us again in these artistic expressions. Their journeys and struggles, sacrifices, and hopes live again when you watch, read, or experience the story.

The story of the workers of Mattanchery is simultaneously a story of both exploitation and awakening. The Mattanchery firing of 1953 occupies a distinct moral place in the collective memory of Kerala. It turned suffering into power, as well as a

reminder to society that justice must be built upon remembrance. When today's audiences watch *Thuramukham*, or when audiences engage with *Chaapa*, or when readers enter the world of *Adayalam*, they are not simply experiencing art; they are remembering. Every form carries forward the same admonition about dignity, equality, and humanity that began on the coast of Kochi and continues decades later.

Reconsidering these histories reminds us that memory is continuous and not just reliving the past. To remember the workers of Mattanchery is to recognize the names of countless individuals, many of whom remain unnamed, who persist with different forms of struggle for justice today. From this historical legacy, the work encourages us to see art as a moral and social obligation, to honor the willingness to tell stories official histories actively avoid, to hold on to emotions that statistics cannot represent, and to honor the tenacity of those who are our neighbors and made this world with their hands. Thus, the historical context of *Thuramukham*, *Chaapa*, and *Adayalam* is not just the backdrop of artistic production but the very pulse of Kerala's cultural identity. These works draw barely remembered histories into present-day memories, preserving the lives of the workers whose sweat created its land. They signify that remembering can also be a form of resistance, and through the act of resistance, we can keep history alive.

Chapter 3

Analysis–Memory, History, and Cultural Representation.

Memory is more than just a collection of our past. Memory is alive and constantly changing and growing; it is a part of who we are as individuals, communities, and cultures. Memory connects us with others in our world and reminds us of our shared experiences, trials, and the stories of those who have passed before us. Memory not only helps us to understand what has happened in the past, but it also informs us in terms of understanding what may happen in the future. Memory acts as a guide for making moral and social decisions relating to how we respond to others and the responsibilities we have to them, including questions of fairness and compassion. Memory allows the stories of oppressed groups, including the laborers in Mattanchery, to persist. Without a memory, the stories of these groups would be lost, leaving only bits and pieces of their lived experience, courage, and strength. The Chaappa system, under which dock workers had to fight for their daily jobs, illustrates both the oppression of these individuals and the resilience of the human spirit. Their lives were treated like a game of chance, where their right to work and support themselves was taken away, all while presenting a glimpse into the harsh realities of our world as defined by economic and social inequalities. In keeping these experiences alive through culture, we honor and remember the sacrifices and struggles made by everyday people, and we maintain the collective courage of the people of Kerala as a part of its cultural history. Memory, therefore, includes not just the history of the world, but memory also includes the emotional, ethical, and social components of the experience of living in the world.

By utilizing cinematic styles as defined by him and supporting other filmmakers, Rajeev Ravi in *Thuramukham* recreates that history through this medium and allows the audience to feel the lives of these dock workers. *Thuramukham* has an immersive effect on the audience by utilizing different forms of cinematic techniques such as close-ups, numerous busily crowded scenes, and the use of a local dialect, Malayalam. Through this technique, *Thuramukham* provides an opportunity for the audience to experience and connect to this history, which spans decades of years, specifically through the depiction of daily life, despair, and solidarity of the laborers that created those historical events. It also provides an opportunity for their audience to develop the ability to associate their emotional response with actual understanding. This connection is even more evident with the depiction of the Mattanchery firing in 1953 that created collective trauma and transformed individual tragedy into a social history of remembrance. *Thuramukham*, as a film, through its cinematographic strategies, provides an opportunity to challenge the dominant histories of the laboring class as viewed through the political and economic lenses and asserts that history is not viewed through the political and the economic lenses of the world; it is also about the human experience of that history. *Thuramukham* provides an opportunity for audience members to see the ethical implications of remembering and offers a platform for them to consider the impact of labor rights and social justice and the dignity that the labor experience provides on the working person today.

