

Tuesday , August 20 , 2013

## My Iron Wings



My novel, *My Iron Wings*, a work of fiction, is my loving ode to my city, Kolkata, which I left a decade back. This city of abundance: of joy, friendship, patience, contradictions, and the rains, is central to the plot, thickened by the protagonist, Maya, rebelling against gender stereotyping at home and the onslaught of electronic media in the print newsroom. The story encapsulates the turbulent 1990s in print journalism and its initial challenges as newsrooms became workstations, with computers edging out teleprinters.

Calcutta, as it was known then, is never the silent observer. Maya rediscovers herself in the city, which becomes the matrix of her growth, both as a person and as a professional. She savours the myriad flavours of her city, and is fiercely attached to it. It becomes Maya's constant companion, as it laughs and rejoices with her, comforts her and wipes her tears. It stands by her as she battles her Tamil Brahmin family's conservatism and her repressed sexuality.

The claustrophobic air inside her house is in stark contrast to the warmth and broad-mindedness outside. I wrote the novel because Kolkata never left me, even though I left it for professional and personal commitments.

I took my collection of Rabindrasangeet, Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak movies and very fond memories of everything Calcutta and its people with me wherever I went. I found myself unmindfully following and gaping towards a drifting conversation in Bangla, admiring the architectural marvel of a temple down south or soaking in the pride of Maratha history in the west. For me, Bangla was my father tongue, my mother being Tamil. And, there was an emotional link with my friends, with whom I laughed, bunked college, got drunk and danced in our wild parties and even gate-crashed a wedding.

Nobody judged me and that is what is so special about my city.

This book was my little way of paying tribute to this large city with a big heart. As we get off the train, the avuncular Howrah Bridge welcomes us with open arms and an unparalleled warmth. I had to tell the people how this city embraces multiple cultures, languages, cuisines and still manages to retain its flavour.

That is Kolkata for me and I wanted to come home and say "Thank you".

Subhashini Dinesh

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