

Murma Jatra of Jharkhand: Unearthing the Tales of Tribal Cultural Confluence

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Abstract

Tribal belief systems are deeply rooted in symbolism and ritualistic practices. These rituals have been passed down through generations in the form of folklores, in both written and oral forms. Oral history percolates through stories, legends and myths that offer insights into the deeper meanings behind these beliefs. Murma Jatra, a historic two-day fair of Jharkhand, India, celebrated each year on *Kartik pratipada*, on the eighth day from *Mahanavami Puja*, is one such rich cultural heritage that reflects the belief system, the values, and customs of the Oraons and Mundas, the two major tribes of Jharkhand. The cultural legacy of Murma Jatra has come down to the present generation through folklore and folk narratives. Today the state fair of Jharkhand, the Jatra, is an interface of the tribal way of life in the past and the progress made in contemporary times.

The cultural beliefs, rituals, myths, music, dance, costumes, and the Adivasi root are being celebrated at the Murma Jatra for the last four hundred fifty years or more. Popular belief dates its origin somewhere around the 1530s-40s. Since then, it is reinventing itself but the essence of the Jatra remains intact. The Jatra entails not only the worship of gods and goddesses but also homage paid to spirits and ancestors. Murma Jatra is also an event with its own cultural, social, and economic significance. Oraons from forty villages of three *parhas* take part in the procession to the Jatra Sthal. Not only the Oraons but other tribal communities, from the state and beyond, also take part in it.

This article hopes to foreground and retrace the folktales and folk narratives related to Murma Jatra. It tells the tales of the confluence of gods, goddesses, spirits, ancestors, and the Oraon community of Jharkhand. It also focuses on the Munda-Oraon stories of blood brotherhood.

Keywords: Murma Jatra, Folktales, Tribes, Oraon, Munda, Jharkhand

Introduction

The relationship between tribal beliefs and folklore is often intertwined and interconnected. Tribal communities often have rich oral traditions that pass down their cultural beliefs, values, and history through folklore. Folklore can be defined as the traditional beliefs, customs, stories, and practices of a community, which are transmitted orally from one generation to another. Tribal beliefs typically encompass a wide range of spiritual, religious, and mythological concepts. These beliefs often revolve around the relationship of the tribe with nature, ancestral spirits, and deities. Folklore serves as a medium through which these beliefs are expressed and communicated. Folklore of tribal communities often consists of myths, legends, creation stories, and folktales that provide explanations for the origin of the world, the behaviour of natural phenomena, the formation of cultural customs, and may also include moral teachings. These stories and legends are frequently centred around important cultural figures, heroes, or deities, and may involve elements of magic, symbolism, and metaphor. Symbolism and ritualistic practices form an integral part of tribal belief systems. These rituals, in the form of folklore, written and oral, have been passed down through generations. Oral history in myriad forms, be it story, legend or myth reveals the deeper meanings behind these beliefs. Tribal folklore not only reflects the beliefs and values of a community but also serves various purposes such as entertainment, education, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural identity. It is often performed through storytelling, songs, dances, rituals, and visual arts, allowing the community to engage with and participate in their cultural heritage.

Jharkhand, a state located in eastern India, is not only known for its rich natural resources but also for its vibrant cultural heritage. The state is home to numerous indigenous tribes, each with its own unique folklore and traditions. Among these traditions, the Murma Jatra holds a special place, as it reflects the cultural ethos and religious beliefs of the people of Jharkhand. Murma Jatra is organised at Murma village, located 28 kilometres from Ranchi at Mandar block, Ranchi district, Jharkhand.

Murma Jatra, a historic two-day fair of Jharkhand, is celebrated each year on *Kartik pratipada*¹, on the eighth day from *Mahanavami Puja*². A rich cultural heritage, the Jatra reflects the belief system, the values, and customs of the Oraons and the Mundas, the two major tribes of Jharkhand. It is through folklore and folk narratives that the cultural legacy of Murma Jatra has come down to the present generation. Today the state fair of Jharkhand, this Jatra, is an interface of the tribal way of life in the past and the progress made in contemporary times.

