



## **International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)**

*A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal*

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-VII, Issue-V, September 2021, Page No. 105-113

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v7.i5.2021.105-113

## **Santals and their Language: An Anthropological Study**

**Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed**

*Asst. Professor, Dep.t of Education, Haldia Govt. College, Purba Medinipur, W. B., India*

### **Abstract:**

*The role of script of any language from anywhere of the world, is not only to identify the community itself but also it is expected to strengthen the language and development of the community with respect to literature and culture and overall position in the society. Besides this, it is a medium to preserve a language from the dangers of extinction. Scripts can be compared with that of the dresses where we can wear any dresses of any culture, but at the end of the day we feel the reassurance of the dresses of our own culture. Similarly, we can write our views in any script, but it is best expressed with the help of our mother tongue. In India, Santals are one of the largest tribal communities who speak Santali language. Like most of the ethnic groups in India, the Santals had no script to write on earlier. They used to pass their expressions, thoughts, legends through orally only. It was the Christian Missionaries who promoted Santali by using Bengali and Roman script. After the Bengali and Roman Script, Devnagari and Oriya scripts are also being used by various authors. This trend is running strong although 'Ol Chiki', the 'writing script' for Santali language had been introduced to the world as well as to the Santals all over the world by "Guru Gomke", Pandit Raghunath Murmu many years ago. This paper mainly concentrates the developmental history, myths and legends behind the emergence of Santali language and its script, after the long struggle for the recognition of the script as well as the language.*

**Key Words: Santals, Development of Santali Language, 'Ol Chiki' script**

**Introduction:** Santals are one of the most dominant tribes in India. They are the third largest tribal community in India after Bhil and Gond tribes. They spread out over a vast area of the country, mainly in the states of West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Assam. Some migrated in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. They have been described as the most integrated and possibly the most resilient tribe in eastern India. The origin of the Santals has been remained mystery, till date, the mystery is unsolved. Apart from the unsolved mystery of their origin, the other aspects such as their religion, their culture are very rich than that of many other tribes in India. In spite of various obstacles, Santals are tremendous anxious to retain their tribal identity as various social transformations are making serious damage as whether it is culture or language, there have

been infiltrations from various dominant social groups such as Hindus and Christians on the tribal community's culture, language, and their age old customs and beliefs.

Like any other social groups, the Santals have their own language. They speak Santali which is an independent language itself. Santali belongs to the Munda group of languages. Again, while citing from Pater W. Schmidt's (1906) *Die Mon Khmer Volker, ein Bindeglied Zwischen Volkern Zentralasiens und Austronesiens*, Troisi (1979) said that Schmidt classified this Munda group of languages as the Austro-Asiatic language group. Among the Austro-Asiatic languages, Santali is spoken by a large number of populations. While concentrating on the development scale of the language, it is certain that Santali ranges among the best documented tribal languages of India (Lotz, 2004). That is because; from the nineteenth century onwards foreigners came in contact with the Santals, learned their language and culture and wrote many valuable books containing each and every characteristic of Santal life. These books became highly valuable for those researchers who have/are worked/working upon various aspects of tribal life of the Santals. Needless to say, Santali, the language of Santals, draw tremendous attention of the researchers to study on, as more than 6.5 million (Census of India 2001) people in India speak this language i.e. more than the total population of many American, African, European, as well as Asian countries, according to the World Bank data.

The Santals are more aware and strong-minded to protect their language than many of the other tribes in India. Santali is derived from the ethnic name, Santal. Santals call themselves 'Hor' i.e. 'Man' and call their language Santali as 'Hor-Ror' where 'Ror' means speech or language. Therefore, it is the 'Language of Man', the 'Language of Santals'. Despite the apprehension of losing the tribal identity, Santals somewhat managed to continue their language intact from the foreign influences, be it the grammar or other principles of the language are concerned. But, as far as vocabulary is concerned, nothing can be said like that as a lot of words from different languages have been adopted as well as adapted to the Santal ideas and linguistic rules (Troisi, 1979).

Although the Santals have their own unique and independent language, they did not have their own script to convey their thoughts. Till the nineteenth century Santali remained an oral language and all the traditional knowledge, history, stories, songs etc. were transmitted orally from generation to generation. Before the independence, it was the Christian Missionaries who came in contact with the Santals. The only aim of these missionaries was to promote Christianity among the native Indians. Needless to say, when they came in contact with one of the primordial aborigines of India i.e. the Santals, they wanted to spread Christianity among them. But the language fence became the most challenging hurdle to cross over. The missionaries took the challenge and began to learn their culture, their language, and their age old customs by living their life with them in the intense forests. After learning the language, these missionaries wrote many valuable books on Santals using Bengali and Roman scripts before 1860s by European anthropologists, folklorists and missionaries like Philips, Campbell, Skrefsrud and Bodding. Their efforts resulted in Santali dictionaries, documentation and translations of collected folk tales, study of the basic

morphology, syntax and phonetic structure of the language and many more. Gradually, Devnagari and Oriya had been introduced to promote Santali.