Similar to the film adaptation of his theatrical production "*Chaapa*," the author M. S. Sivakumar, through his performance of "Chavittunadakam," a traditional Kerala folk form, embodies the aspects of diastolic memory as a performance of the lives of dock

workers fighting against injustices. Each individual step, chant, and gesture within the performance implies solidarity among the workers, while demonstrating the courage they share in the face of oppression. Thus, Sivakumar's use of a traditional performance style creates a living record of collective memory through theater. Furthermore, in using an art form previously reserved for epic or religious narratives, he demonstrates how traditional forms of artistic expression can be harnessed as an instrument of historical memory, thus allowing audiences to experience both present and past experiences together. Experiencing the embodied experience of the performance reinforces the connection between the performer and the audience in a collaborative act of collective memory preservation. Similarly, Abdulla Mattanchery's novel "*Adayalam*" also preserves collective memory through the use of literary devices and drawing upon the author's imaginative interpretation of events in Mattanchery that are imbued with the personal experiences of the community, thereby providing the reader with an opportunity to participate in the community's daily life. By employing both oral tradition and local vernacular idioms, as well as incorporating the voices of individuals from the community who may otherwise be excluded from the historical record, Mattancheri situates the reader within the community as a fellow member of the social and emotional fabric of the area.

Memory can be kept and shared in various directions, as evidenced by the convergence of these different forms. Visual and emotional experiences are represented in film, and performance represents the battle for solidarity and the concept of community. Additionally, literature provides insight into the inner workings of one's mind and also allows for the reader to become immersed in a story. When combined,

these three forms of art give us an understanding of how memory evolves into both an individual and a collective experience. For example, the experiences of workers relating to oppression, opposition, and aspiration have not only been conveyed by recorded history but have also been represented by cultural expressions that evoke, build upon, and maintain these memories. By doing this, these cultural artifacts serve as an antidote to the silencing of marginalized groups and ensure that the struggles of the working class continue to play a prominent role in the historical consciousness of Kerala.

Maurice Halbwachs has developed a theory of collective memory that emphasizes the relationship between memory and society and how these two areas influence one another. According to Halbwachs, memory is not a solitary experience; rather, it is a social activity that exists in groups, whether they are families, communities, or nations. Examples of that are oral traditions, folklore songs and local stories, through which collective memories are passed down through many generations. For example, a grandparent may tell their grandchildren the story of the Chaappa system, thereby helping to establish a framework in which historical events can be embedded in the minds of future generations living in the community of Mattanchery. Jan Assmann's work on cultural memory builds upon Halbwachs' understanding of collective memory by identifying how material culture, such as books, performances, festivals, monuments and films, shared knowledge and experience from one generation to the next, through maintaining a connection to the past, but also shape the way society views, understands, interprets and relates to the past.

Literary works such as *Thuramukham, Chaapa,* and *Adayalam* serve as powerful examples of the ethical implications of memory. A viewer's or reader's ability to relate to

the history of Mattanchery Workers through their remembrance of the hardship and resistance will help them understand and directly consider issues relating to labor rights, social justice and individual's responsibility towards others. This group of literary works is not simply used to describe the actual events which took place; rather, the authors take a very active approach to creating an emotional and moral understanding of history by allowing audiences to connect with people who lived and experienced injustices. Cinema creates immersion, theatre creates collective memory through performance, and literature and poetry all promote an ability for the reader or audience member to deeply reflect upon what they have witnessed within the storyline. All three forms come together to demonstrate how memory is a continually evolving process and requires ongoing contact through a variety of different mediums between generations.

The passing of stories from generation to generation helps create the memory of Mattanchery's dock workers and is an important part of this process. They shared these with others through family members as well as through public performances. By creating opportunities for creating memories together, these stories unite people, foster community and identity among members of society, and remind us of the importance of remembering who we are and where we came from. The forms in which we tell these stories today are oral histories, songs, theatre, etc., and they make tangible and relevant the experiences of past generations in current times. We all have an opportunity to participate in creating a collective memory of our struggles and connecting this memory between our past and present.

Memory as a means of combating being erased. The workers of Mattanchery were historically silenced, and their struggle has been almost completely omitted from the

official record of history; therefore, preserving these stories (through literature, film, theatre, etc.) is a way for artists to give voice to these previously unrecognized and underrepresented groups in today's world. Both collective and cultural memory work together to create a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the past, creating an opportunity for us to reflect not only on our own experiences of suffering but also on how we relate our own experiences to those of others, how they relate to one another within the greater community, and how they shape our identities as members of a larger community. Memory is a volatile process, and the way we remember will continue to evolve as it connects us to both the present and to the issues we face today and in the future.