For the last four hundred fifty years or more, the cultural beliefs, rituals, myths, music, dance, costumes, and the Adivasi root are being celebrated at the Murma Jatra. Popular belief dates its origin somewhere around the 1530s-40s. Eversince, the Jatra is reinventing itself, though the essence of the Jatra remains intact. The

Jatra is a unique congregation not only of humans but also of gods, goddesses, spirits, and ancestors, and also entails their worship. Murma Jatra also has its own cultural, social, and economic significance. Oraons from forty villages of three *parhas*³ take part in the procession to the Jatra Sthal⁴. Not only the Oraons but other tribal and non-tribal communities, from the state and beyond, come to the Jatra Sthal to seek blessings from the Jatra Khoonta.

Jatrā: Origins

The term *jatrā/jatra* may have been derived from the Sanskrit word *yatra* meaning pilgrimage, travelling for a sacred purpose like visiting temples or holy sites.

Down history to present times, the term *jātrā* has been used to describe theatrical performances, such as plays or musicals. *Jātrā* as a form of folk theatre is popular in Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar. Mostly based on mythological stories, a *jātrā* is performed on an open stage during the leisure period between agricultural engagements. *Jātrās* are usually religious in nature and involve rituals, music, dance, storytelling, and performance that communicate spiritual themes or values.

There is another term *jātrā* whose meaning is totally different from the above notion of theatrical performance. This *jātrā*, according to Rev. A Grignard (1865-1935), is a “religious cortege in honour of some divinity” (328). In this regard, it is closer to the term *yatra*, which also has connotations of travel. This *jātrā* relates to religious processions, the best example being that of *Jagannath Rathjātrā* festival, when the three deities Lord Jagannath, his brother Lord Balabhadra and sister Goddess Subhadra, are drawn by devotees in three grand, wooden chariots to *Mousibari*⁵, the Gundicha Temple, in Puri, Odisha, for the annual seven-day visit commencing on *dwitiya tithi* of *shukla paksha*⁶ in the month of *Asadh*⁷.

The *jatrā* of the Oraon tribe is significantly different from the above instances as it focuses not only on spirituality/religiousness but also on socio-economic-cultural issues as also entertainment. Rev. A Grignard in his *An Oraon- English Dictionary* (1924) gives two definitions of the term *jatrā*- (i) *jatrā* is “a popular festival and great fair with public games and at night, dances and revelry. It corresponds with the mela of the Hindus. It is held near any village, and to which any Oraon boy or girl may be invited. These dances are held once a year”, and (ii) *jatrā* is a “common name of the several dances, or dancing night outside the village, under the neighbouring *bagicha*⁸. They are generally organised by the landlord, and announced by the beat of drum” (327-28). S. C. Roy (1871-1942), in his seminal work titled *Oraons of Chhotanagpur* (1915) defines *jatrā* as “the inter-parha dancing festival” (307).

S. C. Roy situates the probable origin of *jatrā* to the early times when the Oraon people lived as different hunting clans. He describes *jatrā* as a meeting centre where neighbouring clans would meet “to settle disputes about game or about captured females” (313). These “periodical meetings of neighbouring clans

gradually came to be organized as a regular institution” (312). Gradually, the *jatrā* became an integral part of tribal life and culture offering a platform for inter-clan interactions that forged strong relationships between different clans. *Jatrās*, further served to maintain order and to unite disparate clans into one large tribe. These meetings were held at conveniently located centres at the start of each new season. *Jatrās* also provided opportunities for young men to find brides outside their own clan and thus, strengthen ties between various family lines. (312-313) Different *jatrās* were celebrated to mark changes in agricultural season; even today *Jeth-jatrā* is celebrated in May-June, *Dashera(Aswin)-jatrā* in September-October, *Sohrai(Kartik)-jatrā* in October-November, *Aghan-jatrā* in November-December, etc.

Oraon Dharam Guru⁹ Bandhan Tigga, in an interview in 2017, had a different etymology for the term *jatrā*. According to the Dharam Guru, the word *jatrā* comprises *jia* and *taran*. *Jia* means ‘soul’ and *taran* means ‘to purify’. So, *jatrā* denotes a journey or a congregation that purifies souls. To the present-day Oraon community, *jatrā* is a congregation with definite religious, social, and recreational elements.

