

Winds of Tradition: Celebrating Sukanburu's Kite Festival

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Abstract: *The Sukanburu festival is a unique tradition of crafting and flying giant kites that serve as spiritual messengers to the deity of Buru Bonga, symbolizing freedom, harmony, and ecological connectivity. These artistic expressions reflect the Munda community's deep respect for nature and its commitment to sustainability. The festival occurs annually on sacred hills and includes rituals, music, dance, and social gatherings, fostering community cohesion and cultural continuity. This research highlights the festival's role in preserving indigenous art forms and environmental ethics amidst contemporary challenges, emphasizing the need to educate younger generations on traditional practices to maintain cultural heritage.*

Keywords: Sukanburu festival, Buru-Bonga, Cultural sustainability, Indigenous spirituality, Tribal art

1. Introduction

The **Munda tribe** is one of the major tribal communities living in **Jharkhand** and other parts of eastern India. Their life is closely connected with nature, culture, and religious traditions. The Mundas deeply respect nature because they believe it provides them with everything they need to survive. They live near forests, rivers, and hills, depending on them for food, water, and shelter. The tribe worships **Singbonga**, the Sun God, whom they see as the giver of life. They also believe that spirits live in trees, mountains, and rivers, and they offer prayers to these natural elements to protect their land and people. The Mundas have a rich culture filled with music, dance, and storytelling. Their traditional dance, known as **Jhumar**, is performed during festivals and special occasions. They also have unique art forms, including beautiful handicrafts, which reflect their traditions. Festivals like **Mage Parab** and **Sarhul** are important for the community because they celebrate nature and honor their ancestors. During these festivals, people sing, dance, and feast together, strengthening their bond as a community. The Mundas follow their own religious beliefs and customs, which revolve around nature worship. They conduct rituals to seek blessings for good harvests, protection from diseases, and overall well-being. Their religious ceremonies often take place in sacred groves of trees, where they offer sacrifices and prayers to their gods and ancestors. A unique aspect of Munda culture is the **Buru fairs**. The word "**Buru**" means **hill** in their language, and these fairs are held near hills, which the Mundas consider sacred. **Buru fairs** are both religious and social gatherings where people come together to worship, trade goods, and enjoy cultural performances. Traditional music, dance, and local crafts are important parts of these fairs. They also serve as a marketplace where people sell and buy items like grains, livestock, and handmade goods.

The **Sukan-Buru** festival is a fascinating celebration that showcases the rich culture and traditions of the Munda tribe. This annual festival takes place in the foothills of Sukan-Buru, located in the Chota-Nagpur plateau of India. The festival is a unique opportunity to witness the Munda people's exceptional art and creativity, with the highlight being the flying of kites, which are more than 10-15 feet wide. The

festival's unique feature is that the kites are allowed to fly freely, and no one is allowed to cut the kite of others. Children and adults both take part in making vibrant kites of different shapes and sizes. This festival is an excellent opportunity to learn about the Munda tribe's beliefs and customs, which are primarily spiritual and ancestor worship in nature. The Munda tribe's beliefs revolve around the principle of sustainability and preserving nature for future generations. They view nature as a source of life and take great care to protect it. The Sukan-Buru festival is a testament to their commitment to nature and their culture. The festival is a unique and beautiful celebration, and one of the oldest tribes in India organizes it. The Munda tribe is one of the 32 tribes in Jharkhand, and their culture and traditions are an essential part of their heritage. The festival serves as a reminder of the rich history and traditions of the Munda people.

In conclusion, the Sukan-Buru festival is a must-see event for anyone interested in learning about the Munda tribe's unique culture and traditions. The festival is a testament to the Munda people's exceptional art and creativity, their commitment to nature, and their principle of sustainability. The festival is an excellent opportunity to witness the Munda people's rich heritage and learn about their customs and beliefs in a persuasive and effective way.

2. Literature Review

Several scholars have highlighted the religious, ecological, and artistic practices of the tribal communities in India. **W.G. Archer** (1946) emphasized the poetic and symbolic depth of tribal rituals in Central India. **Elwin** (1955) documented the sacred worldview of Adivasi cultures, which perceive the environment as being inhabited by spiritual forces. **Munda** (2017) and **Xaxa** (1999) have underscored the indigenous struggle to retain cultural autonomy amidst modernization.

While there is ample work on mainstream kite festivals like Gujarat's Uttarayan, research on tribal kite traditions remains scarce. However, similar practices are found among the Dayak people of Indonesia and some communities in Northeast India. These events also carry symbolic and spiritual meanings, often related to harvests and ancestral

communication, validating the Sukanburu festival's pan-Indigenous relevance.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to document and analyze the cultural, spiritual, and ecological dimension of the Sukan Buru

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, incorporating ethnographic and historical methods to understand the cultural significance of the Sukan-Buru festival. The research follows an exploratory approach to document the traditions, beliefs, and artistic expressions associated with the festival.

