



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



**A feathered visitor from Mongolia?**  
The eastern marsh harrier was in Chennai **P2**

**WHY PRINT PROJECTORS**  
**ARE MAKING A COMEBACK** **P4**

**Analytical play**  
(Clockwise from right) A game of boccia in progress; M Selvam takes aim; Lakshmi Prabha with her gold medal.  
THAMODHARAN B



## Eye on the prize

**Chennai's small but steadily growing** boccia community does not skip a Saturday training session and is winning laurels along the way

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Lakshmi Prabha smiles as she hands out bars of chocolate to the small group scattered around the auditorium at Vidya Sagar, an organisation that works with persons of disability, in Kotturpuram. The chairs have been pushed aside and trainer Sathish Kumar is moving about on his wheelchair, getting chalk lines marked on the wooden floor, for a court.

The sweet treats, laughter and chatter is a Saturday fixture for a small but growing community in Chennai that comes together to play boccia every week.

This Saturday, the treats are courtesy of Lakshmi's recent victory at the eighth Boccia National Championship in Gwalior. She holds up her gold medal, which she won in the individual category.

"This is a sport I can play comfortably from my wheelchair. I was thrilled to go to the Nationals and win," she says. "I come here every week and have made many friends," adds Lakshmi.

Boccia was first introduced in



1984 at the Paralympics in New York as a competitive sport and at present, is one among two sports in the world that does not have an Olympic counterpart. The sport can be played individually, as a pair, or as a team and has categories for the same. Over the last few years, organisations working with persons with disabilities across the country, have taken up the cause of this interesting sport.

Back in 2016, Rajiv Rajan, executive director, Ektha (a disabled peoples' organisation), and Sathish Kumar, the current boccia

programme coordinator, both from Chennai, embarked on a journey to make persons with disabilities in the city, aware of the existence of this Paralympic sport. They believed that boccia would be a turning point for people who were unable to do other activities independently.

"It was originally designed for people with cerebral palsy. At present however, persons with a wide range of disabilities who use wheelchairs, enjoy playing the sport," Sathish says. "There is a lot of mind, and hand-and-eye

coordination involved."

On the temporary court at Vidyasagar's auditorium, five players arrange themselves at one end. Armed with red and blue balls, the goal is for them to throw the balls as close as possible to a white ball on the floor. There are prolonged silences as each player takes their time to aim at the white ball, and loud cheers when the red and blue balls inch close to it.

A common refrain, among players like K Dharmesh (a



**Many wheelchair users like me, are eager to learn new things and this (boccia) is a great opportunity**

**TARIQ ANSAR**  
Boccia player

National-level athlete) is how they were unaware of boccia or how it is played. This was one of the first things that Ektha worked on addressing in 2016. "We had to popularise the sport. While we initially started off with spreading the word among persons with disabilities in Chennai, we also started conducting camps across Tamil Nadu, and other neighbouring states. We focus on special schools, to introduce boccia to children," Rajiv says.

### A thriving community

In Chennai, Ektha is the only organisation that currently trains aspiring players, and has around 40 active players. "I am sure there are at least 100 people in the city who will be interested, and can become great players with the right practice. We have introduced the game to around 1,000 wheelchair users in Tamil Nadu so far," says Sathish.



National-level games, like the recent tournament in Gwalior sees a participation of around 100 or more players from across India.

Over the years, several members from this growing community have won laurels. While there is a State-level tournament that Ektha organises, players from Chennai like Lakshmi Prabha are an integral part of National-level tournaments and have won trophies and medals many times. The sport has now become an important part of their lives.

Tariq Ansar, who was among the winners of the State-level boccia tournament last year, jokes about how people at his workplace know of his schedule, and are not surprised any more when he heads out of office early to make it to practice on Saturday. "When I initially heard of boccia, my parents were hesitant to even let me come for these training sessions as they hadn't heard of the sport. Many wheelchair users like me, are eager to learn new things and this is a great opportunity," he says, of the recognition that boccia has given him.