Murma Jatra

Murma Jatra amalgamates within itself the myriad connotations of the terms *yatra* (pilgrimage), the two *jātrās* (theatrical performance and religious cortege) and *jatrā* as the meeting space of the Oraon community. Jatra Khoonta, a giant *sal*¹⁰ stem, located at the centre of the Murma Jatra Sthal forms the focal point of the celebrations. It is believed to be the sacred place where the supreme deity resides.



Fig. 1. Bhattacharji, Shreya. Jatra Sthal, Murma, Ranchi, Jharkhand. 11 Oct. 2022.

*Khorhas*¹¹ from forty villages come to the Jatra Sthal singing and dancing with their flags and totems. These totems represent their gods, goddesses, spirits, and ancestors. The rhythmic singing and dancing to the beats of *mandar*, *dhol*, *nagara* and other musical instruments creates an ethereal environment. These songs and dances are also believed to have a magical effect on the fertility of the soil. Murma Jatra also becomes the place for kith and kin to meet and the occasion for the elders of the community to sit together to talk, discuss and solve their social issues and problems. Young boys and girls of the community come to the Jatra to find their prospective life partners. People of all age groups from toddlers to old men and women participate with great enthusiasm and fervour in this Jatra. Murma Jatra also has a powerful economic dimension. For two days, it serves as a centre where people from different parts of Jharkhand as also other states come to sell and buy various agricultural implements and products such as seeds, fertilizers, ploughs, shovels, spades, sickles, etc. Traditional musical instruments such as *mandar*, *dhol*, *nagara*, *dhamsa*, *kendra*, *banam*, etc., traditional weapons such as bows-arrows, swords, daggers, iron and wooden utensils, measuring vessels such as *paelas*¹², tribal attire and jewellery, fishing nets, etc. are also bought and sold. The food stalls of Murma Jatra are a special attraction. Rides such as the giant wheel, dodgem cars, *maut ka kuan*¹³ pull huge crowds.



Fig.2. Kuiry, Hare Krishna. Evening View of Murma Mela, Murma, Ranchi, Jharkhand. 11 Oct. 2017.

Furthermore, Murma Jatra serves as an occasion for tribal communities to come together, exchange cultural knowledge, and strengthen social bonds. It is an opportunity for the younger generations to learn about their heritage. The rituals of Murma Jatra, preserved over centuries, connect the traditional world to contemporary times.

Murma Jatra: Rituals

The first day of Murma Jatra falls on *Kartik pratipada* or the eighth day from *Mahanavami Puja* that is observed at Ratu Fort¹⁴. *Pahans*¹⁵ from the forty villages with forty *karsas*¹⁶ led by the *pahan* of Murma village worship the Khoonta with different ritual items. Village deities, spirits and ancestors are propitiated to seek blessings, protection from evil, and the Jatra commences only after their permission.



Fig.3. Kumar, Vikash. *Karsas* being carried to the Jatra Khoonta, Murma, Ranchi, Jharkhand. 11 Oct. 2022.

On the second day of Murma Jatra, processions from the forty villages come singing and dancing to the Jatra Sthal with *parha* flags, village flags, and totems. The *khorhas* headed by Pungi village enter the Jatra Sthal and circumambulate the Jatra Khoonta thrice.

The popularity of Murma Jatra has seen it evolve over centuries into more modern forms while still retaining its unique identity. The narratives revolving around Murma Jatra are both unique and varied.

Narrative 1

Local lore states that the Munda tribal people were the original inhabitants of Murma and the surrounding areas. Later, around 1530s-1540s, the Oraon tribe migrated from Rohtasgarh to this area and a clash ensued between the two tribes for control over this region. Interestingly, to avoid bloodshed, they decided to settle their differences through a cultural competition. The competition lasted seven days and seven nights. Finally, the sweet beats of *mandar* accorded victory to the Oraons. It is believed that the place where the cultural competition took place was named Mandar after this musical instrument, perhaps the only place to be named so (Bhattacharyya 69-70). Today, Mandar is not only the name of the

village but also the respective block and constituency in Ranchi Sadar subdivision of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. Murma is also a village under the same block and constituency. The two communities parted on good terms. The Munda community resettled in the neighbouring Khunti area and left Murma to the Oraons. It is believed that to commemorate this brotherhood between the two communities, Mundas and Oraons together erected the Jatra Khoonta in Murma. To commemorate the event and as a mark of gratitude, Oraons began inviting Mundas to the Jatra Sthal every year and celebrated the day with feasting, revelry, singing and dancing. In course of time, the Jatra Sthal transformed into the meeting centre of these two communities and the Jatra Khoonta became the socio-religio-cultural marker of Oraon-Munda unity and brotherhood, signifying the social and cultural accord between them.

