

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE



In *Between The Lines*, Nandita Das and Subodh Maskara play an educated, affluent couple, caught between modernity and tradition

THEATRE REVIEW

Play : *Between The Lines*
Directed by : Nandita Das
Duration : 105 minutes
Cast : Nandita Das and Subodh Maskara
Language : English
Rating : ★★★

Purvaja Sawant

Unlike mainstream Indian cinema, where *masala* entertainers rule the roost, Indian theatre prefers exploring and toying with scripts that deal with the complexities of married couples. In a sea of such stories, some realistic and some absurd, another drama, *Between The Lines* makes its way to the stage. A chronicle of an urban couple's relationship, it explores the bold theme of gender inequality — how it plagues even the so-called 'affluent upper middle-class'.

Maya (Nandita Das) an educated woman is happily married to a high-profile criminal lawyer, Shekhar (Subodh Maskara) for ten years. While the ambitious Shekhar is busy winning court cases, Maya balances her home, their son Arjun and work (she drafts routine contracts for a law firm), like many urban Indian women. One day, she gets offered a case (her first) to defend a woman, who has shot her husband and as luck would have it, she has to fight it against Shekhar. To find her bearings as a lawyer and get justice for the accused, she takes up the case. But as Maya and Shekhar battle in court during the trial, their personal relationship starts getting affected too...

Sounds like a simple plot — but it's not. Written by Nandita and Divya Jagdale, the idea originated from a play written by Prof. Purushottam Agarwal and is complex in many parts. The script and its execution is such

that most men in the audience will find the play powerfully feminist, while the women will relate to the ambiguous inner struggle they have to face daily, when it comes to prioritising between their family and work. Thankfully, the hero of *Between The Lines* is its premise. It shows us that while in urban families, men might not resort to wife-beating and other obvious and crude inequalities, sexism is so deeply and subconsciously rooted in our thinking that we always give a man's need priority. Even the most cultured and educated amongst us!

Maya's character is complex because of its many layers and Nandita, quite expectantly, essays her well. But Subodh's debut as an actor is surprising. For his first stage performance, he is confident and at-ease. He makes for a charming husband cum criminal lawyer, thus providing comic relief, in an otherwise thought-provoking play. Intermittently, both Nandita and Subodh, who are a real-life married couple, double up as courtroom characters, making the switch smoothly.

Two fine performances, some great dialogues, sporadic laughs and plenty of thoughts — *Between The Lines* leaves you with all this and more. On the downside, you may find the narrative not unlike art films. Some scenes are stretched longer than necessary, with extensive monologues — nothing that some crisp editing can't fix. With her first directorial theatre debut, Nandita has proved that she's here to stay.

POOR★ | AVERAGE★★ | GOOD★★★ | VERY GOOD★★★★ | OUTSTANDING★★★★★