The community that plays boccia in Chennai also has a growing wish list. Rajiv says more sports facilities in the city need to be accessible for persons with disabilities. "The balls used to play boccia are not available in India and need to be imported. For persons who cannot use their hands, a specially built ramp is used which is very expensive. We do not have one and hence, aren't able to practise with the same," he says. Many of them travel long distances to get to these training sessions at Vidya Sagar. Accessible transport is another constant concern. All the training and participation in tournaments has been free so far, and for some players, Ektha has also worked on reimbursing their travel costs to training sessions.

There is one thing though that all of them who play agree on, that the weekly training sessions here have introduced them to some of their closest friends. There are hot samosas being passed around, after the training session is done.

He adds, "Our goal from the start has been to bring out persons with disabilities who are confined to their homes, train them and give them the opportunity to participate in tournaments. While this has definitely been possible, the camaraderie is also something we are thankful for as well."

The 10th edition of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival has an exciting line-up of events, including a boat ride through mangrove forests, a culinary trail, heritage walks, and more

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## Cultural cornucopia

The coastal town of Puducherry, often dubbed the Paris of the East, sees a huge influx of tourists on a weekly basis. The yellow and white buildings of French colonial architecture, artisanal cafés, and serene beaches, act as the perfect backdrop for one to break away from the monotony of life.

The essence of this quaint town lies in its heritage, and what better excuse than the 10th edition of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival (PHF) to do a deep dive.

The current edition of the festival will see a range of activities including a birdwatching and cycling tour, exhibition of handicrafts, photography exhibition, boat ride through the mangrove forests, culinary trail exploring the local food, heritage walks, street plays and dance performances.

"The wonderful ladies who had started the festival 10 years ago have taken a step back, and this is the year of a transition.



**Strokes of heritage** Pondicherry Sketchers at PHF 2024. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The baton is being handed over to a younger generation of volunteer-organisers" says Veda Aggarwal, one of the coordinators.

PHF celebrates the character of the town. The idea came from the tragic collapse of the Marie building (Town Hall) of Puducherry on November 29,

2014. Originally erected in 1870, the building housed the offices for the Mayor of Pondicherry.

The collapse sparked the realisation for the urgent need to preserve the heritage of Puducherry. This prompted the formation of a civil society group known as People for Pondicherry's Heritage (PPH),

which then led to the conception of PHF.

The inaugural festival took place in 2015 with an aim to draw attention to Puducherry's architectural legacy, its spiritual and intangible heritage.

Since then, the festival has become an annual event, organised jointly by PPH, INTACH Pondicherry, and PondyCAN.

"We do not have any sponsors or funding. The organisers are putting in their time and effort," Veda says, adding that some events will be free while others will have a registration fee.

The main objectives of the PHF are to foster a strong local identity, showcase the town's diversity to visitors, and provide a forum for experts to discuss preservation strategies. Puducherry's architectural blend of European and Tamil styles, poses unique challenges for preservation efforts, as both Government and private buildings contribute to its heritage.

**The Pondicherry Heritage Festival is on till March 3. For details on events and registrations, log on to pondicherryheritagefestival.in**

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**New bird on the block**  
The full-grown eastern marsh harrier. R KARTHIK

**City birder R Karthik recently spotted the eastern marsh harrier, a visitor from Mongolia, at Madurantakam. It also posed for his camera**

# Harrier says hello

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It is just the thing every birder hopes for: the sighting of a rare feathered friend. For city birder R Karthik, it was the eastern marsh harrier. He spotted it two weeks ago at Madurantakam lake near Vedanthangal. “This is the first time a full-grown bird of the species was spotted in the region,” says Karthik, who shared the information with fellow birders, all equally thrilled to hear the news. “This bird can be usually sighted in South Korea and Taiwan, and there is no record of it so far in Chennai.” Karthik, who regularly visits Madurantakam for birding, spotted the raptor late in the evening, when there was hardly any light. “It was roosting between the tall grass at the grassland inside the lake,” he points out, adding that he had around 10 minutes to shoot pictures of it. “I did so with great difficulty since it is a shy bird. Also, other harriers and drongos were chasing it since it looked different from regular visitors at the lake.” The eastern marsh harrier is a

migratory bird. “It had travelled from Mongolia in October, entering India through Assam, passing through West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh before flying into Tamil Nadu, mostly taking the route along the shore over the Bay of Bengal,” explains Karthik. The bird makes this long journey in search of food since it is too cold to hunt at its place of origin during this time of the year. “Chennai is its last stop, and its return migration has begun,” Karthik points out, adding that he initially shared the information only among serious birders since he did not want the habitat to be invaded by crowds. “Now that it is going back, birders in states such as Odisha and Andhra Pradesh can try to spot it too,” he says. Sighting the eastern marsh harrier is not easy. Karthik, who has been birding since 2010, says that this is possible only for experienced birders, mainly because the bird comes to roost towards dusk, when light is low. He shares that he also spotted the pied harrier around the same time which is another rare bird that has flown in from South Korea.



