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## City Lights

### Footprints in the sand



Inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Suman Ghosh's debut film *Padakkhep* (*Footsteps*) tells the tale of an unusual bond of friendship that develops between an old and retired man and a five-year-old girl that helps him discover life afresh.

Soumitra Chatterjee plays Shashanka Palit, an aged man who lives in Calcutta with his daughter (Nandita Das). Disillusioned by the current Calcutta milieu and a growing rift with his daughter, he connects with five-year-old Trisha who returns to the city with her parents after having been in the US since birth.



"The common thread that binds the two is the crisis that both face in search of company," explains Ghosh.

The storyline is simplistic with a running narrative. The film is split into three segments that are inter-related. Each section is preceded by a title that acts as a precursor to the story that traces the entire cycle of a man's life.

Soumitra Chatterjee, Tota Roy Chowdhury, June and Nandita Das with child artiste Shweta Dutta in *Padakkhep*; (left) a moment from the film

"Unlike the original story which borders on chimerical lines of a child born as an 80-year-old who grows younger chronologically, *Padakkhep* has a realistic framework. There comes a time when it is difficult to distinguish the protagonist from the child mainly

because old age is a phase that is closest to childhood," says Ghosh, who had previously directed the documentary *Amartya Sen: A Life Re-examined*, on the Nobel Laureate.

A professor of economics and management at the Florida Atlantic University, Ghosh completed his graduation in economics from Presidency College before moving on to the Delhi School of Economics and Cornell University in New York for a Ph.D. It was his passion for films that later pushed him to pursue a diploma in filmmaking from the Film Institute at Cornell.

It was during the filming of *Dekha* that Ghosh, as an assistant to director Goutam Ghosh, met Soumitra Chatterjee. "The idea for the film was always in my head and after my interactions with Soumitrada I knew that he was the right one for the role. Nandita was also my first and final choice because we had been friends for some time and I know that she's comfortable with Bengali given her past experience of working with Mrinal Sen and Rituparno Ghosh," says Ghosh.

For Chatterjee, the role is "quite special". "I play a retired widower who journeys towards a second childhood. My bond with a kid brings out the child in me and frees me of my loneliness. My character is very meticulously etched out and the cinematic treatment is quiet and introspective..."

Apart from Soumitra and Nandita, the cast includes Tota Roychowdhury, June, Sabitri Chatterjee and child artiste Shweta Dutta. Ghosh has been touring around Canada and the US for the past four months for the world premiere of *Padakkhep* at the Vancouver International Film Festival followed by special screenings of his debut film at the Seattle Film Festival, Atlanta Film Festival and the Indo-American Film Festival at New York.

"We had three screenings at Vancouver which played to a full house. Not just the non-resident Bengalis but most of the foreigners who attended the festival loved the film. They also recognised Soumitra Chatterjee because of his association with Satyajit Ray's films," said Atlanta-based Ghosh, who intends to promote and screen the film in various cities in the US after the Calcutta release on January 19.

Music for the Bangla Talkies production has been scored by US-based Mayookh Bhaumik and the editing has been done by his brother Mainak Bhaumik, who has directed *Aamra*.

Mohua Das

