

Applause

Nandita Das' play
*Between the
Lines* unravels the
fragile bond that
binds human
relationships



PG

50

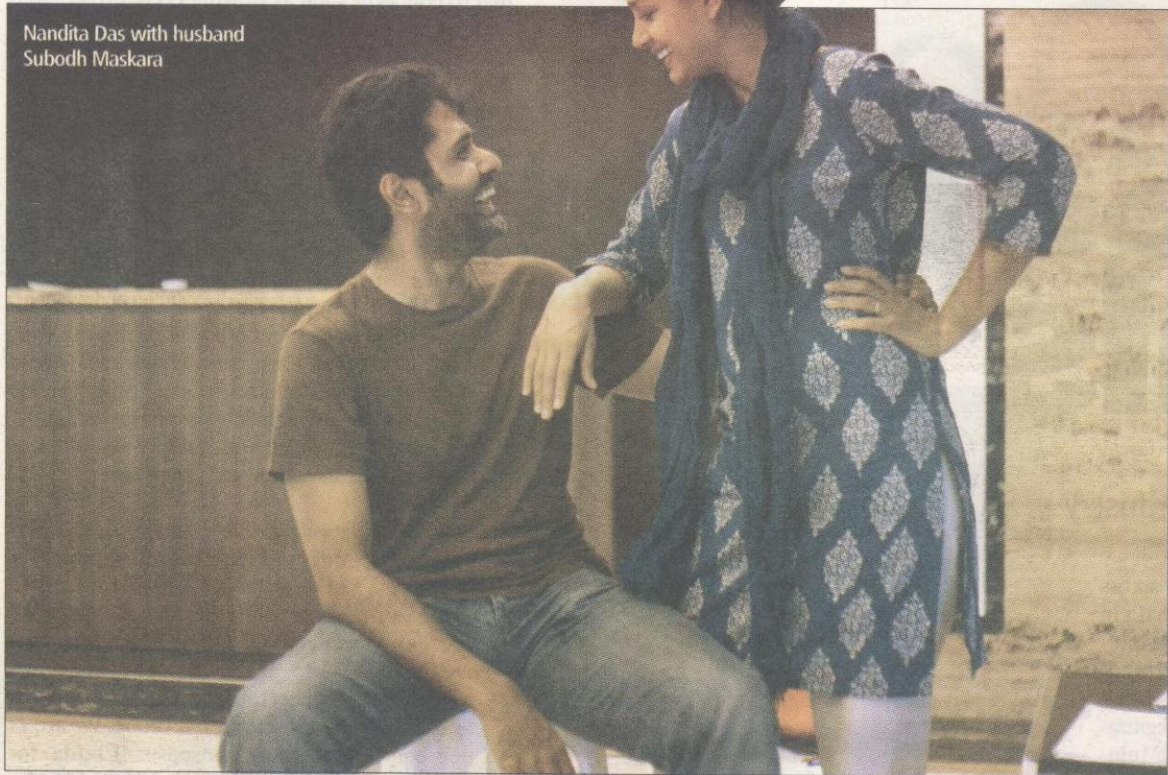
Nandita Das with husband
Subodh Maskara

Photo :Avani Rai

A small beginning

Between The Lines explores the nuances and the fine thread that binds relationships

By **Farida Khanzada**

Writer-director-actor-social activist, Nandita Das has donned many hats and believes in doing the unexpected. Presently the actor is working on a two-actor play titled *Between The Lines*.

The play marks the acting debut of her husband Subodh Maskara, who also oversees the financial aspect of their company, Chhoti Production Company. Das is busy going through the nitty-gritty of rehearsals, looking into minute details, besides directing her husband in their first play, which premieres in Ahmedabad on September 30. Opening at Mallika Sarabhai's, Darpana Theatre Festival, Das is quite looking forward to it.

Relationship being the focus of the play, it delves into the lives of a lawyer couple who have been married for ten years. Subodh plays the role of a high profile criminal lawyer, Shekhar. While Nandita essays the role of Maya, who balances work and her wifely duties by drafting routine contracts for a law firm. By a quirk of fate, the couple end up on opposite sides of a murder case. The play vividly brings into fore the effect professional life wreaks on the personal space of the couple who find themselves on the opposite side of the fence.

Nandita explains, "There is nothing more fascinating to me than human relationships, and *Between The Lines* peels, layer by layer, what is said and what remains unsaid in a couple's relationship. Urban affluent India is caught between modernity and tradition. Contrary to common perception, gender inequality is present. Today the woman is still expected to look after the house, besides juggling her career. The play intends to raise many questions, answering a few, and hopes to leave the audience with many lingering thoughts."

The germ of the idea, to capture the idiosyncrasies of relationship, stemmed years back when Das had read a script by playwright Purshottam Agarwal. When I saw the script, I felt that it had the potential to be dramatised," she says. The project, however, took a back seat with the birth of her son Vihaan and the onerous task of being the chairperson of

the Children's Film Society of India.

After several brainstorming sessions with her co-writer Divya Jagdale, the concept took shape. "The play has gone through several revisions and many of our personal stories have been weaved in. The challenge was to strike a chord without being preachy, and witty without being frivolous. It's true to life and therefore I feel it will resonate with a lot of people," says Nandita.

Unable to stay away from the thrill and drama, Das who is back to theatre after a hiatus of eight years, is both excited and nervous. She admits, "At times I am not so fearless! It is challenging to embark on a journey that has so many firsts. For the first time, I am writing and directing a play and Sub-

There is nothing more fascinating to me than human relationships, and *Between the Lines* peels, layer by layer, what is said and what remains unsaid in a couple's relationship

odh is acting and producing it. I have always done things that have grabbed me at different times. It is exciting to explore a new medium and play with it. I have never planned my work and things have happened rather organically. I hope to continue doing that."

Moving towards that end, the husband-wife duo look at their production company as a vehicle to express themselves and bring quality productions to the audience, while exploring different mediums. Maskara says that they are looking forward to "working with talented people and do work that is financially viable without compromising on quality."

The play will later be staged in Mumbai on October 6 and 7 at the Tata Theatre. In Bangalore on October 19, New Delhi, October 20 and Gurgaon, October 21. It will be staged in Kolkata and once again in Mumbai at the Prithvi Theatre Festival.

farida.khanzada@expressindia.com