The artistic representation, these works allows the audience to connect with the memory in different ways. In *Thuramukham*, the viewer engages with images, sounds, and feelings of the chaos of despair and the hopefulness of solidarity. In *Chaapa*, the audience engages rhythmically, moving together in time and collectively voicing their experiences. In *Adayalam*, the reader goes into their characters' thoughts and shares in the emotional and social aspects of their conflict's past. The way these works present such a broad range of experiences demonstrates how memory is expressed and experienced throughout time and place in both physical and cultural form.

Memory is not a single entity but is made up of many different layers: personal, collective, and cultural. Personal memory refers to the individual laborer and their family's experiences; collective memory refers to the things that people remember in common as a result of shared stories, rituals, and performances; cultural memory refers to the physical representation of culture (e.g., books, films, plays) and how it has been

preserved. Through the interaction of these layers, a better understanding of history is created in both intellectually and also emotionally. In addition, through their attention to these different layers of memory, *Thuramukham*, *Chaapa*, and *Adayalam* allow the humanity, dignity, and aspirations of marginalized groups to be remembered alongside historical events.

In general, memory is the product of thought, action, and experience. In these texts, memory connects the past to our present and reaffirms our cultural identities. By re-experiencing the past through storytelling, performance, and film, these texts also serve as living memory. Remembering is not just a personal experience. It is both an ethical and an essential act of individual and collective memory. Memory serves as an avenue of cultural identity formation to create a more just society. Cultural identity formation occurs through dynamic, participatory processes and intergenerational relationships that preserve marginalized voices and resist erasure. Through the cultural forms of performance and storytelling, the courage, resilience, and ongoing struggles of the workers of Mattanchery live on. Therefore, as we remember the past, we cannot erase it from our lives. It will continue to shape us and provide us with the tools to continue to create a more just world.

Thuramukham, *Chaapa*, and *Adayalam* serve as examples of how literature, theater, and film can act as containers for the collective memory of society. They also illustrate how memory relates to and informs the way that societies understand their histories; that is, memory is neither a passive nor private phenomenon, but rather an active, communal, and culturally mediated experience that sustains the community's understanding of its historical consciousness through both struggles and victories of the

marginalized. In essence, these works provide a platform for preserving not only the ethical, social, and political dimensions of memory, but they also serve to transform all historical events into an embodied, experienced, and "living" reality. Ultimately, they invite us to remember that to remember will allow us to honor, resist and engage in building a society that recognized these same qualities of dignity and courage in those who came before us.


ദേശാഭിമാനി

മട്ടാഞ്ചേരിയിൽ തൊഴിലാളികളുടെ നേരെ പോലീസ് വെടിവെച്ചു

ജീവനിലവാരം ഞങ്ങളുയർത്തും

Fig.1. Newspaper clipping reporting the firing at workers in mattancherry, Deshabhimani, 16 September 1953.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that through the study of memory, it is evident that memory is much more than just the past viewed through a lens, but it continues to live, change, and affect who we are, whom we share memories with, and where we fit into our cultural heritage. The three chapters developed here show the important message that remembering is a moral act. The process of remembering serves to acknowledge and highlight the experiences of those whose voices have been suppressed or forgotten, and therefore spotlight the stories and past histories of those people. Concerning the experience of the Migrant Workers of Mattanchery, in particular, the migrant workers that had the trauma of being forced into conditions of Chaappa Labor, and those workers that faced violence during the events of the Mattanchery Firing in 1953, the narratives demonstrate the value placed on preserving the dignity and humanity through the memory of experiences suffered by Marginalized Groups in order to develop and promote Safe and Supportive Environments for Marginalized Communities. By remembering the experiences and legacies of the Workers, we may continue to learn from the experience, pain, and suffering of the Margaret's of Mattanchery, and apply those lessons and the lessons of others to our current concepts of Justice today. The final chapters of this dissertation emphasize that memory is always a changing and developing factor. Memory is preserved through certain mediums, such as culture, emotion, and the arts, as well as through storytelling in community contexts, to serve as preservation efforts for many who may otherwise be overlooked in the official stories of history.