To this day, Jatra Khoonta is revered as the socio-religio-cultural marker. The erection of such markers representing unity and brotherhood is prevalent among tribal communities across India. *Ka vi Long Chok*, literally meaning ‘our blood stone planted upright’, 17 kilometres north of Gangtok, Sikkim, is another such marker of brotherhood between two different communities. These huge upright stones, dating back to the thirteenth century, symbolize the “Blood Brotherhood Covenant” between the Lepcha high priest, Thikoongtek, and Khye-Bumsa, an ancestor of the Tibetan Namgyal Kings of Sikkim. Consequently, the first Namgyal king was crowned in Yoksam, Sikkim in 1642 with Lepcha consent (Bhattacharji 71).

Narrative 2

In another narrative, when Oraon people were settling in the Chotanagpur¹⁷ area, they were opposed by local inhabitants. This conflict took the form of a fierce fight and many heads were cut off. *Mur* means ‘head’ and *mar* means ‘to strike’, therefore, the present-day village Murma, possibly located at the site of the conflict, might have derived its name from *murmar*, meaning “to strike/cut the head off” (Mishra and Ekka 9). The Oraon people eventually won the battle and settled in this area. It is believed that the Oraons started the Jatra at Murma to commemorate their victory in this battle. Thus, this annual celebration came to be known as Murma Jatra.

In another version, it is believed that the Oraons used to call the Mundas “Murma” in their language. So, it is assumed that the name Murma may also have been derived from the Munda community, the original inhabitants of the place (Mishra and Ekka 8).

Narrative 3

According to another folklore, when the Oraons left Rohtasgarh and moved to Chotanagpur, the community members appeared before the king of the region. Again, there are two different versions regarding the king ruling the area at that point of time. According to one version, the Munda king, Madra Munda, was the ruler of the area, which seems to be historically inaccurate as Madra Munda ruled

the area around 84 CE. The other version states that the Oraons approached the ruling Nagvanshi king. This version may have some truth in it as the Nagvanshis were definitely the rulers of Chotanagpur during the 1530s-40s. The Nagvanshi dynasty is regarded as the fifth longest ruling dynasty in the world and the first in India with a reign of 1931 years beginning in 83 CE and ending in 2014 CE (Ankan). When the Oraons requested the King for shelter, he demanded the Oraons demonstrate their skill or expertise. Oraons were agriculturalists and experts in digging the soil. So, they went to the Murma area and kept on digging the earth with *sabars* (a tool) till morning. The King was pleased and praised the laborious Oraon tribe. He bestowed to them the Murma region to reside. The Munda people, the inhabitants of the region, were also pleased to see the skill of the Oraons. In the Mundari language *ur* means 'to dig the soil with *sabar*' and *ang* means 'morning'. The Mundas, impressed by the Oraons digging the soil till morning, started calling them *urang* meaning 'people who dig the soil till morning'. Oraons and Mundas began living in the region peacefully. To express their gratitude, the Oraon people invited the King to Murma and felicitated him. They danced and sang and feasts were organized in his honour.

Ever since, the Oraon people began gathering there every year to commemorate the historic occasion. Gradually it took the form of a *jatra* and after the name of the place, popularly came to be known as Murma Jatra (Mishra and Ekka 7-8).

This narrative goes beyond the tenets of tribal amity and peaceful co-existence to highlight the warm and cordial relation that developed between the Nagvanshi king, a non-tribal and the Oraons. According to Dharam Guru Bandhan Tigga, the last king of the Ratu Fort, King Chintamani Sharan Nath Shahdeo (1931-2014), used to attend the Jatra. His descendant, Princess Madhuri Manjari Devi, still follows this tradition of the Fort (Tigga 2023).

Narrative 4

Two tales show the involvement of the Lohar community¹⁸ in the origin myth of Murma Jatra.

