



The Baisabi Festival

Asha and her family experience new ways to celebrate the Bengali new year when they travel to a different part of Bangladesh.



The Baisabi Festival
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Ma and I were packing a suitcase. Our family was going on a trip. "Asha, did you know we are going to celebrate a very special festival this year?" Ma asked. "But we always celebrate Bengali New Year." I said. "That isn't new." "Yes. but Bangladesh is home to many different cultures that have their own ways of celebrating the new year. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where we are going, the indigenous people celebrate with a festival they call Bai-sa-bi."



"What does Bai-sa-bi mean, Ma?" I asked. "Baisabi is a name made of three names: Baisu, Sangrai, and Biju. Each is the name of a new year festival celebrated by an indigenous hill tribe. The Tripura, Marma and Chakma peoples all have their own way of welcoming the new year."



When we arrived at the Baisu festival, the girls of the Tripura community dressed me in a colorful skirt and shirt. They put flowers in my hair and taught me the steps of the Goraia Dance. My new friends told me that the dance follows the movements made by hillside farmers. We danced and laughed and played until sunset.



The next day, we travelled to Rangamati for the Marma Sangrai festival. It was the perfect way to spend the hot day - playing water tag and splashing around in the pools. We watched the priests carrying Buddha statues to the water to wash them. Then, we enjoyed a wrestling match in the evening.



Our last stop was the Biju festival of the Chakma people. We danced and made floating flower beds to sail on the river. We spent a long time swimming and washing ourselves for the new year. In the evening, we went from house to house, sharing curry made of 32 ingredients!



On the train back to the city, I thought about how lucky I am to live in Bangladesh; a country that welcomes the new year so many times, in so many different ways.



Note Bangladesh is home to many indigneous people who live in the north and south of the country. They have unique cultures, languages, and heritage. Bangladeshis have a diverse and rich history.

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