# Fusion flavours in a wok

**Set at VR Mall, Tapasme offers European and Asian menus, serving up dimsum, pide and cocktails**

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On the nights that you are tempted to break-free from the dreariness of the everyday, there is nothing quite as comforting as digging into a warm bowl of egg fried rice and chilli chicken. Today, there is no dearth of choices if you want the Asian dine-in experience in Chennai, from Korean bbq to good old Indo-Chinese. Tucked away in a corner of VR Chennai mall in Anna Nagar is the latest addition to the city’s burgeoning Asian food scene. There are warm orange lights on the wall, wood accents, cosy cane furniture by the bar, and soft music playing, perfect for an evening of drinks, conversation and sushi at Tapasme. With the focus on wanting to offer something for every palette, Tapasme’s extensive menu has a

blend of European and Asian options. It includes dimsum, sushi, and hot pots alongside pastas, pizzas, and pides (Turkish flatbreads). “We want to offer a different dining experience with European and Asian cuisine and a cosy ambience. People can just walk in, sit and relax with a drink,” says K Balachandar, who is one among six partners for Tapasme. When asked what sets Tapasme apart from the many Asian dining options across the city, Balachandar says their food and ambience will be the main draw. “In Chennai, people are ready to travel for food and I expect people to keep coming back to dine here. The restaurant’s location is inside a mall too, we’re hoping, will give us footfall,” he adds. To go with your meal, the alcohol menu has a few interesting cocktail options. The Harmony Highball, which brings together whiskey, lime juice, jaggery, cinnamon syrup and ginger ale is fizzy and light. But we prefer the more heady Jazzed Up – a gin cocktail with martini fiero, triple sec, soda and gin.



First on the platter to taste, is a crunchy Thai raw mango and avocado salad, followed by a Thai seafood salad with a sweet and spicy sauce. Seafood is tricky to get right, but Tapasme manages this across all the Asian dishes we sample. The Sichuan style crispy prawn, the sunshine sushi with prawn and salmon, and an offbeat tuna pizza– with tuna and jalapenos on thin slivers of tortilla, with a wasabi mayo are all delectable. The savoury Prawn Har Gao dim sum however, is my pick from the seafood line up. Stuffed with juicy, small prawns, they come plated on a yellow curry sauce with sprigs of fresh basil. **Elevated comfort food** Tapasme also gets the basics right. Their Thai basil chicken fried rice is perfectly representative of Asian comfort food. From among their more elaborate main course offerings, we sample the Indonesian lamb rendang curry with roti prata. Plated theatrically, the meat is succulent and the flaky pratas are the perfect accompaniment. Compared to their vibrant Asian flavours, their European fare does not stand out as much. The pollo-de-bufala, is generously coated in a spicy tomato sauce and blue cheese dressing, but the flavours feel too overwhelming. The pides, or Turkish flatbread too are not as tasty as the inventive tortilla pizzas we sample earlier. We end the night on a rather dramatic note with the tub tim grob or sweet coconut cream and rose dessert which arrives in a cloud of dry ice fog. Given how the restaurant wants its patrons to sit down for a relaxed dinner, Tapasme’s dishes are best enjoyed as a group of at least four, given the extensive menu and generous portions of their main courses. A leisurely dining experience at Tapasme, with its Asian flavours and cocktails, feels like a welcome addition to the mall and after some heavy-duty weekend retail therapy. **@VR Chennai Mall. Tapasme opens on March 2. A meal for two including alcohol, approximately costs ₹2,500. Contact 9092282727 for reservations.**

