For a vibrant adivasi literature

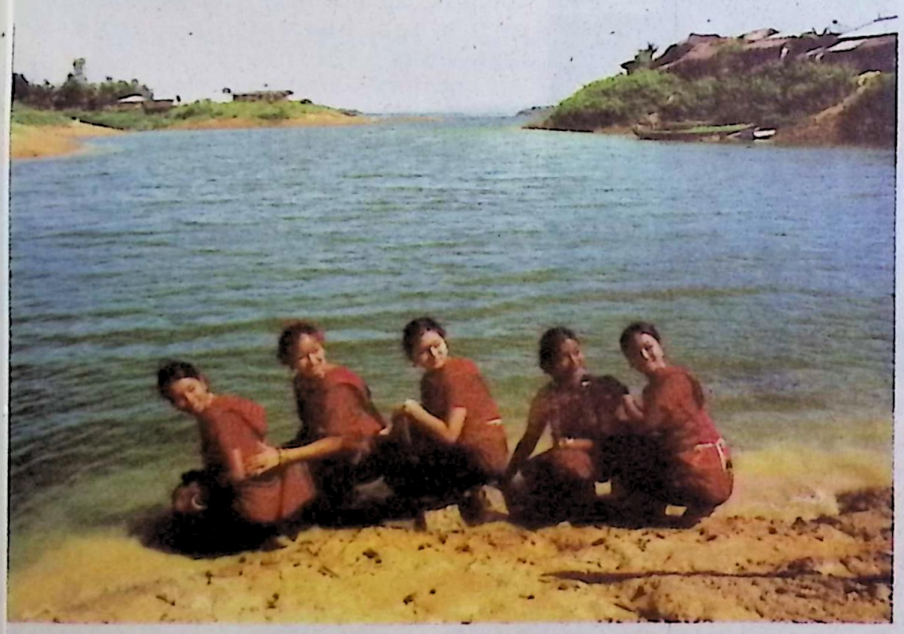
EKRAM KABIR *in Rangamati*

When I met Mrittika Chakma -- an adivasi cultural activist from Chittagong Hill Tracts -- in Dhaka, little did I realise how passionate he was about the Biju festivals in the hills. Accepting his invitation, when I came to Rangamati, I found out he was also a renowned writer and poet, treasured by the hills people as a valuable bridge between all existing indigenous cultures in CHT and Bengali mainstream one.

Come Chaitra, the adivasis in CHT get ready for celebrating the end of the years as well as the New Year, similarly as we look forward to Eid, Pujas and Christmas. Having a cursory idea on it, I researched a bit.

Calling it "Boishobi", the adivasis celebrate this festival for wiping away the distresses of the outgoing year and greeting the new one. This is also a spiritual quest for each adivasi, who brims with joy and happiness during this celebration.





The Chakmas call it Biju, the Tripuras Boishuk and Marmas term it Shangraing. Together, they form "Boishobi". Although the carnival relates to the three communities, all adivasi groups as well as the Bangalis in CHT celebrate it. The occasion includes rallies, a range of cultural shows, art exhibitions and *Boli khela* (wrestling).

The Chakmas, the largest ethnic community, celebrate the three-day festival in phases. As part of the rituals, young girls clean up their houses and float flowers in water, young people would cook *pazon*, a dish of seven vegetables, to feed guests. They believe the *pazon* is their hedge against diseases in the New Year.

Tripuras begin with bathing the elderly people and offering them clothes. They believe the ritual would bring them good luck. The Marmas organise 'water session' when young girls spray water jets to one another. Before frisking in the water game, they offer *jolpuja*.