When the Oraon people were migrating from Rohtasgarh to Chotanagpur, so goes the first tale, they were chased by some enemies. To save their lives, some Oraons took refuge in a Lohar's house. The Lohar hid them in his house and saved their lives. To show their appreciation for this kind gesture, the Oraon people organized a celebration with songs and dances, in honour of the Lohar family. Gradually, it became an annual celebration and eventually developed into what is known today as the Murma Jatra (Mishra and Ekka 16-17).

Narrative 5

The second lore dates Murma Jatra to a time when a Lohar and his family lived in Murma village. He had six girls and three boys. The children were married off according to tradition. The Lohar and his wife once invited the daughters and their husbands back home. The daughters and the sons-in-law were extended

excellent hospitality. Just before their return, the Lohar couple organized a special family gathering on a full moon night. They sang and danced in the open field. Every year, thereafter, they gathered for a family celebration on this particular full moon night. Gradually, their neighbours also began to join the celebration. As it became an annual event, people from nearby villages also came to see it. As more and more people started attending, some people began selling *murhi*¹⁹, *chewra*²⁰ etc. Gradually, the number of people increased manifold and the family event took the form of a festival. This later metamorphosed into the present-day Murma Jatra. (Mishra and Ekka 16) Over time, the Jatra has developed into an annual event that celebrates love, unity, and togetherness among families.

Thus, two prevalent folktales regarding the origin of Murma Jatra involve the Lohar community. While the first tale highlights Lohar-Oraon camaraderie and unity as the foundational pillar of Murma Jatra, the second narrative revolves around the Lohar community and gives them sole credit for the initiation of the Jatra at Murma. Even today, the Lohar community resides in Murma and nearby areas. Interestingly, stones to sharpen iron implements, and iron pieces are still found in excavations in Mesal²¹ and nearby areas (Mishra and Ekka 17). The camaraderie between the two communities continues. In present times, the presence and involvement of the Lohar community in Murma Jatra is notable.

While different versions about the origin of Murma Jatra exist, yet these multiple folk tales and narratives foreground Murma Jatra as an inclusive space for people from not only tribal but also non-tribal communities to come together. The Jatra symbolizes unity and brotherhood among different communities. These tales inculcated in the younger generations enable them to live in harmony with other communities and build an accommodative and peaceful society.

The Jatra Khoonta is the pivot around which Murma Jatra revolves and the tales of the Jatra Khoonta are perhaps equally interesting and varied.

The Many Tales of Jatra Khoonta:

The Jatra Khoonta, also known as Shakti Khoonta or Dharam Khoonta, is a sacred space not only for the Oraons and the Mundas but also other tribal and non-tribal communities. It has immense historical importance and stands as a symbol of the tribal way of life. Not only the Oraon migration story, but the cultural beliefs, and religious sentiments of this community are deeply attached to the Jatra Khoonta. It is believed that the success of the annual Murma Jatra depends on the year-long worship of the Jatra Khoonta. As mentioned earlier, along with the *khorhas* from the forty villages, their deities, spirits, and ancestors also come to the Jatra Sthal on Murma Jatra. Oraon people believe that circumambulating the Jatra Khoonta grants these beings a certain potency. Once potent, Oraons believe, these powers protect their respective villages from any evil or calamity for the ensuing year.

There are many myths and legends related to the origin and existence of Jatra Khoonta.

Tale 1: Oraon people believe that the earth is full of guardian spirits such as forest, water, and hill spirits. These spirits alongside ancestors, protect villages and communities from lethal diseases and natural calamities. The belief in these spirit beings has been passed down through generations. It is believed that the Jatra Khoonta serves as a home to these guardian spirits and ancestors and thus is known as the *Bhoot*²² Khoonta.

There is an interesting folklore associated with this belief in spirits. It is said that during the Second World War, the Murma Jatra area was surrounded by the British army. The army had formed its base at the Jatra Sthal and did not allow the tribal community to worship there. The army stopped them from celebrating Murma Jatra for three long years. One night, during the time of the Jatra, Sobha Miyan, a sixty-year-old resident of Jolha toli near Jatra Sthal, saw a giant black buffalo-like animal sitting near the Jatra Khoonta and bellowing ferociously. Sobha Miyan later said that it was the spirit of the Jatra Khoonta that was showing its dissatisfaction at not being worshipped (Mishra and Ekka 25). This tale foregrounds the faith of the non-tribal inhabitants of the region on the Jatra Khoonta.

