Indigenous alcoholic drinks such as *dochoani*, *jogorah* and *kanji* also consumed in large amounts by the celebrating adivasis.

I find myself in a colourful inauguration of a four-day ceremony organised by Jum Aesthetic Council (JAC). Celebrating the Boishabi for the ninth time this year, from April 6 to April 9, JAC received support from UNDP and European Union, which are in the middle of an all-out development campaign in CHT, home to Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro, Lusai, Khumi, Bom, Pankho, Khiang, Chak and Tanchongya.





Organising cultural events for furthering the adivasi cultures in CHT was not an easy task. There was a time when conflict reigned supreme in the hills and, I learnt, a majoritarian cultural upheaval was on the verge of crushing the cultural diversity of the region. It was at that time 1981 when a group of intrepid young men risked a lot for, first, conserving the traditional culture, and then, promoting it. They formed JAC, initially known as Rangamati Aesthetic Council. The pre-peace treaty era was a disillusioned one as far as indigenous cultural propagation was concerned.

Although the full implementation of the peace treaty, singed in 1997, is a long way off, Jhimit-Jhimit Chakma explains to me how it has created an atmosphere for holding such cultural events. However, he emphasises, these events are still far away from true promotion of adivasi cultures. These are still their frantic attempts from keep their culture afloat in the face of a onslaught of a majoritarian one.

A good suggestion comes from the chief guest of the event, poet Asad Chowdhury. If the adivasis really mean a promotion of their cultures, they, he suggests, have to come forward to create literature such as novels, short stories and poetry in their own language as well as in Bangla and English. Writing in the latter two languages will get a huge audience.

I cannot agree more with him. I alerted Mrittika Chakma about it: if adivasi people don't start writing, someone else would. And it would be a very shameful for them if Bangali literatures start producing adivasi literature. It is the adivasis themselves who need to come forward in this sector. The CHT region is full of elements suitable for the making of good novels, short stories and poems. All aspects of lives of the hill people are excellent ingredients for theatrical performances.

Unfortunately, little effort has been made for preserving and building on the magnificent adivasi languages in Bangladesh. Doing so is not an insurmountable task. We Bengalis don't have to toil for it; all it needs is to provide support to adivasi scholars for the purpose. Given the population and rising literacy in the region, is won't be too difficult to inspire them to write books in their own language.

There's hope, many say. To their delight, participants in the festivals came to know that dictionary of adivasi words may be in the offing by one of the development partners of Bangladesh. If that happens, it certainly would help the indigenous people to start producing literary works in their own languages. If that happens, the day may not be far away when Bangladeshi TV channels come forward to broadcast play in those languages as well as in Bengali. I'm sure efforts by Mrittika, Jhimit-Jhimit and Shishir will get true recognition then.

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Photos: Syed Zakir Hussain

Note: This year many indigenous communities announced they would not celebrate Boishabi, the biggest traditional festival, in protest of the attacks on adivasis in various areas of Khagrachhari that have left at least 60 people injured.