STAGE 2

Nandita Das tells her Podokkhep director Suman Ghosh about life, people and catharsis What
would you like to ask Nandita Das? Tell t2@abp.in

Suman: It's been six years since we shot
Podokkhep. You have not been in a Bengali f
scared you enough so that you decided to stay away.

Nandita: (Laughs out loud) No no… it's nothing like
that at all. We have remained friends ever since,
haven't we? You see a lot of things happened in my life
since then.

Suman: If you can jot down briefly how life has
changed for you in the last six years.

Nandita: We shot for Podokkhep in 2006 and then of
course the entire 2007-2008 I was busy with Firaaq. It was a wonderful experience since I
got to travel to a lot of festivals around the world. You travel enough with your films in
festivals so you know what an enriching experience it is. It strengthens our belief as to
whether a particular work of art is universal. Then in 2009 I met Subodh. Then I shifted to
Bombay. I got married again which I had thought I would never do since I had lost faith in
the institution of marriage. I had my child Vihaan. So a lot of these things suddenly
happened.

Simultaneously I was offered the chairperson of the Children's Film Society of India. I was
continuing to write my monthly column. I was doing my speaking engagements. So I was
juggling a lot. I left some projects though. I was supposed to do Deepa Mehta's Midnight's
Children but when Vihaan was just six months old I could not leave him and go for the
shoot. So in a sense I was juggling a lot.

Suman: How did being a mother change you?

Nandita: It impacted me spiritually, personally and psychologically in a deep way. I was
looking at children outside the car in a different light. My own understanding and
sensitivity — whether it was my child or towards other children — changed in a significant
way. There are so many things which my child will ask about the world to me…. I have to
prepare him for that. Maybe I don't know a lot of the answers. You know this play
(Between The Lines) also emerged out of all these contradictions in my life. I am like
Maya of my play who after 10 years of her marriage with Shekhar faces upto these
questions.

Suman: As a woman who has fought over the years for many social causes, been one of
India's truly international actors, travelled all around the world with your talks, now leading
a happily married life, both as a wife and mother, and performing and directing this play,
Nandita Das seems to have it all. How much of all this is pre-planned?

Nandita: It’s not planned at all actually. I don’t know whether I will say that things
happened to me or whether those things happened as a result of the choices I have
made. You know if you make certain choices then those lead to different paths opening up
for which you make more choices and this is how life has evolved for me. But I have never
planned my life. At any particular point of time I have done what are my priorities and
interest then and I have followed that. When I did Firaaq everything took a back seat. Now
when I am doing this play everything is taking a back seat — but of course Vihaan is my
utmost priority now. But I am not one who feels guilty about balancing these things. A lot
of these find a place in my play. I am finding my catharsis through the play. And you know
Suman, you say that I have achieved all in my life but there are friends and well-wishers

who think I have missed the bus. They think I should have done more commercial work. So different people have different perceptions which depend on their world view. I just think it’s a journey and I have enjoyed this journey. I have no ambitions at all and I try to live for the moment.

Suman: Let me tell you why I like you as a friend so much. You have such an all-engrossing world view, strong beliefs and convictions about a lot of things, an individual point of view, not cowering down to market forces. We have often disagreed and argued about a lot of things, but that’s healthy. All these things I find a rarity. My question is from where does this come?

Nandita: I think a lot has to do with my parents. Both of them had strong convictions and were objective and correct in a lot of ways — which is not very common. They are both very upright in their work. They have never compromised without knowing all the ‘isms’ and the political jargon of things. So I grew up knowing that and respecting that much more organically. Then this whole thing about working in street theatre for Jana Natya Manch while I was in college. Slowly I got exposed to other realities outside my sphere. And I realised that people who I admired were those who made choices out of conviction and not to show anybody. Today everything is so much about marketing. But my conviction gives me courage to do what I do in my life.

Suman: Two people who both of us have been very close to and admired — and I remember our addas together with them — are Amartya Sen and Soumitra Chatterjee. What attracts you towards them?

Nandita: I think they are the same reasons what attracts you to them also. I think there is such a genuineness in both of them. Especially in today’s world just interacting at a human level is such a rarity. These are such people who never wear that baggage of their statures. They have so much history behind them but they are really so childlike in a sense. They are still on a journey — they are still exploring the world, they still laugh at the loveliest of things, they become emotional about a lot of things… they have thus retained their childlikeness. That is so inspirational and I think there is nothing more attractive than goodness. Their company not only stimulates the mind but actually warms your heart.

Suman: What do you regret in life when you look back?

Nandita: There are regrets regarding certain things which did not happen. Workwise I still regret that Rituparno Ghosh after promising me Chokher Bali did not take me or the same thing about Water with Deepa Mehta. But do I sit back and regret? No. These are small things in the larger space. I always think that I have made decisions taking into account the information I had at that point of time. So I don’t sit back and badger myself about past decisions. I feel privileged at the opportunity to travel and meet new people. I have believed in living simple and my work has taken me to different parts of the world. That has enriched me as a person. Life and people.

A QUICK CHAT WITH SUBODH

Subodh, how has your stage sojourn been so far?

It has been the roller-coaster ride of a lifetime. Full of excitement and fear, fun and apprehension, screams of joy and cries of frustration. But after having been through all this I can say it is one of the best experiences of my life so far.

Did you have any past experience on stage?

No, this is my first play. Mahesh Dattani and Waman Kendre introduced me to the craft of acting. The workshops made me appreciate the effort and dedication required to be an actor. I realised that if I had any aspiration to be an actor, then it would be among the toughest assignments that I would take on.

How did you get roped in?

My decision to give up full-time corporate life coincided with the birth of Vihaan and at that time I wanted to focus my attention on spending time with him and Nandita. What was meant to be a three-month sabbatical has now become a permanent way of life. The experiences and personal growth I have had in the time away from corporate life is far greater and richer. I am glad that I have Nandita to expose me to a different world and I am looking it and credit goes to her for encouraging me and seeing an actor in me. The fact that Nandita believed in me made me take the plunge. Initially it was a romantic idea that we would rehearse at home and travel the world with our son. However that was quickly forgotten as we both realised the effort to stage a play is far greater than what we had imagined. However, like I said, looking back it has all been worth it.

What’s it been like, acting with and being directed by your wife?

Nandita is a very intuitive person. As a director, she is both patient and persistent. Her directorial debut Firaaq is on my Top Ten list of favourite movies. So, my respect for her
as a director was already firmly established. What I like about her is that she will listen to
everybody, but take her own call. I also drew on my personal experiences to flesh out the
character. Acting is a practical art, so I have no choice but to learn by acting itself.

Will we get to see more of you on stage or screen?

I am in theatre and all forms of creative expression for the long haul. In fact I was always
motivated by creativity and even when I was in business, I tried to be creative in the kind
of businesses and the way I did them. I think this is a deeper and more personal
expression of creativity and I am looking forward to theatre becoming a very integral part
of my life.

MD

Between The Lines will be staged at GD Birla Sabhagar on October 27 & 28, 6.30pm.
Tickets at www.indianstage.in, Spandan office, Kookie Jar outlets & the venue