In another version of the story, Sukra Bhagat of Sursa village, adjacent to the Jatra Sthal, one night saw a tiger roaring fiercely and attacking the British soldiers. People assumed that the tiger was, in fact, the spirit residing in the *Bhoot* Khoonta, who was extremely unhappy with the sacrilege (Tigga 2023).



Fig.4. Kuiry, Hare Krishna. Shakti Khoonta at Murma Jatra, Murma, Ranchi, Jharkhand. 11 Oct. 2017.

Tale 2: In another tale of Jatra Khoonta, it is believed that during the Second World War, when the British cantonment settled on the Jatra Sthal, they desecrated the Jatra Khoonta, cut the holy *sal* stem and threw it away. According to certain village eyewitnesses, this sacrilegious act of the British soldiers invited the wrath of the Jatra Khoonta, and many British soldiers are said to have died mysteriously soon after. The dead soldiers were buried at this place (Mishra and Ekka 26). Perhaps, it is safe to assume here that the villagers later purified the Jatra Sthal and erected a new Jatra Khoonta. Although there is no such practice of changing the Jatra Khoonta each year, when inevitable, Pungi village takes the initiative to change the Jatra Khoonta.

Tale 3: According to Sundhanshu Mishra and William Ekka in *मुड़मा जतरा एक परिचय [Murma Jatra: An Introduction]* (1996), Jatra Khoonta is also called Cheri, Chandri, or Chandi. Chandi is worshiped as a goddess of power in many Oraon villages in contemporary Jharkhand. As Murma Jatra commences on the eighth day from the *Mahanavami Puja*, the ninth day of the worship of Goddess Chandi, Bhagwati or Durga, Mishra and Ekka link this worship of Chandi to Murma Jatra and to the worship of Jatra Khoonta as Shakti Khoonta (26).

However, although Oraon *pahans* and the present Oraon Dharam Guru agree that Chanri/Chandri/Chandi is worshipped in certain Oraon villages and the Murma Jatra commences on the eighth day from *Mahanavami Puja*, they refute any connection between the worship of Chanri/Chandri/Chandi and the Murma Jatra. As the Jatra Khoonta is believed to be the source of potency and power, it is also called Shakti Khoonta (Oraon; Tigga; B. Tigga; C. Oraon).

Tale 4: Another name for Jatra Khoonta is Dharam Khoonta. Oraon people believe that their supreme deity, Dharmesh, resides in the Jatra Khoonta. Therefore, they worship it as Dharam Khoonta.

Tale 5: The Munda people believe that their principal god Singbonga resides in the Jatra Khoonta. So, this community, too, reveres the Jatra Khoonta (Tigga 2023).

The worship of the Jatra Khoonta in myriad forms is the connecting thread of these lores. In addition to being the marker of unity and brotherhood between Oraons and Mundas, the Khoonta is believed to be the residence of gods, goddesses, spirits, and ancestors. The Khoonta, thus, symbolizes the nucleus of power from which everyone, tribals as also non-tribals can gain the holy energy. The Jatra Khoonta, today, has become the holy shrine for the tribal people particularly Oraon and Munda communities. Oraons from Jharkhand, other states of India, and even abroad come to seek blessings from the Jatra Khoonta during Murma Jatra. Not only the Oraons but members of other tribal and non-tribal communities also come to attend the two-day Jatra.

Conclusion

The tales and lores of Murma Jatra and Jatra Khoonta are treasures that encapsulate the essence of the tribal cultural heritage of Jharkhand. Tribal beliefs and folklores are inextricably interconnected. While beliefs form the foundation of the spiritual and cultural worldview of the community, folklore is the medium through which these beliefs are expressed, transmitted, and also celebrated across generations.