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection- Field Observations: The researcher conducted direct observations of the festival to record its rituals, performances, and kite-flying traditions. In-depth interviews were conducted with local elders, community leaders, and artisans involved in making the unique kites. FGDs were organized with Munda community members to gather their perceptions of the festival's cultural and religious significance.

Secondary Data Collection-Archival Research: Historical records, colonial-era documents, and previous anthropological studies on the Munda tribe were examined. **Literature Review:** Books, journal articles, and reports on tribal festivals, indigenous art, and the socio-cultural practices of the Munda tribe were analyzed.

Sampling Methodology- A purposive sampling method was used to select participants and about 50 participants along with 50 villagers were interviewed who have extensive knowledge of the Sukan-Buru festival. The sample included:

- 1) Elders and spiritual leaders (Pahans)
- 2) Skilled kite-makers
- 3) Participants in the festival
- 4) Folklorists and cultural scholars

Data Analysis

Data from interviews and observations were coded into themes such as spiritual significance, sustainability practices, and artistic expressions. The festival was compared with similar indigenous celebrations across India to highlight its uniqueness. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Efforts were made to represent indigenous perspectives authentically. Participants were given the right to anonymity and the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

The Myth of Sukan-Buru

According to Munda oral tradition, Sukan-Buru is believed to be the dwelling place of Buru Bonga, a powerful spirit that resides within the hill. It is said that in ancient times, the ancestors of the Munda people settled around this sacred hill and began offering prayers and sacrifices to appease the deity. The spirit of Buru Bonga is believed to protect the land, ensuring prosperity, good harvests, and harmony among the people. There are many myths and legends associated with

Sukan-Buru and the surrounding area. One of them is that if people don't observe the festival and cook 'Urad Dal' (black gram), lions will roar in the nearby jungles.

One of the most well-known stories associated with Sukan-Buru speaks of a time when the villagers neglected their traditional rituals and failed to honor Buru Bonga properly. As a result, the surrounding forests became eerily silent, crops failed, and wild animals, especially lions, were said to have emerged from the dense jungles, roaring menacingly at night. Fearful of these omens, the village elders gathered and decided to reinstate the festival with full devotion. When they resumed their prayers, offered sacrifices, and flew their traditional giant kites in reverence, the disturbances ceased, and prosperity returned to their land. Since then, the ritual of celebrating Sukan-Buru with kite-flying, music, and prayers has continued without interruption.

There is another tale associated with Sukanburu. Long ago, a battle took place between **Korengaburu**, a hill located to the south of Sukanburu, and Sukanburu itself. During this conflict, Korengaburu launched an arrow at Sukanburu. In an attempt to evade the arrow, Sukanburu bent down, resulting in a reduction of its height. Since then, Sukanburu has been shorter than the surrounding hills. The villagers believe that the arrow marks can still be found in the village of **Hakadua**, as the arrow landed there when Sukanburu dodged it.

Origins of the Sukanburu Festival

The exact origin of the Sukanburu Kite Festival is not known. According to oral traditions and community memory, it has been passed down through generations. The hill, Sukan-Buru, is considered a living entity, and kites are flown as offerings and messages to the deity, Buru Bonga. Elders share that when the rituals were once neglected, natural and spiritual disturbances followed, an indication of divine displeasure. These stories emphasize the importance of continuity and devotion, although no written records trace the festival's exact beginning.

The word Sukanburu comes from a Mundari term 'Sukuwan' means a favorite place and thus the hill get its name 'sukan' and its nearby village sukandih. Initially people organize the buru here but it gets its peak after a protest of government project of installing a radio tower for which the villagers resist and stop them from the project. They were of the views that the Buru is a sacred place for them and any project from the government will capture their place, hill and finally the Buru bonga will get upset as told by an informant Baghrai Munda of the village Dulmi. Many villagers lost their lives and many were sent to jail during the protest. Thus, the place becomes more important and the Buru became an important event to remember the sacrifice of their ancestor.

4. Findings and Discussions

Sukan-Buru is a sacred site where people offer praise and perform rituals for the Buru-Bonga deity at the top of a hill. The hill is also known as Buru-Bonga-Tyang, which means the place where Buru Bonga resides. Sukan-Buru is surrounded by three villages: Totada, Dulmi, and Sukandih, and is located in the Khunti district of Jharkhand, about 70km from the capital city, Ranchi.



(Source- Fieldwork). A large kite of measuring approximately 5 feet in length and 4 feet in height.

