Ishika Bansal. *My Diary and Other Poems*. New Delhi: Diamond Pocket Books, 2019. PB. Price: Rs. 150. ISBN: 978-93-5296-783-4.

Reviewed by
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My Diary and Other Poems is the second collection of poems by Ishika Bansal. It has forty seven poems written on varied themes. Having read her first collection, the present book shows her remarkable maturity in language, diction and style. Through these poems, Ishika tries to prove coming closer to fine poetic craftsmanship. Her poetic world is explorations of values, hard work, hope, and the sublime confidence to achieve all that make one's life 'glorious'.

In this collection, Ishika tries to introduce her poetic world through two "Forewords", "Comments", "Reviews" and "Preface" by some teachers and editors, and "Author's Note" written by herself. These writings help the readers to better understand the poems. Some read poems for pleasure and some read them for research. Ishika's poems can serve both purposes alike.

She begins this collection with the poem, "Word 1" and explains the effects of uttered words in one's life. They come out from one's mouth spontaneously. They are: "Hilarious", "'miraculous", "harsh", "discourteous", "inspiring", "surprising", "Life-changing", "sporadically depressing", "Sometimes shattering", and "daring". (Lines 2-6) The effects of words depend on how one uses them so she advises the readers to use "them wisely". In the second poem, "Words 2", she explains different functions of words in one's life as one "can reduce" "stress" by "expressing the feelings" of one's "heart". In order to bring positive changes in "personality", one should be "polite". "Words used in a good manner are like gold" ("Words 2"). In another poem she writes "Our dressing sense can hide the real us for some time / But our words reveal us inside out" ("Clothes Don't Make a Man" 5-6). These words of Ishika are really praiseworthy in this highly materialistic age, when harshness and discourtesy are very much common in expression, and many a time slyness, shrewdness and "Machiavellian deception" dominate over fraternity and integrity.

The title poem of the collection, "My Diary", shows her child like imagination with logical interpretation on the verge of maturity. For her, "thick and heavy" "diary" is "better than teddies and toys" (4-5). Her "diary" gives her "a lot of satisfaction" when she opens it and writes in it (12-13) because it contains all her "secrets, lies and truths" (8). In the poem, "Childhood", she writes that childhood is

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a period of "innocence" and "mischievous behaviour". It needs "guidance and appreciation". She has painted a beautiful picture of a child whose presence brings "fragrance of love" in the family. His sweet voice pleases everybody. Even his mischief is a source of joy. When the same child enters a school premises his world starts changing. He becomes a student and this life does not come again, like childhood. This period is full of fun and hustle and bustle. Ishika also paints a lovely picture of a classroom where innocence and experience both go together. It has "good dancers", "singers" and "orators".

> A lot of noise, teachers yelling at us
> Most probably the fish market
> Or the travellers coming out of the bus
>
> Whistling, whispering and gossiping all around
> Some are extremely happy
> For no reason some are frowned ("My Hustling Class" 1-6).

At the time when voice of the common people is suppressed and many times many intellectuals have been politically targeted, Ishika's poem, "Speak Out" is very relevant. Fear of the power leads to destruction. Whenever the power is misused for suppression and oppression of people, it is the responsibility of all intellectuals to raise strong voice against the power through all platforms available. "Our speech decides the strength we possess / So speak out, be loud / May be you convince someone one day." ("Speak Out" 3-5) When some people in judiciary, the main stream media and even in academia seem to act as tools in the hands of the political leaders of the ruling party, the role of true patriots becomes vital to protect justice, law and order, and overall morality of human beings.

The poem, "Bonds in Life" gives important message of "love and faith". This poem can't be believed to be written by a teenage poet due to its mature language. But the poet's assertion that she is her own "poetic guide" has led her to maturity: "A little mature in my poems" ("That's How I Am" 12).

The poem, "Find Out 'Me' Time", is also full of suggestions to have faith in one's own. She writes that the reasons of happiness should be identified in order to be happy and satisfied. The poem, "Trust Your Instincts" has also the same message. The poem "Be an Actor Not a Reactor" also begins with the similar message: "None of the worldly powers / Will stop you from rising / When you yourself are correct" (2-4). This is an optimistic outlook that enables one "to dream big". When "grief and pain" enter one's life, it is hope that helps one to find "A new light to shine once again" ("Each Day, New Light" 1). In another poem she writes, "At last you'll surely win / If you never lose hope" ("Be an Actor Not a Reactor" 16-17). Living in this world, one comes closer to nature. The poet describes nature and

natural objects and becomes their part. She writes: “I am a chirpy bird’s friend / In the blue sky” (“Where Am I” 3-4). In another nature poem, “Dawn Time”, she is absorbed in the pleasant scene of the “rising sun” welcomed by the “chirping” of birds and other “marvelous creatures”. The love of nature engenders love for beauty. When love and beauty engross a person, he seeks these elements in everything. If he does not find them, he gets totally disturbed. The poet is also in the same situation in the poem, “A Sneak Look Outside.” She finds “The archaic beauty” “so pale”. She is unable to find “the glistening grounds” and “blooming dales.” “The pick-pockets, robbers” all are present everywhere. Negativism spreads fast in society. So the poet urges the people to wake up from the “deep slumber” and bring “a change”. The poem “The Other Side of Today’s World” has also the same message. In this poem too, she brings to light the ugly face of the present age that is full of “envy, cheating and malice” (3). Religion has lost its true spirit because “rituals” and blind-faith have overpowered it. “The rich go for boasting, the poor make a yell / Caste, religion, race on pinnacle” (“The Other Side of Today’s World” 9-10). At the end, again she believes in herself “to beautify” the world with her “worthy hand” (“My worthy Hand”).

The poem, “A Creation” reminds us Lord Brahma, the Creator of the universe. The poet is also called Brahma as he is able to create poems as he desires, and like Brahma, the poet also feels delight after his creation. Ishika’s poem creates the similar delight to her: “… the whole world I’ve won / My soul feels alive, a new creation being done.” (“A Creation” 7-8)

It has been observed that a person engaged in a creative endeavour likes loneliness. It is loneliness that helps him to create beautiful creations. Ishika also “enjoys such moments” (“Loneliness – A Great Phase in Life”). Life is short so time is very important. It should be used wisely. “Wealth will decline one day” so accumulation of wealth should not be the aim of life. Instead of it, creative work should be done to spread the message of love, brotherhood, peace and harmony. Creativity brings glory to one’s life that lasts long.

Above all, Ishika advocates the importance of “hard work”, “Dedication” and “determination” to accomplish the set goal of life. She writes, “The best way to predict the future / Is to create it” (“Embellish Up Your Future” 1-2). Such message to the readers in the modern age is noteworthy when there is acute competition in every field. Ishiks’s poems touch many aspects of life and its complex and interconnected issues giving scope for further creative and critical explorations. The book deserves warm welcome by one and all.

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