

The Statesman, 11/09/25, Pg 14

# Seasons in the skin, songs in the soul

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**R**eading Silver Years doesn't feel like just reading a book of poems; it feels like being welcomed into a room full of women who've lived, struggled, laughed, and loved deeply. These are not just poems, they're distilled legacies from women who have resisted quietly and emerged unshaken. This luminous collection of 163 poems by 50 Indian women poets, aged over 60, doesn't murmur from the shelf; it stands tall, adjusts its glasses, and speaks with hard-earned clarity. The introduction to Silver Years: Senior Contemporary Indian Women's Poetry is an

eloquent, richly layered preface to a beautifully woven anthology of poems, thoughtfully edited by Sanjukta Dasgupta, Malashri Lal, and Anita Nahal. It chronicles lives shaped by multiple roles: daughters, wives, mothers, professionals, caregivers. These women aren't fading into the margins; they're claiming space with bold, unapologetic voices. Here, the 'silver' in their years isn't about decline, but defiance, gleaming and unapologetic.

Amrita Ray's "A Sunday Morning" begins in familiar tranquility but ends in jarring disquiet, a serene scene shattered by grim headlines. Ray inserts horror into domesticity with chilling elegance, a subtle reminder of how violence infiltrates even the most peaceful moments. Anita Nahal's "We Are the Kali Women" is raw, powerful, and confrontational. It opens with the disquieting refrain, "There's nothing wrong. Nothing wrong," and yet every line pulses with unspoken fury. It challenges patriarchy, colourism, and the hypocrisies society cloaks in politeness. Her invocation of Ma Kali is both a spiritual cry and a revolutionary war chant. This isn't mere poetry; it's reckoning. Themes of aging unfold with beauty and defiance in Anju Makhija's "Greying Follies" and Nahal's "I Am a New Aging Woman". One reflects with wry humour,

the other with bold declarations, but both reject invisibility. Smita Agarwal's "Mid-Sixty-Three" and Snigdha Agarwal's "It's Not the End" echo this resistance; aging is not erasure but a revelation.

Basabi Fraser's poems glide between the intimate and the political with the quiet strength of a woman who knows when to whisper and when to roar. Whether it's the tender guilt of not offering tea to a proud, passing stranger, or the lyrical defiance of "The Woman Speaks", Fraser claims space, with grace. Her sunflower-bearing woman stares down violence with seeds of hope, while "Winter Homecoming" celebrates silence and seasonal patience.

Jharna Sanyal's poems leave a quiet ache, like the kind that settles in when you return to a place you once called home and realise it no longer fits. "Of Houses and Homes Today" speaks of displacement layered with pandemic anxiety, migration, and the heartbreak of a child cradling a bar of soap like it's hope itself. In "Bheemapada", the sting hits harder; the home is lost not to time, but to history's cruelty. A sister's unfinished raga becomes a ghost-note echoing through a post-Partition void. Sanyal doesn't romanticise loss; she lets it settle like dust on familiar floors. In her world, home isn't where the heart is; it's where it once hoped to be. The patio in "The Backyard Patio in Arlington", brick-layered nostalgia in

suburban America, where traditionally spiced "tandoori lobsters" meet mojitos, is the place where memories are grilled with the kebabs. Jharna Sanyal's poem is not just about moving house, it's about what refuses to move: the laughter, the Baul and Ravi tunes, the "return or not to return" debates marinated over decades.

Ageing is inevitable; it is like a plot twist no one asked for, but everyone has to endure. Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca's poems feel like opening your mother's jewelry box and finding receipts, nostalgia, and a bird feather. "Empty Nest" aches with maternal love and abandonment, where even magpies seem to understand more than your grown kids.

*They are just birds, they do what birds do. They fly away.*

The poem "Once Upon a Time?" is akin to all of us on the local train of life, standing, stumbling, and discussing knee pain over biryani and samosas. Kavita Mendonca dwells upon 'old age' as her father's optimism seeps into her veins, gilding her on to move ahead in this journey of life. With dry wit and a poet's gaze, Kavita wraps memory and mortality in warmth and just a pinch of salt.

