

Stage of Life

Marriage and motherhood have prompted Nandita Das' debut as playwright and theatre director

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Nandita Das and husband Subodh Maskara play a married couple in *Between the Lines*

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AT the time she planned to launch a company that would promote performing arts, Nandita Das was pregnant. So, along with husband Subodh Maskara, the actor-filmmaker decided to name the company Chhoti — an affectionate Hindi word for a little girl — after their awaited child. That they eventually had a baby boy did not affect their decision, but Das' life post marriage and the birth of her son Vihaan — who is two years old now — has prompted her foray into theatre in many ways.

Chhoti's first production is a play, *Between the Lines*, which also marks Das' debut as a playwright and theatre director. "I was a free-spirited woman all my life who could balance work and personal life. Marriage and motherhood came with sudden responsibilities, which I was struggling to cope with. It was the perfect time to write and direct a play," says Das. A businessman otherwise, Das' husband Maskara will also debut as an actor with the play.

An informal music session at Gallery Maskara last week marked a prelude to the play, with Das and Maskara, who is also her partner in Chhoti, in presence. The musical duo Electric Monsoon, who has composed the score for *Between the Lines*, set the tone for the play by performing at the gallery. The play will premiere on October 6 and 7 in Mumbai at the Tata Theatre, NCPA, and will travel to Ahmedabad, Bangalore,

Gurgaon, Delhi, Kolkata and later to Dhaka in Bangladesh.

While Das is enjoying motherhood, she also acknowledges her desire to channelise the complex emotions that the new phase has brought. However, she chose theatre over films as a medium despite the comfort of familiarity they offer. "It's more personal and appeared truer to life. There's also lesser accountability in case of failure as compared to films," she says.

Between the Lines is about a couple married for 10 years, both lawyers, who find each other battling out at either sides of the court. And as their private and professional lives blur, they struggle to find balance in their lives.

While writing the play, Das amply drew from various couples she met in her life, but, the core of it, she says, remains universal to modern-day urban couples. "Our grandmothers used to live a certain kind of life, they had specific division of labour, roles to play; today while grappling with both traditional and modern norms we end up being in the middle," she adds.

Quite literally, the play remains deeply personal, with Das and Maskara as the only two actors. "He is spontaneous, but of course, doesn't have experience. So I have to keep this in mind during rehearsals; both of us have to click to make the play work," says Das, who shares the playwright credit with Divya Jagdale.