Through an in-depth examination of *Thuramukham*, *Chaapa*, and *Adayalam*, this project demonstrates how important cinema, theater, and literature are to preserve the

memories of communities whose voices continue to be threatened by silence. *Thuramukham* uses an immersive representation of the harbor, dust-filled air, someone's work life, and the trauma of the shooting incident to recreate an audiovisual memory of the dockworkers and their fight against oppression and injustice. In addition to documenting the facts, the film uses an emotional approach to capture the feelings of desperation, hope, and strength of the dockworkers, which puts human emotion in the center of the history. The film shows that we are not only see the political nature of labor-related struggles but also experience them morally and emotionally. *Thuramukham* is more than just a recollection of memories. It is a means to re-experience them through film. It brings the collective pain and courage of the laborers on screen. And also enabling their stories to be seen as not merely anecdotes that occurred in an earlier time but as real and tangible experiences.

Similar to the way that performance serves as a vehicle for memory, *Chaapa* draws on a traditional Kerala folk form, Chavittunadakam, to represent the histories of the Mattanchery workers. The physicality of the performance the rhythmic step patterns and the use of vocalization to express strength and emotion through gesture, as well as the act of being present for performers as they create their work on stage creates a memory experience created by the communal and embodied. Rather than just watching history happen, the audience is involved in creating a memory themselves. By transitioning Chavittunadakam's usage as a form through which heroes and deities are represented into an artistic medium used to represent labor resistance, this shows that ways in which we use tradition today are also ways to hold our contemporary memories as part of the reworking of cultural institutions. Performance becomes a living archive,

allowing for the continual renewal of memory through movement and the creation of shared experience. By using a traditional folk form, *Chaapa* creates a connection between the past and present and continues to hold the memory of that connection.

Adayalam preserves memories through its use of language, storytelling, and imagination. Abdulla Mattanchery uses oral history, regional dialects, and the stories of people's daily lives to create a written account of the community's hardships, feelings, and strength. The novel shows how memory is experienced by individuals and then shared between generations in a way that connects them emotionally. Literature provides a means for people to think deeply about their own pasts, reflect on how those pasts affect them now, and understand themselves as part of a larger society. *Adayalam* is a place where an individual can take ownership of their memories and feel connected to the memories of others. The memories carried by the characters in the novel are what create their identities. The stories that the characters tell reflect the memories of their forefathers, which will remain as a part of our historical record forever. Literature is a powerful and personal way of remembering, showing how written words can document what a culture may forget.

These three works create a rich archive of memory. Each of the three helps to shed light on the past through a different view – visual, performative, or narrative. The different forms of memory demonstrate that memory isn't simple or one-dimensional but rather a multifaceted experience that is created from many sources. Cultural examples integrate together to create a complete, nuanced and historically accurate view of the past. Cinema expresses collective feelings of society; theatre conveys a feeling of community in terms of rhythm and unity; literature allows us to reflect on our own

feelings and thoughts. Together the cultural expressions in each of these three pieces illustrate that history does not only belong to those who write it down or keep an official record of history, and instead that some cultural and artistic expressions can help provide a better understanding of the experiences of minority groups.

The insights of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann provide additional evidence for the validity of this project's conclusions. Halbwachs' assertion that memory is essentially social provides important insights into how stories about Mattanchery's workers have been kept alive by many means including familial and community connections—as well as through the means of retelling those stories culturally. Memory can only be formed through discussing/sharing with other people in the same social setting; therefore, where memories are kept alive, they are created and maintained by social groups. Assmann's concept of cultural memory gives us insight about how certain physical "things" e.g., motion pictures, literature, dramatic productions, etc.—can preserve the past. Historical sources of information for many generations beyond any single individual's recollection or knowledge of the past. The continuing existence of worker stories about Mattanchery shown over successive generations illustrates how important cultural memory is to understanding and defining the identity of Kerala as a whole. These theoretical concepts support the idea that cultural "products" are not simply a record of cultural memory but rather are participatory functions of that same memory.

The chapters illustrate how honoring the past of Mattanchery's workforce, both through an acceptance of the importance of their lives and the right to their dignity, is somewhat of a social action towards justice. This will promote the dignity associated with all Mattanchery's laborers and support the survival of those stories, which have been

suppressed in dominant historical representations. Workers' daily existence, along with the Mattanchery firing and Chaappa system, ensures that memories of individuals fighting for dignity in extreme conditions live on. The memories of these workers provide context concerning the sacrifices of previous generations in the creation of Kerala's political and social consciousness, and they are part of the ongoing discussion about labour rights, equality, and the responsibilities of society to those who work; they are reminders of universal truths about human suffering, courage, and resistance.