The different narratives about Murma Jatra posit the Jatra as an inclusive and harmonious space where people from different communities have been congregating in a spirit of brotherhood and love every year, for the last four centuries or more. The Jatra has a different signification for each community. Oraons worship the Khoonta as God Dharmesh, and also as the source of divine power. Mundas come to the Jatra Sthal to worship the Jatra Khoonta as Singbonga, their supreme deity. Both Mundas and Oraons participate in the Jatra to commemorate the historic accord between them. To the Nagvanshi dynasty, perhaps, the Khoonta symbolises Goddess Durga or Chandi. While Tale 1, wherein Sobha Miyan sees the spirit of Jatra Khoonta in buffalo form, points towards the involvement of Muslims in the Murma Jatra, in contemporary times their participation in the Jatra is limited to economic dealings. Though, the Jatra Khoonta remains the connecting thread that binds the different lores and narratives, the very existence of such multiple narratives points towards the open-endedness of Murma Jatra as a cultural text. Thus, the hermeneutics of Murma Jatra is, perhaps, responsible for its sustained adaptability over four centuries. This hermeneutics, further, points to the Jatra being a constantly evolving and transforming space. The Jatra which began as a meeting place of different hunting clans has, today, taken the shape of a grand fair. The Jatra is not a fixed or rigid space; instead, it continues to evolve, change, and incorporate new elements over time while still retaining its core essence. This flexibility and adaptability allows the Jatra and its allied folk traditions to remain relevant in changing social, cultural, and technological landscapes. Thus, the Jatra retains its contemporaneity in each age and time.

This article has tried to foreground and retrace certain lores and tales related to Murma Jatra and Jatra Khoonta. The Murma Jatra, as also its tales, highlights an inclusive space shared not just by humans of different communities but also by deities, spirits, and ancestors. The stories of Munda-Oraon as also Oraon-Lohar brotherhood form the very essence of Murma Jatra. This spirit of togetherness infuses everyday life, and these communities continue to support each other during times of need and distress. This solidarity amongst the communities may also be considered as a tribute to their shared history.

The present article, through its analysis of the tales of tribal convergence, hopes to add to the existing knowledge domain about the worldviews of tribal communities, particularly the tales, rituals, traditions, and culture of the Oraons. Based on empirical research, the article hopes to serve as an effective resource material to gain an insight into the pluralities of the tribal world. There is an

urgent need to unearth such tales of inclusiveness and harmony, the cultural repository of the distilled wisdom of these communities, in this violence battered times. Disseminating such tales of tribal cultural confluence to the world at large would, perhaps, go a long way in creating a more egalitarian and peaceful society.

Notes

¹*Kartik* is the eighth month in the Hindu lunar calendar which falls around October-November in Gregorian calendar; *pratipada* is the first day of the Hindu lunar month.

²the ninth day of the worship of Goddess Durga in the month of *Kartik*

³*Parha/Para* is a confederacy of neighbouring villages usually consisting of seven, nine, twelve, twenty-one, or twenty-two villages. Each *parha* consists of the *raja* (king), the *dewan* (prime minister), the *panrey* (clerk), and the *kotwar* (bailiff) village. Villages with no such denomination are known as *parja* (subject) villages.

⁴*Sthal* is a place or venue. *Jatra Sthal* is the focal premise where the *Jatra*/religious procession both begins and concludes.

⁵*Mousi/Masi* means maternal aunt and *bari* means house, so *Mousibari* refers to the maternal aunt's house.

⁶*Dwitiya tithi* of *shukla paksha* denotes the second day of the bright lunar fortnight, i.e., two days after the new moon in the Hindu lunar calendar.

⁷*Asadh* month would be June-July according to the Gregorian calendar.

⁸ A garden or grove.

⁹Dharam Guru can be considered to be the religio-cultural leader of the Oraon community.

¹⁰*Shorea robusta*, also known as *Sakhua*.

¹¹*Khorha* is a group of people representing a particular village at the Murma Jatra.

¹²A traditional measuring vessel made of aluminium or brass, used to measure different food items like rice.

¹³The well of death, a popular motorcycle stunt show.

¹⁴Fort of Ratu King (Nagvanshi dynasty), Ratu, 15 kms from Ranchi.

¹⁵Priest of the Oraon community.

¹⁶An earthen pitcher.

¹⁷Chotanagpur plateau, in eastern India, covers much of Jharkhand and adjacent parts of Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh.

¹⁸Lohar/Lohra is a blacksmith community classified as a Scheduled Tribe in Jharkhand.

¹⁹puffed rice.

²⁰beaten rice.

²¹village adjoining Murma, Mandar block, Ranchi district.

²²Ancestors and spirits of the Oraon people (to be differentiated from ghosts of mainstream communities).

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