

# SPREADING HER WINGS

**Deepshikha Bhattacharyya**  
deepshikha.bhattacharyya  
@hindustantimes.com

**J**ournalist-turned-teacher **Subhashini Dinesh's** debut novel *My Iron Wings* (Palimpsest Publishing House, R 599) is the story of a Tamilian Brahmin girl and her rebellion against the

SAMIR JANA

system. Maya, an aspiring journalist whose parents are looking for a match for her, finds the unjustness of the whole arrangement humiliating. Why doesn't the boy's side send his pictures for her to decide? Why don't her parents have the privilege of rejecting a bridegroom? HT City caught up with Subhashini about the book. Excerpts:

## **Tell us more about the novel.**

There are three plots in this novel. The first plot is about the protagonist Maya, who comes from a conservative family. She doesn't have a problem with marriage but the way it is done. The novel also traces the 1990s era of print journalism. It also charts her rise as a print journalist.

## **Is the story autobiographical?**

Yes, there are observations and some characters that I know. But it's not autobiographical. I have taken some stories from my life and fictionalised them.

## **Maya is a contradiction. She is strong and at the same time weak.**

Maya represents the conflict of women, who grew up during that period. Most of them were in the throes of change. Women no longer studied BA and MA to update their marriage resume or take up



jobs as a stop-gap between education and marriage. Careers were opening up, but marriage, as an institution, was strong and could not be ignored. Maya symbolises this confusion. So she is not weak. Just that, she is not too confident of asserting her strength and taking on the system.



**Maya's relationship with her father goes through phases. How did you come up with the father's character?**

I wanted to conceive of a strong patriarchal figure that will clash with the character of Maya. This characterisation was necessary to bring out the discordant note that this generation had confronted during the post-1990s liberalisation decade.

**Of late there have been many books with women at the forefront. Your book, too, has a similar theme. How different is your book from the others?**

My book has women with varying strengths. The protagonist, Maya, is a weak, plain girl who evolves into a woman of strength in the course of asserting her identity amid domestic and professional turbulence.

**Your novel is all about a woman's choice. But unlike the novel, in most cases the women end up compromising?**

For me, being free is to be able to make a choice: whether it is the choice of career, marriage, sexuality (whether being comfortable being with the same gender or the opposite one), or even of one's reproductive rights. This was my way of asserting my rights as a woman.

**Maya's mutiny is portrayed through little incidents. Why is there never a full-blown revolution?**

As I mentioned, Maya represents the confusion of her times. She has her mother and grandmother, who understand her but are unable to support her completely for fear of the patriarch's wrath. Also, she could not assert herself completely because of her financial dependence. The profession of journalism was not a well-paid one in those times. So, she had to let it simmer, rather than let it explode.

**Do you think this is the right time to write more and more books on women, keeping in mind the rapes and subjugation of women?**

There is nothing like a right or wrong time for a book on women. Rapes and subjugation of women are not new. Just that they are coming to light now, with a pro-active media. The subject of women as a male gaze is entrenched in our psyche. We need more such assertions of identity to dilute the male ego.