Pintu, a teenager from Murshidabad, is in awe to hear the history of Raibenshe, a folk martial dance from south Bengal, from Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, while Tito, a boy from Kolkata, is surprised to learn that behind the Chhau masks are real people dancing.

These children are the characters from graphic novels brought out by the West Bengal government, the UNESCO and Banglanatk.com, to promote traditional crafts of the State. In a unique initiative, three such graphic novels have been published on three different art forms of the State, both in Bengali and English in 2018.

The graphic story on the Purulia’s famous Chhau dance is called *Experiencing Chhau* (*Dekhe Elam Chhau*) while the book on Raibenshe is called *Raibenshe Rocks* (*Ajo Aache Raibenshe*). The third publication is on the little known puppetry from Nadia titled *The tale of a lost leg* (*Haran-no Payer Kissa*).

Engaging young readers

“These graphic novels are part of our efforts to promote cultural industries in different parts of the State under the project Rural Crafts & Cultural Hubs, which is supported by Department of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises and UNESCO,” said Ananya Bhattacharya, director of Banglanatk.com, a social enterprise working with artisans across different States of the country.

Ms. Bhattacharya said that the idea behind the publication is to engage young minds so that they become aware about folk tradition of the State.

“These graphic stories or short novels, whatever you call them, are not more than 50 pages and are designed with lots of colourful sketches to engage young readers. While the characters are fictional, it has been our effort to pack as much information about the folk art forms as possible in these stories,” Ranjan Sen, author of these publications said.

These graphic novels are being distributed to children through school outreach programmes, fairs and festivals.

There are plans to publish more novels and a book on Baul singers is in the offing. Mr. Bhattacharya said that under the initiative, work is underway on 15 different crafts of the State.