

Calcutta flavour, Chennai garnish

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Published: 26th September 2013 08:58 AM



A young Tamil Brahmin woman journalist in Calcutta in the 1990's, struggling to assert herself in a world which decreed that women belonged in the kitchen. The description fits both Subhashini Dinesh, the author of *My Iron Wings* and her protagonist Maya. The identities are fluid, the experiences personal. But the book, which will be released this Friday, is more fiction than autobiographical. At its heart, it is a tale about a young woman caught between two cities that are in the midst of change. But it also about identities – as a journalist, as a Calcuttan, as a Chennaiite and most of all, as a woman.

Maya is a young journalist who wants to make a career out of her reporting job. But like other women during that time, her orthodox family tries to force her to get married. “Maya is a confused rebel,” says Subhashini, who was herself a journalist with *The New Indian Express*. “She wants to completely break out of her given ‘role’ in life but at the same time, the time she has grown up in hasn’t given her enough confidence to do it,” she says.

“Maya represents the confusion of a lot of women from that generation, not just me,” says the associate professor at Asian College of Journalism. “Women from that era no longer looked at a job as a stopgap option before they got married. They started wanting more,” says Subhashini. And with a career option of a print journalist, which involved long hours and penchant for roaming the streets, Maya’s life got tougher, she adds.

The book contains a lot of Subhashini’s personal experiences, both as a journalist and her life in Calcutta and Chennai – small anecdote here and there, a specific perspective of a city, long nights in the newsroom. “It was challenging because I was writing fiction, not an autobiography. I had bring in my experiences but not turn the book into my account,” says Subhashini.

But she also adds that the highlight of her time spent writing the book was writing about Calcutta and Chennai in tandem. “I’ve tried to bring in different attitudes between the cities. You could say I’ve flavoured the book with liberal amounts of Calcutta but garnished it with Chennai,” says the author cheekily.

But what does she like best, the mishti doi or the masala dosai? “I’ve grown up in Calcutta, but Chennai feels like home because of the language. So I guess it’s like living between two parents,” she says with a grin.

My Iron Wings will be launched at Landmark, Citi Centre, Mylapore at 6.30 pm on Friday.