The festival is celebrated during the post-harvest season in December-January, and the date is chosen by the local Munda priest, known as "**Pahan**," and other village elders. The date is usually determined by looking at the moon cycle, specifically after the nine days of '**Amavasya**' (no moon). However, in recent times, the date is chosen when everyone is available to organize the Buru, which is always after the nine days of no moon. On the day of the festival, people from nearby villages gather at the hill to offer thanks to Buru-Bonga. One of the most remarkable features of this festival is the kites that fly in the sky, made by the local people. These kites are not ordinary ones available in the market; they are

unique in shape and size, resembling a glider or a butterfly, depending on the maker's creativity.

Kite-making starts a few days before the Buru festival, using only natural materials such as organic glue made from 'Bael fruit' (Aegle-Marmelos) and rope made from grasses. However, nowadays, rope is bought from the market, and color paper is used to make the kite's body. Bamboo sticks are used to make the kite's frame, and the villagers use their creative ideas to make the kite aerodynamic. These kites are at least 10-15 feet long, proving that the villagers have great knowledge of aerodynamics.



(Source- Field work). Kites with different size and different designs.

On the day of the festival, male members of all ages carry their kites to the hilltop and fly them. These kites are not for sale, and making them is a matter of pride for the villagers. If someone wants a kite, they have to make it themselves. The

villagers are not allowed to cut each other's kites, and there is no competition between them. The only competition is whose kite is the biggest and whose kite flies the highest.



(Source- Fieldwork). A kite of length 6 feet and 3.50 feet in height.

As the day progresses, the sky over Sukan-Buru is filled with kites of many hues. This is not the only place where the Buru festival is celebrated. The first Buru festival is held in Chatta-Buru, located in the Jonadih village of Maranghada block. After that, the Buru festival is held in Gutuhatu-Buru in the village of Gutuhatu, followed by Sukan-Buru. Sandi-Buru, Lotor-Buru, and Tundu-Buru are also organized in the same block, with Tundu-Buru being held in the village of Sirum. After these burus, converted into the Magh Jatra (Festival celebrated in the month of Magh).

Symbolism of the Kites

The unique giant kites flown during the festival carry spiritual significance. The Munda people believe that these kites serve as messengers to Buru Bonga, carrying the prayers of the community to the divine realm. The kites' shapes- resembling gliders or butterflies- symbolize freedom, harmony, and the connection between the earth and the sky. Unlike conventional kite-flying competitions, there is no rivalry in Sukan-Buru; the focus is on the artistry, size, and height of the kite, reflecting the community's reverence for tradition.

What Makes Sukanburu Kite Festival Unique:

The Sukanburu kite festival of the Munda community is remarkably distinct from other kite festivals celebrated in India and across the world, both in terms of its purpose and practice. Unlike festivals such as Gujarat's Uttarayan, which has become a largely competitive and recreational event involving kite-cutting and the commercial sale of kites,

Sukanburu remains deeply spiritual. In this Munda festival, kites are not flown for leisure or rivalry but as sacred messengers carrying prayers to Buru Bonga, the hill deity. This act reinforces the sacred bond between humans, nature, and the spirit world.

The materials used in Sukanburu are traditionally organic and locally sourced: bamboo for the frame, glue made from bael fruit, and ropes from natural grasses. While modern festivals like Bali's international kite competition or China's Weifang kite show use commercial materials and are organized as large-scale tourist events, Sukanburu retains its grassroots and handcrafted essence. Each kite is a personal or family creation and is never bought or sold. There is also a strict cultural rule: no one is allowed to cut another's kite, in contrast to the aggressive kite fighting common in other places. The designs of the kites flown at Sukanburu are artistically and spiritually motivated. They resemble gliders, butterflies, or birds and reflect the community's knowledge of aerodynamics and their mythic imagination. The festival takes place exclusively on sacred hilltops known as Buru, which are believed to be the dwelling places of ancestral spirits. This geographical specificity, tied to oral myths and ecological reverence, gives the festival a deeply rooted sense of place and identity within the community.

The transmission of knowledge at Sukanburu is also unique. Unlike other regions where kite-making has become commercial or institutionalized, here it is passed orally from

the elders to the younger generation. However, this sacred knowledge is increasingly endangered as modern influences spread. In essence, the Sukanburu Kite Festival is a ritualistic act of ecological wisdom and ancestral remembrance, making it a rare and powerful example of indigenous cultural

continuity. It celebrates harmony over competition, spiritual connection over spectacle, and handmade artistry over mass production, offering the world a different way to view what kite festivals can truly mean.

