

CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH BENGAL'S SONG, DANCE AND PLAY PATTERNS FOR 70 SCHOOLCHILDREN

Folk forms in heritage fest

ARNESH GHOSE



STEP BY STEP: Children are put through the paces of folk dance at the three-day workshop on Bengal's art forms. Picture by Anindya Shankar Roy

For the 70 youngsters who attended the three-day workshop titled 'Back to Roots', organised at Oxford Bookstore Junior on Park Street, it was a welcome break from the pressure of studies and the wilting heat.

It was held from April 17 to 19, by *Banglanatok.com*, that works to create awareness about Bengal's folk for us.

The workshop introduced the art forms of rural Bengal, including the *chhau* dance of Purulia, *fakiri* and *baul* music and folk theatre to children from ages six to 12, from schools like Apeejay School, The Heritage, Mahadevi Baria Girls' Higher Secondary School and Calcutta Boys'.

On Day 1, a documentary on *Jhumar* folk music, *Journey of Jhumar*, was screened for the children, after which they were treated to live *fakiri* and *baul* songs by artists from Purulia. They also participated in an interactive session of theatre games that included acting, music, mask-making and dance.

This was the first encounter with *Jhumar* for Anish Dasgupta, a Class III student of St James. "I loved the film. But I most enjoyed it when the songs were performed live for us

later," he said.

"*Fakiri* songs are better than those of Bollywood!" quipped Abhijoy Halder, a Class VII student of St James School.

The second day's attraction was a *chhau* performance, followed by an interactive session with dancer Jagannath Mahanto from Purulia. Mahanto put the participants through theatre games for voice intonation, facial expressions and dialogue delivery.

The kids got to play their part too, donning *chhau* masks and performing an act by themselves, the girls dressed as Kartik and the boys as the buffalo demon, Mahishasura.

On the final day, the children put up four performances based on what they had learnt, on subjects like environment and friendship.

Banglanatok has been using theatre to reach out to people in the rural areas of Bengal, Bihar and Maharashtra. "We have organised such workshops earlier in schools and colleges and kids always take to it eagerly. It teaches them about their heritage in a way that books can't", said theatre personality Sushanta Mukherjee, the guide for the kids from *Banglanatok.com*.