**Development of Santali Language:** As Roman, Bengali, Devnagari, Oriya were being used extensively for writing Santali, some felt the need of a new script which might embody themselves independently, not by using foreign or some dominant language scripts but the script of their own for which they would be proud of. There was a huge gap in between the dreams dreamt and the reality. But a man from Rairangpur of Odisha made the dream come true. He was Pandit Raghunath Murmu.

Pandit Raghunath Murmu is the inventor of the “Ol Chiki Script”. He was born in a small village called Dandbose (Dahardih), Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj District in Odisha State of India on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1905. He completed his High School education from Baripada High School. Then he joined as an apprentice in Baripada power house. After completing apprenticeship, he engaged himself in carpet weaving. The then Dewan of Mayurbhanj State Dr. P. K. Sen, once visited him and persuaded him to pursue further industrial training. He was then sent to Kolkata, Serampore and Goshaba for acquiring technical knowledge. After getting technical training, he was made the advisor of Purna Chandra Industrial Institute at Baripada. After the death of his father Shri Nandalal Murmu, he returned to his native place and took the job as a Headmaster of a school. During this period he wanted to do something for the development of the Santal society and started planning to create a new script to promote Santali language. He intensely felt the need of an independent script for Santali because the scripts that had been used by the authors and the poets then were not sufficient and proper for Santali language, whether it is grammar or the phonetics of the language. He wanted uniformity in the language as authors from Bengal were using Bengali script, authors from Odisha were using Oriya script, authors from Bihar (Jharkhand State was not built then) were using Devnagari script, and they were also using Roman script as well, which, definitely was causing serious smash up and creating bewilderment between the Santals of these different regions. Moreover he also felt that by using those different dominating language scripts, many infiltrations were in the rise in the Santali language unknowingly. As it is being rightly said that necessity is the mother of all inventions, Pandit Raghunath Murmu’s utmost endeavour for better manifestation of his mother tongue and his zest for excellence paved the way for the evolution of Santal peoples’ own script known as “OL CHIKI” in 1925. This historic path breaking invention gave the whole Santal community a much higher confidence and also facilitated proper expression of their words while writing and, Ol Chiki emerged as a saviour of the language to inspire and in still a sense of enormous confidence, endless pride, rejuvenation and solidarity among Santals residing all over the world.

After incredible hard work and prolonged persistence Ol Chiki was invented and it seemed that the Santals had achieved the dawn of justice for their language. Pandit Raghunath Murmu developed a hand press by himself earlier. The then Superintendent of Education, Mr. Sachindranath Das was so impressed by the invention that he insisted Pandit Murmu to exhibit his hand press in the State Exhibition in February, 1939. The Maharaja of

Mayurbhanj, His Majesty Purna Chandra Bhanj Deo was immensely impressed by the invention and permitted him to spread the knowledge of the usage of the script. He inspired millions and millions of illiterate Santals through his wide range of writings, be it novels, stories, poetries or dramas or be it the grammar of the language, he was the legend, the Master of Santali. He wrote over 150 books covering wide range of subjects in Santali using 'Ol Chiki' script. The most acclaimed drama written by Pandit Murmu was "Bidu Chandan". "Kherwal Bir" , "Darege Dhan" was also another famous drama which was written by him. Pandit Raghunath Murmu is popularly known as "Guru Gomke" among the Santals. This title was conferred on him by the Mayurbhanj Adibasi Mahasabha. An Honorary D.Lit. was conferred on him by Ranchi University. Besides this Government of West Bengal, Government of Odisha, and many other associations and organizations like Odisha Sahitya Academy have honoured him in various ways. This great philosopher, thinker, writer, poet, dramatist breathed his last on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1982. Although he is not among us but the legend continues through the fight for proper respect for the language and proper justice for the 'Ol Chiki' script by the Santals all over the world.

**An Overview of Santali Language:** The Santali alphabet consists of six vowels or "Raha Arang" and twenty four consonants or "Kecheth Arang". The characters are arranged in a five by six matrix in a conventional way. The first characters in each row (A, AA, I, U, E, O) are the vowels or Raha Arang and remaining are the consonants or Kecheth Arang. Below is the list of the letters:

**o<sub>A</sub>T<sub>AT</sub>G<sub>AK</sub>F<sub>ANG</sub>L<sub>AL</sub>**  
**A<sub>AA</sub>K<sub>AAK</sub>J<sub>AAJ</sub>m<sub>AAM</sub>W<sub>AAW</sub>**  
**I<sub>I</sub>S<sub>ISH</sub>h<sub>IH</sub>Q<sub>INJ</sub>R<sub>IR</sub>**  
**U<sub>U</sub>C<sub>UC</sub>D<sub>UD</sub>M<sub>UNN</sub>Y<sub>UY</sub>**  
**E<sub>E</sub>P<sub>EP</sub>d<sub>EDD</sub>n<sub>EN</sub>Z<sub>ERR</sub>**  
**O<sub>O</sub>t<sub>OTT</sub>B<sub>OB</sub>V<sub>OV</sub>H<sub>OH</sub>**

Ol Chiki is written from left to right, and consists of letters which represent vowels and consonants as mentioned above. In addition to these, a number of modifier letters are used to indicate tone, nasalization, length, and deglottalization. The list is shown below.