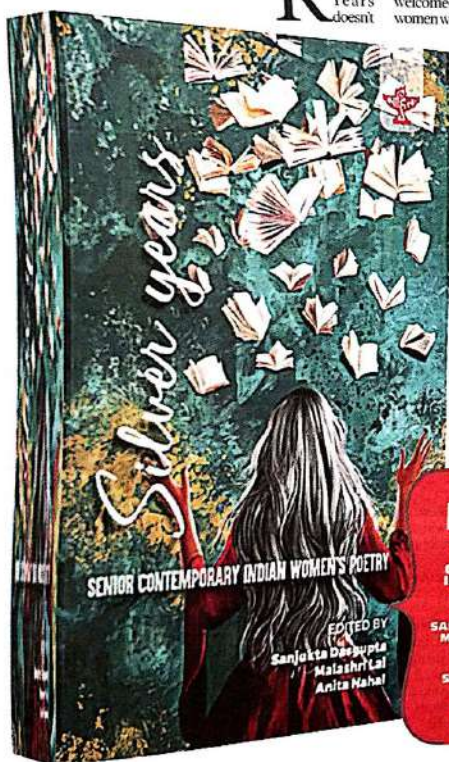
Malashri Lal's poems don't scream for attention; they stay with you, quietly. Reading her is like unfolding an old silk sari that's been in the family

for years, creases and all, it carries stories you didn't even know were there. "Book of Doubts" makes me feel oddly guilty about the books I've given away over the years. "Kashmir One Morning" holds a silence that says more than most headlines. And "Krishna's Flute", it hums, gently, like something sacred drifting through the soul of a tired city. Her writing doesn't chase drama. It lingers, like a faint trace of perfume in an old drawer. Navamati Chakraborty's "We Have Our Sky" reads like a steady, assured assertion rather than a loud protest. There's something quietly firm in her tone, a refusal to bow to outdated norms, paired with a graceful claiming of space that doesn't ask for approval. Let's "Wind the Clock Again" is quietly defiant. It speaks of choosing quality over longevity, clarity over convention.

Reading Sanjukta Dasgupta's poems feels like chancing upon an enchanted mirror in a heritage house, an intricately carved, antique mirror that does not lie. Her writing is unsparing, yet kind. With a style as honest and precise as a well-cut diamond, clear, sharp, and impossible to ignore, she makes aging feel like both a quiet rebellion and a whispered truth we all pretend not to hear. The poem "Fall" reverberates with the rhythm of an impending end, where the words "fall" and "fail" set the tone for a slow, deliberate descent into the hush of finality. With imagery both tangible and

sardonic, a tortoise neck with "countless rings of recorded time" replaces a neck that was once like a swan's, arms trembling like marshmallows, "the skin droops like an oversized overcoat," the poem moves with the quiet resignation of someone who's seen too much to protest. The poem "Crowning Worry" is uplifting and inspiring for the likes of me, dealing with a midlife crisis—the insufferable anxiety of greying roots and the anguish of colouring my hair as soon as I spot the silver streaks that sprout out faster than the spreading of coronavirus. Sanjukta Dasgupta's "Crowning Worry" has miraculously helped me in doing away with my crowning woes and has goaded me on to wear my streaks of silver with pride and love. That's the power of poetry that emanates from the pens of stalwarts, women with depth and wisdom, the power to exonerate other women from self-inflicted fears and insecurity.

The poems in this anthology help in reflecting lived truths while lighting the way through the shifting landscape of age, memory, and meaning. The poets write with a clarity sharpened by time and a grace earned through experience. Their voices don't plead for attention; they command it through silent wisdom, wry humour, and absolute honesty. What emerges is not just a collection of poems, but a chorus of lives well observed and deeply felt, proof that the twilight years can shine with their own fierce, silver light.



## Spot Light

SILVER YEARS:  
SENIOR  
CONTEMPORARY  
INDIAN WOMEN'S  
POETRY

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SAHITYA AKADEMI  
MAY 2025  
230 PAGES,  
RS 330/-