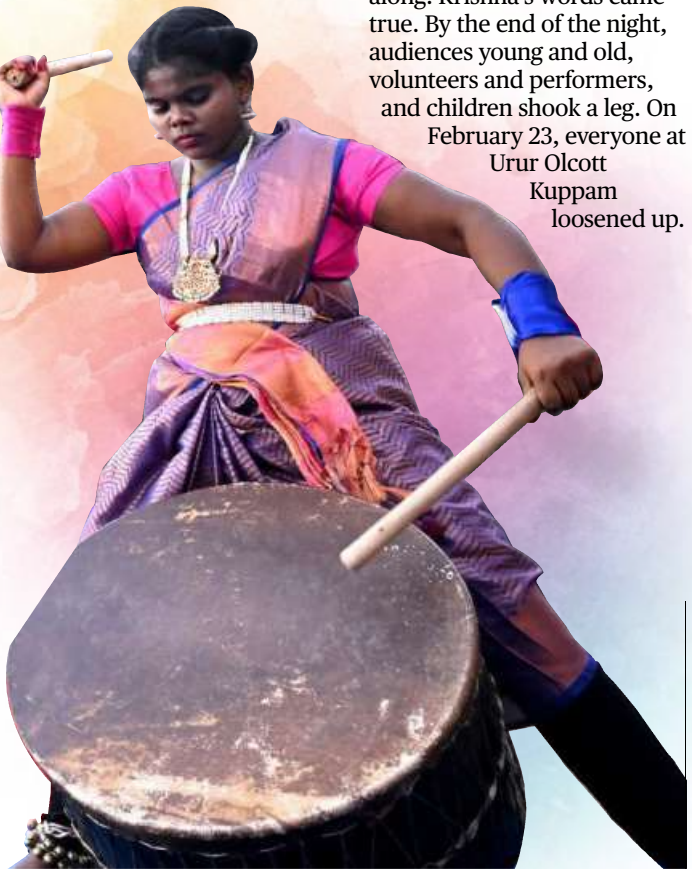


**Musical evening** (Clockwise from left) Villu paatu by students of Olcott School; a performance by Motta Maadi Music; parai attam by the students of Avvai Home. THAMODHARAN B



only for one evening, everybody loosens up. The stage here is part of the audience, and so the energy is completely different. There is laughter, fun, banter, and food,” said Krishna as he waited in line at the *bajji* stall. S Palayam, a *marathukaarar* (hook-and-line fisher) from Urur kuppam, performed some

‘songs of the ocean’ known as amba paatu. His recital narrated stories from the sea, where fisherfolk would sing to keep their spirits up on rough waters. The end to this lively festival was drawn by a sing-along concert by Motta Maadi Music. They performed a range of cinema songs while the audience danced and sang along. Krishna’s words came true. By the end of the night, audiences young and old, volunteers and performers, and children shook a leg. On February 23, everyone at Urur Olcott Kuppam loosened up.



# Waves, serenades

**Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha returned to the shores of Besant Nagar beach after six years with spirited performances and sing-alongs**

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The aroma of the salty sea breeze, milky tea and freshly-fried bajjis, welcomed guests who greeted each other like old friends at the Ururu Olcott Kuppam Vizha. Overheard as the slow building crowd settled, were words of nostalgia. One could hear the beats of Chandrasekara Sharma’s ghatam in preparation for singer TM Krishna’s performance as the waves crashed rhythmically in the distance. Back after six years, this counter-culture festival by Besant Nagar beach, saw sonorous sing-alongs to film songs by Motta Maadi Music and spirited performances of parai aatam, villu paatu, amba music and Krishna’s Carnatic music on February 23. The venue for this crowd-funded

festival, was the Ellaiamman temple where a make-shift stage was set up against the backdrop of the gopuram in construction. R Sundaramurthy, one of the lead organisers, arrived on stage, now beautifully set up, to announced the start of the festival. The evening began with parai attam by students of Avvai Home. Parai attam is traditionally performed only by men. This all-girl crew effortlessly wielded the instrument, made of animal hide, with elan. They left the stage, with cheers from friends and family, having literally drummed up the excitement for the acts to follow. The students of Olcott School came next, settling down with their bow-shaped instrument, the villu, for a spirited performance. Traditionally, villu paatu is used to entertain and educate people in rural communities,

passing down cultural and moral values through oral storytelling. At the vizha, the students recited stories and learnings from the *Thirukural*. Soon, the stage was set for the most awaited performance of the evening. TM Krishna took the stage along with HN Bhaskar (violin), TRS Manikandan (mridangam), Sunil Kumar (kanjira) and Chandrasekara Sharma (ghatam). Residents of the area crowded balconies and rooftops around the temple to catch a glimpse of the performers. Krishna performed a number of songs, among which was the first Carnatic song written about the Urur Olcott Kuppam. “This song was written by my friend [author] Perumal Murugan about this very fishing village,” he said on stage as he launched into the melodic song. “The vibe is brilliant. I loved it. Even if it is temporary and

## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13574

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### Across

- 1 Verbal pedant (6)
  - 4 Total — number (6)
  - 8 Imaginary place for forgotten things (5)
  - 9 Packing stuff (7)
  - 10 Declare unfit for use (7)
  - 11 Picturesque and peaceful scene (5)
  - 12 Vanish (9)
  - 17 Starting point (5)
  - 19 Carve up (7)
  - 21 When the sun is directly above the equator (7)
  - 22 Propose for discussion (5)
  - 23 Jumble (6)
  - 24 Light-hearted (6)
- ### Down
- 1 Plan of action (6)
  - 2 Ron came (anag) — court (7)
  - 3 Bit of rock (5)
  - 5 Kind of wine or cake (7)
  - 6 Make one (5)
  - 7 Kind of electric switch (6)
  - 9 Plant container on a sill

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.



- (6,3)
- 13 Armoury (7)
- 14 Show off (7)
- 15 Not here (6)
- 16 Zephyr (6)
- 18 Turn down scornfully (5)
- 20 Add up (5)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated March 7, 2024.

**Solution No. 13573**

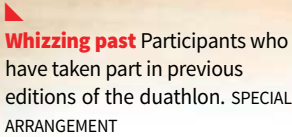
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## Braille on wheels

National Association for the Blind and Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC) organise the 33rd edition of Brailles on Wheels car rally. Every car will have a visually impaired navigator who guides and collaborates on the rally route with the driver and the passenger-team in the car. @Savera Hotel, Mylapore. March 3. Flag off by 9am. Prior registration is mandatory. For details and fee, call 9841079163.





**Ready to put  
your fitness to  
test? WCCG  
Aalam Deepam  
Duathlon's fifth  
edition is back on  
March 10**

**W**hen the fourth edition of WCCG's (Chennai Cycling Group) Aalam Deepam Duathlon took place in 2023, the city was still reeling from the grip of the pandemic. Participants who had registered for this event, raced virtually and solitarily to the whirr of their cycle chain.

One year hence, this fitness event is back in Chennai. This time, participants do not have to ride solo. With their colourful helmets and sipper bottles, the athletes will have the opportunity to line up outside Mayajaal on the East Coast Road on March 10 for their first in-person race.

a 10-kilometre run followed by a 40-kilometre ride. Participants can choose to tag along with a teammate for both these categories where one will be

CM  
YK



Print projection is making a comeback at a few city theatres, which plan to re-release hit Tamil films

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Ajith will woo Simran, and Vijay will sing a song for Richa Pallod. This March, it is time to go back in time and revisit some memorable old Tamil films on the big screen. At Chennai's GK Cinemas, March is going to be exciting because of multiple reasons. But a brand new release featuring a big star is not one of them.

"With exams around the corner, this has traditionally been a bad month for cinema, and thus, we usually have re-releases that fetch us footfall," explains Ruban Mathivanan of GK Cinemas. This time, however, he has reason to celebrate: not only will he showcase a special playback series, but he has also enabled his main screen with a print projector, thus bringing back to theatres a technology that has not been in vogue in the last decade or so. "I was lucky that my father

# Back to the Nineties



had stored the old print projectors carefully. But we had to put a lot of time and effort in getting it to shape as finding spare parts were tough." At the forefront of this playback series at GK Cinemas is S Kamalakannan, who has been its theatre operator for the last 12 years. Kamalakannan has been part of various theatre projector rooms since 1984 and has seen the winds of change. "It's nice to handle a machine I have handled when I was much younger," says Kamalakannan, even as he feeds a film reel into it, "I'm looking forward to seeing how today's audiences react to the print and sound quality of these films." After a year of working on it, Ruban is ready to showcase films on it. He hopes to play *Minsara Kanavu*, the 1997 film starring Aravind Swami, Kajol and Prabhu Deva, and