As the world continues to evolve and new histories emerge while old histories start to fade away, it has become more important than ever to preserve our memory and prevent losing our identity through the loss of our memories. In this regard, it is also important to note that marginalized voices may be subject to disregard in the future; therefore, memory must be protected for future generations. Therefore, the art discussed in this study illustrate how through the artistic expressions of *Thuramukham, Chaapa* and *Adayalam*, the emotional memories of the Mattanchery laborers are maintained. Through their artistic representations, *Thuramukham, Chaapa*, and *Adayalam* illustrate the emotions, experiences, and stories related to the creation of our cultural consciousness; that is, they represent how cultural memory is created and continues to be maintained. Furthermore, these artists remind us that the term 'history' does not just mean events; history must contain all human experiences, emotions, and feelings, and as a result, honoring, feeling, and remembering these histories will continue to provide a legacy for future generations to draw upon. To remember these stories means honoring all the courage and humanity demonstrated by the laborers who fought for our rights.

In conclusion, this project confirms that memory is still with us today. Memory moves through time and is passed down through the forms of art, conversation, acting, and writing. Memory connects communities, and creates a sense of identity for a particular culture. And provides us with morals that help us to live out our futures. The stories of the Mattanchery workers are strong reminders of our duty to remember our dignity. And stand against any form of oppression, and regard each other as human beings. The literature examined in this project serves as ongoing evidence of the impact of memory, preserving the marginalized workers' voices and providing support for future generations as they continue to fight for both their rights and those of others.

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DISCUSSION WITH GOPAN CHIDAMBARAM: THE STORY BEHIND THE SCRIPT.

1- What ispired you to take up thuramukham as a script?

Ans: I was very touched by Thuramukham's story because it was about the actual struggles of the Mattancherry workers during the Chappa system. The workers' resistance, pain, and collective unity against oppression were indicative of a crucial moment in Kerala's labor history. I thought that it was really important to bring those voices that had not yet been heard to the screen.

2- Was there any personal memory or family story that motivated you to write about chaapa system?

Ans: Yes, my father, K.M. Chidambaram, had penned the original play Thuramukham years ago, which I had known through the stories I heard while growing up. My father was close to this work, exploring the many struggles dockworkers faced for dignity, which continued to resonate with him. So, in many ways, this script is a tribute to my father, along with the story itself that I had learned so much of during my childhood.

3- Do you see cinema as a way of preserving collective memory and history, especially for struggles like Chaapa?

Ans**:** Of course. Cinema can keep memories alive, and it evokes emotional connection to past history and experience. So, many of these struggles and unions are forgotten, but cinema gives us a chance to relive these moments and bring them to the present generation. Thuramukham is not simply entertainment; it demonstrates the sacrifice and effort of the working class.

4- Thuramukham is not just a film but also a reminder of a social movement. What is your opinion on that?

Ans**:** I absolutely agree. Thuramukham is more than a film; it's a record of resistance and awakening. It shows how ordinary workers came together to oppose exploitation and demand their rights. The film understand us that every social movement begins with people who dare to question injustice, and that spirit continues to inspire us today.

5- What message did you want today's generation to take away from Thuramukham?

Ans**:** I wanted the younger generations to understand the lessons of unity, resistance, and the dignity of labour. The struggles shown in Thuramukham remind us all that rights and equality were not given but earned through pain and courage. I wanted young people to recognize the importance of standing together to fight injustice and remembering the sacrifices that shaped our society.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THEATRE DIRECTOR SIVA KUMAR.

1. Do you think theatre is an effective medium to discuss caste and labor oppression? Why?

   Ans)Throughout the history of world drama, labour oppression has been powerfully represented through plays and theatre. In fact, some of the strongest and most impactful discussions on class and caste oppression have come from live performances rather than films. From early Malayalam political dramas like Ningalenne Communist Aakki and Pattabakki to contemporary theatre, Kerala's drama tradition has consistently highlighted issues of caste hierarchy, class struggle, and labour exploitation. One important reason theatre is so effective is its liveness unlike films, which audiences may forget after a short time, a live play creates an immediate emotional connection. The experience stays with the audience because they witness the suffering, resistance, and reality unfold right in front of them. I experienced this personally during a drama competition in Abu Dhabi. Almost every play performed there dealt with class differences and social inequality. When someone commented that audiences were expecting different themes, the response was simple but powerful: if all the plays today are about caste and class oppression, that itself is necessary. It shows how urgent and universal these issues are. Overall, drama is a unique art form because it is informative, thought-provoking, and entertaining at the same time. It not only reflects social realities but also pushes the audience to think critically about injustice,

making it one of the most effective mediums for addressing caste and class oppression.

