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Tribal Tales: Sounds of Silence

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She embraced the desiccated roots as if they were an extension of her while waves lashed the quiet shore, washing away old footprints as new ones get etched on the sands of time. And then, out of the screen she was amidst the audience, having transcended the barrier between the real and the virtual.

A performing art presentation, '*Untimely Thoughts*', by a group of tribal performers under 'Trimukhi Platform', left the audience awestruck at the French Consulate in Kolkata which hosted the dance drama on International Women's Day.

The performance at the consulate premises, directed by the French dance-theatre director, Jean Frederic Chevalier, in collaboration with Sukla Bar, was poetry in motion. A group of tribal youths from the Borotalpada Santhal village in Bengal, near the Odisha border, pulled the audience into a vortex of art and philosophy that found expression through enchanting visuals.

Against a dark background, the swaying of the hanging neon lamps, above the actors, created a chiaroscuro effect symbolising their thoughts which resembled shooting stars in the galaxy of mind where a thousand words are being spoken through a sound of silence. A piece of hypnotic music relayed the mood of the play while putting the audience in a reverie. The journey of the Trimukhi Platform began with an aim to "build bridges between distant worlds and stimulating the invention of out-of-the-common thoughts."

The theme does provoke a thought, reminding us of the physical and mental struggles of the indigenous tribal population in our country, for whom, living is more a privilege and survival, a reality. Although the government has recognised them under Scheduled Tribes, the Santhals, residing in remote areas of our country, have put up endless struggles to claim their rights and keep pace with the rest of the civilisation which underwent a rapid transformation with the passing time.

They fought to get themselves included in the chapters that mark the Indian subcontinent- a book whose pages were turning at a blistering pace since independence. Evolution in their small world was gradual and perceptive, far from the metropolitan buzz of rapid growth and development.

The troupe comprised Dhananjoy Hansda, Joba Hansda, Salkhan Hansda, Sukul Hansda, Surojmoni Hansda and Swapan Mandi. The surreal theatre-cum-dance presentation appeared as a palimpsest where stories of our tribal communities are constantly being re-written by them since it frequently gets erased in the lightning pace of contemporary times.

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