Reel life GK Cinemas' theatre operator S Kamalakannan; (right) Ruban Mathivanan. S SHIVA RAJ

Ajith-starrer *Kaadhal Mannan*, among others. "I'm also trying to source a print of *Lesa Lesa*," he says. With tickets priced at ₹80, these re-releases hope to evoke nostalgia among older audiences and provide a new experience for younger audiences who are used to consuming films played through digital projectors. The re-releases trend has clicked big-time among fans of Tamil cinema, who caught up with the release of films such as *Aalavandan*, *Baba* and



*Vaaranam Aayiram*, among others. However, it is a "passing fad", as Ruban points out. "The selection of films is vital. If you observe carefully, it is films such as 3 and *Vaaranam Aayiram* that have done exceedingly well – and that's because of chartbuster songs in them." Elsewhere in Chennai, Vadapalani's Kamala Cinemas is also gearing up to dish out some nostalgia. They have revived print projection as well, and hope to fulfil the requests of audiences who are eager to catch a few Tamil classics. Fans are looking forward to these sweeping changes in theatres, which are already grappling with multiple issues owing to the lack of big films and entry of OTT platforms. The day a re-release equals the footfall of a new release is not too far, according to some theatre owners. Says Ruban, "If I get to screen Rajinikanth's *Padayappa* or Kamal Haasan's *Kuruthipunal*, I'm sure they will give new releases a run for their money."



## Joshua is here

Varun, who plays the lead in Gautham Menon's upcoming film, on the various factors involved in its making

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"Go with the flow. Don't plan too much or have any expectations." This principle is something you hear actor Varun mention quite a few times as he speaks about his journey with *Joshua: Imai Pol Kaakha*, directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon, which is releasing this Friday after being in the making for five years. Excerpts from a conversation:

**Question:** Can you take us through why *Joshua: Imai Pol Kaakha* got delayed and how you handled it?  
**Answer:** We started shooting for *Joshua* when Gautham sir was committed to doing *Vendhu Thanindhathu Kaadu*. Enai Nokki Paayum Thota was in post-production and he was working on *Dhruva Natchathiram* as well. So we could plan a schedule only based on his availability. In 2020, just as we were about to go to the US to shoot a long, pivotal schedule, the pandemic-induced lockdown spoiled our plans. After that, Gautham sir had to do *Vendhu Thanindhathu Kaadu*. Then came a delay in the post-production of *Joshua* as the CGI output didn't match the international standards with which we had shot the movie. Gautham sir wanted *Dhruva Natchathiram* to release first but as that didn't happen for whatever reasons, we decided to release *Joshua*. This was quite a difficult journey because what else could you do when you cannot be certain of something? What I realised in this journey is that time, luck

and hard work should all fall in place for something to happen.  
**Q:** From the trailer, the film looks like an actioner in the same vein as BBC's *Bodyguard*...  
**A:** I play a hitman in the UK who falls in love with Kundhavi Chidambaram, a woman whom he is assigned to protect as a bodyguard. Usually, a hitman is depicted as a normal, rugged-looking muscle-for-hire – it's the cliché, so I wasn't sure what sir was going for. That's when he showed me some references, like *John Wick*, *Extraction*, and so on. *Joshua* is a quirky, unique version of a hitman, and Gautham sir had nuanced details about who this guy is.

**Q:** You have worked with a director who has been in the industry for over two decades and has a following of his own. Was there pressure to prove yourself?  
**A:** Initially, I was like, 'No matter what, Gautham sir has to like my performance'. But after a week, I realised that it wasn't enough. A film is a collective process of creating a magical moment that the audience should enjoy.

**Q:** The many postponements in the release of *Dhruva Natchathiram* seem to have unfairly affected the hype around *Joshua*...  
**A:** With *Joshua*, Gautham sir only came in to direct the film and uncle (Ishari Ganes) produced the film. With other films like *Dhruva Natchathiram*, Gautham sir had also produced them and there were some burden on him as well. So, there is no uncertainty about *Joshua*'s release in theatres. I am sure this will be a treat for all fans of Gautham Menon.



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