2. What inspired you to choose the Chaappa system as the subject of this play?

   Ans) When I speak about the inspiration behind Chaappa, it began when we were planning to stage a play at St. Teresa's College, mainly for the MG University Kalolsavam. Since we decided to present a Chavittunadakam, I felt that it was not enough to perform just any play; it needed a clear and socially relevant idea. After much thought, the idea of portraying the Mattancherry struggle emerged.

   One major influence was Safdar Hashmi, a CPM activist who was killed by some goons while performing a street play against a factory. This incident made me think about what would happen if a similar event occurred in Kerala. That thought led me to connect theatre closely with real life. From there, the story developed around Antony Aashan, an actor, his daughter, and his wife, a family struggling with poverty, especially during a time when he fails to earn money through theatre.

   Antony initially performs plays to earn money so that his daughter can act in a new drama. However, as events unfold, he realizes that the injustice he experiences is not just personal but social. This realization pushes him towards the Mattanchery struggle. Eventually, theatre itself transforms for him, from a means of survival into a form of resistance and protest.

Another strong influence for the play came from my own lived experiences and the political atmosphere of my native place. Many people who directly witnessed the events during the struggle, including relatives, personally narrated their experiences to me. These real stories shaped the narrative deeply. Through Chaappa, I wanted to engage with contemporary politics and highlight that theatre artists must discuss life, struggle, and resistance as part of their art.

3. Why do you think the story of Chaappa is still relevant to today's society?

   Ans) The relevance of Chaappa in the contemporary period, as I see it, lies in what the story ultimately says about the life of an artist and society. In the story I have written, an artist can survive only if the society around him sustains him economically. When he is unable to earn a living through his art, he is forced to look for other forms of work. Yet, at the same time, the desire to continue creating art never leaves him. That inner conflict is central to the play.

   Towards the end, the play makes a strong statement: hunger is the greatest struggle. Even so, the drama insists on continuing to speak, to perform, and to resist. When we look at the concept of Chaappa, we realize that the condition it represents has not disappeared from our society. Even today, people remain trapped in the hands of intermediaries. This form of capitalism continues to exist, often in ways that are not immediately visible.

Those who benefit the most from this system are rarely the actual workers. For instance, in agriculture, the farmer does not receive the real profit; instead, it is the middleman who gains the most. These intermediaries occupy a powerful position between classes, influencing economic and social decisions. Even the changes within the middle class—whether positive or negative—are often shaped by such intermediary forces.

As a result, ordinary laborers are still forced to wander in search of work. Even today, I personally witness migrant workers from Tamil Nadu waiting by roadsides in the hope of getting daily wage jobs. Middlemen approach them, take them away for work, pay them around ₹1300, and keep ₹300–₹400 for themselves. I know Malayalis who are directly involved in such practices. Because of these continuing realities, Chaappa remains deeply relevant in our time.

4. What is the central message you wanted the audience to take from Chaappa?

   Ans) My intention was not to deliver a fixed message to the audience, but to express my art. I wanted the play to be experienced emotionally, allowing the audience to feel it and arrive at their own interpretations rather than being told what to think. . If we decide and say that the message is “hunger is the greatest struggle,” then that becomes only one way of thinking.

There is also the moment where the daughter goes to perform a folk play, and the mother tells her that when you perform, rhythm will always be with you. People living in that house experience life in that way. So like this, there are many layers. Because of that, the play gives me a good result by itself as it progresses.

That is why I feel a message should never be reduced or narrowed down. I am not capable of compressing the play into one single message.

5. How does Chaapa reflect the lives of marginalized communities in kerala's history?

   Ans)This is not that kind of play, and it is not that kind of programme. When we speak about the present idea of a marginalized community, this play is not primarily speaking against the caste system. Instead, it very clearly speaks about class. There is no doubt about that — it is a play that precisely identifies and represents the working class.

   The stories are carefully woven in such a way that they create awareness and a sense of direction among the working class. The intention is not to entertain the audience, but to make them think and reflect.

   Chavittunadakam comes from the lived experiences of people, especially from the poverty they experience in their own lives. What the actor expresses here is about suffering — about any person who goes through pain. It is about me, it is about this, it is about the artist himself.