Differences: Sukanburu vs Other Kite Festivals

Aspect	Sukanburu (Munda, India)	Uttarayan (Gujarat, India)	Bali Kite Festival (Indonesia)	Weifang Kite Festival (China)
Spiritual Purpose	Deeply spiritual; kites are messengers to Buru Bonga	Originally tied to sun worship; now largely secular	Offerings to Hindu gods for harvest and rain	Mostly artistic and recreational
Materials Used	Bamboo, bael fruit glue, grass rope, handmade paper	Plastic, nylon, synthetic string	Bamboo, cloth, paper	Industrially made kites
Cultural Rules	Non-competitive, no kite-cutting allowed	Highly competitive; kite-cutting is central	Competitive but symbolic	Competitive flying and artistic display
Scale of Participation	Local and inter-village; based on community consensus and spiritual calendar	National and international tourists	Island-wide; competitive team events	International participants and teams
Designs	Resemble birds, gliders, butterflies; based on local myth and aerodynamics	Diamond-shaped or fighter kites	Massive leaf-shaped or animal-like kites	Complex dragon and animal kites
Festival Site	Sacred hilltop (Buru), linked to ancestral spirits	Urban rooftops, fields	Open beaches and fields	Stadiums and kite parks
Transmission of Knowledge	Passed down orally by elders and artisans; often endangered	Learned through community or casually	Trained teams; organized by village groups	Formalized kite associations and schools

5. Conclusion

Munda art embodies a profound cultural and spiritual connection with nature, shaped by the tribe's traditional beliefs and sustainable practices. A prominent manifestation of Munda artistic tradition is observed during the Sukan-Buru festival. This annual event is distinguished by its remarkable kite-making tradition, which highlights exceptional creativity and artistic expression within the Munda community. The kites, notable for their considerable size, often measuring 10–15 feet in width, are crafted with significant artistic and spiritual intent. They transcend mere recreational use, serving as spiritual emissaries believed to convey prayers from the community to the deity Buru Bonga. The kites symbolize freedom, harmony, and the connection between the earth and sky, often resembling gliders or butterflies, thereby reflecting the artistic ingenuity of their creators. These large kites are meticulously handcrafted from natural materials, traditionally utilizing bamboo sticks for the framework, organic glue derived from Bael fruit (*Aegle Marmelos*), and ropes made from grasses. In contemporary times, some modern materials, such as colored paper and commercially purchased ropes, are also employed; however, the skill and traditional knowledge underlying kite construction remain essential. Although the historical origins of kite flying are uncertain, kites have been integral to traditional rituals for generations, including the Sukanburu festival. These kites, unlike designer kites found in other regions, feature unique sizes and shapes that resemble gliders or butterflies, depending on the observer's perspective. However, as modernity advances, it has become imperative to educate the younger generation about this cultural tradition and the construction of these large aerodynamic kites, as only a few skilled individuals remain. During the Sukan-Buru festival, the hill transforms into a vibrant carnival filled with traditional music and dance, as participants bring their 'dhols' and 'nagaras.' Another significant aspect of Buru is the government's attempt to acquire Buru from the villagers to construct a satellite station tower for television signals. The

inhabitants of the region organized a protest concerning this matter and, after several years, successfully regained control of their Buru. Consequently, the significance of Sukanburu in this area has been enhanced.

The Munda people's profound connection to the forest, land, and water is deeply ingrained in their cultural practices, leading them to venerate each of these elements. Jal, Jungle, and Jameen are integral to their existence, and Padma Shree Dr. Ram Dayal Munda posits that a defining feature of Munda culture is the recognition of all natural components—air, water, hills, trees, and forests—as abodes of the supreme being. Consequently, each element is imbued with a spirit that offers protection to the community, and Bir Buru or Buru Bonga is revered through the Sukan-Buru kites. The Sukanburu kite festival is characterized by several unique cultural attributes that distinguish it from other kite-flying traditions. Primarily, the festival serves a spiritual purpose, functioning not merely as a recreational activity but as a sacred annual ceremony that connects the Munda people with their ancestral spirits. Each kite serves as a symbolic emissary, bridging the human and divine realms. Unlike the commercial nature of many other festivals, Sukanburu adheres to a non-commercial ethos—kites are neither bought nor sold; rather, each kite is meticulously crafted by individuals or families, infused with pride and deep cultural significance. This practice fosters a strong sense of identity and craftsmanship within the community. Furthermore, the festival promotes ecological consciousness, as kites are traditionally constructed from biodegradable materials readily available in the local environment, such as bamboo sticks, bael fruit glue, and natural grasses. This tradition exemplifies the community's enduring respect for nature and commitment to sustainability. Importantly, Sukanburu emphasizes community harmony. There is no competitive element; unlike urban kite festivals where cutting others' kites is a common and even celebrated tactic, such actions are prohibited here. The festival's essence lies in unity, joy, and shared reverence. Additionally, the festival is intrinsically

linked to its location- it is held exclusively on sacred hilltops known as Buru in the Khunti district. These sites are not arbitrarily chosen; they hold mythological and ancestral significance, further anchoring the event in Munda cosmology and cultural heritage. Collectively, these elements render Sukanburu more than a mere festival; it is a profound cultural expression of indigenous spirituality, sustainability, and solidarity.

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