



Poems

(In honour of Prof. BN Goswami)

Amlanjyoti Goswami

Nainsukh

Was in your living room dark
The blinds drawn
Morning not trickling in yet.

He looked at the wall
Sunlight streaming into a pool
Its lush yellow swirling with feeling.

Then he stepped out on tip toe
Not waiting for the tea
You called him for.

Once out, he was at the country fair
With me all day.
With merry go rounds, turnstiles and rock songs.

Wearing shorts, surprised to see
His knees so bare.
I asked if he would like to paint this.

But he didn't answer.
He kept looking at the merry go round
As if it held a clue to his life.

Then skirted the edge of field, as dusk began to fall
And disappeared into the book of miniatures
Where I remembered this scene like a painting.

Workday

Sunday too
He was up early
In work mode
As if Monday arrived
A day too soon.

Sifting medicines
On the table
Stomachache from headache
Like precious stones
From childhood

The urge to just sit there
Mark time & wonder
How things happen
So slowly – & so quickly
How one looks at it.

Finding the correct word
The picture in the book.
Incandescent?
Glowing? Radiant? Luminescent?
Brilliant?

He picks up the picture again
This time from his soul
Sifting with a lifetime's hands
Charmed by meaning
Looking for signs that aren't there.

What was it he saw the last time?
What does he see now?
The light, golden & yellow?
Screaming out of a page
And next to it, a god

Sitting rapt in silence
Waiting for magic to unfold.
The first panel, all bright
The second, the god in golden sun yellow.
The third is the god in gold, sitting on a rough black stone.

This is description, not elation.
He sits there waiting for a dream to turn up
Unannounced, just like morning.
It is Sunday, he remembers.
Though sleep won't come, he feels awake

Sifting medicines on the dining table
Tending to the sick and lonely
Setting out for a long walk, into the heart of the matter
And stop Monday at the door
Saying it has arrived a day too early.

Arranging Transport for the Art Film

First came the mules. Easy as the horses
Shifting feet in a dung corner.
Owners – out of work – eager for something to do.

The cars were not difficult.
Cabbies on hire who knew how mountain roads snake
In white winter.

Foot soldiers, carrying the palanquin
Workers for a day's wages.
Everyone wanted to become an actor for a day.

A van – four wheels – with equipment
Cameras, tripods, steel frames, hope.
This was easy. Didn't cost much.

Outside my gate, the owner kept asking for something to do.
Now the difficult part. I do not wish to hasten
My hesitation in revealing it.

They also wanted... a mythical creature...one that would fly into
Viewer's hearts. Something like half-eagle, half-airplane
With furry wings.

I looked for it, in my morning haunts
My dreams up the mountain, among birch and fir.
They also wanted a whirring saucer, like aliens flying.

This was how the film would begin.
I thought of cable car, strung in thin wire across the peaks,
But nothing buzzed or whirred a string top from childhood.

The third impossible ask was an arrow that moved
From corner of eye when the lashes fluttered.
I said (cautiously): Maybe, animation could design such things?

But there was no money.
I was surprised to find all three – the arrow, flying saucer,
Even the half-bird, in the film, drawn in pictures.

They moved, that was the main thing.
I asked them who did it.
There was no artist in the crew, at least the ones I knew.

This was kept a secret.
The film was crafted frame by frame,
Each shot a visual treat.

A man walked across the distance. My bit role.
The mules and horses found strong roles.
A film set in the 17th century.

No steam engines moved then.
No trains huffed and puffed.
No airplane shot through the sky. No car wheels.

But there were arrows, a flying bird that carried pictures
Nibbling, one by one, to your little heart.
I didn't know how they did it, & I didn't ask.

But there was something else too.
Before leaving, the crew stayed at my house.
Nothing special, but we had a good meal

On the verandah that opened into the night sky twinkling.
During the conversation, over a tippie, the producer said
He had come from far away, another country.

He realised how things were here, bathed in another time.
He said people dreamt up strange things,
Then they came true.

And that – we had – a way with time, as with silence.
They did not speak much, these artists,
But knowing their work, they knew how to travel time.