**N**<sub>[MU TTUDDAAG]</sub>•**GAAHLAA** **TTUDDAAG**~**RELAA**]~**PHAARKAA****X**<sub>[AHAD]</sub>  
 •<sub>[MU-GAAHLAA TTUDDAAG]</sub>

MU TTUDDAAG is the nasalization mark which follows any vowel whether it is long or short. GAAHLAA TTUDDAAG is the vowel modifier. When MU TTUDDAAG and GAAHLAA TTUDDAAG used together, they form MU-GAAHLAA TTUDDAAG. RELAA is the length mark that combines with any oral or nasal vowel. PHAARKAA is the glottal protector and the deglottalizing AHAD can follow only four consonants **g**, **j**, **D**, and **b**.

**1**<sub>[1]</sub>,**2**<sub>[2]</sub>,**3**<sub>[3]</sub>,**4**<sub>[4]</sub>,**5**<sub>[5]</sub>,**6**<sub>[6]</sub>,**7**<sub>[7]</sub>,**8**<sub>[8]</sub>,**9**<sub>[9]</sub>,**0**<sub>[0]</sub>.

The numbers or digits in Ol Chiki script are shown above. These digits have their distinctive forms also.

As far as the punctuation are concerned, the European comma (,), exclamatory mark (!), and question mark (?) and quotation marks (“-”) are used in the writings using the Ol Chiki script. But the full stop (.) is not used. Instead of full stop (.) the punctuation Mucaad (I) and Double Mucaad (II) are used.

### **The allegory and the Anthropological perspectives in behind the invention of Santali**

**Language:** While citing from Rameswar Murmu’s (1988) *Ol Chikireyah Galhan*, Mohapatra (2001) said that the origin of Ol Chiki lies on two different myths. The first myth tells upon how the first characters i.e. **o**, **T**, **g**, **f**, and **l** have appeared. **o** [A], originated from Sengel i.e. Fire; **T**[AT], originated from Hasa i.e. Soil; **g**[AK], originated from Dak i.e. Water; **f**[ANG], originated from Hoi i.e. Air; and **l**[AL], originated from Soon i.e. Sky; all appeared from these basic elements. Pandit Raghunath Murmu saw the Santal gods *Bidu* and *Chandan* in his dream and they advised him that if he worshipped them they would help him in his queries. Pandit Murmu did accordingly and he was blessed with the ideas of inventing the Santali writing script by the gods and thus the Ol Chiki script is primordial and sacred. The second myth suggested that the script was a divine gift to a blessed man as common man believes that anything which is extraordinary, is the doings of gods and thus Ol Chiki as an extraordinary thing had been done, surely it has to be a divine thing invented by a blessed man called Pandit Raghunath Murmu.

Apart from the first five characters there are some other characters also derived from Nature. They are as follows:

**C**[UC]: Peak of hill

**I**[I]: Bending tree

**D**[UD]: Mushroom

**M**[UNN]: Picture of a flying bee

**E** [E]: Over flowing river changing course

**T**[OTT]: Hump of a camel

There are some characters which are derived from Physical Environment. The list is shown below:

**A**[AA]: Shape of a man using a spade

**S**[IS]: Shape of a plough

**R**[IR]: Figure of a sickle

**U**[U]: Shape of a vessel for preparing food

**H**[OH]: Figure of a man throwing something with none hand

There are some common postures from where some of the characters were derived:

**J**[AAJ]: Shape of spreading hands

**m**[AAM]: Indicating ‘you’

**w** [AAW]: Opening of lips

**h** [IH]: Hands up

**q** [INJ]: Pointing to oneself

**y** [UY]: A man bending towards the ground

**p** [EP]: A person receiving something with both hands from another

**d** [EDD]: Shape of a man with two legs stretching towards his chest and mouth

**n** [EN]: One working in bending position

**z** [ERR]: One avoiding an arrow with one hand

**O** [O]: Shape of opened lips

**B** [OB]: Shape of curly hair

Mahapatra (1986), the great scholar once conducted an interview with Pandit Raghunath Murmu where he confirmed the fact that there was a close relationship in the symbolized, pronounced sounds and their meaning in each case. On the other hand there are some differences in the meaning of pronounced sounds when views of both the scholars, Pandit Raghunath Murmu himself and Rameswar Murmu are concerned.

In spite of the similarities or dissimilarities regarding pronounced sound of the symbols or some legends or myths regarding the appearance of Ol Chiki in the arena of the Indian language, it has to be admitted that the originality of Pandit Raghunath Murmu is beyond doubting.

**Place of Santali as an Indian Language:** According to Brandt (2014), India hosts the majority of the scripts which play an outstanding socio-linguistic role. Via the 92<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment in 2003, four new languages-Dogri, Maithili, Bodo and Santali were added to the eighth scheduled of the Indian Constitution. At present there are 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule in the Constitution of India and these are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. From the 22 languages above, the following scripts of the Indian languages are not yet represented on the Indian Currency Note: Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Manipuri, Santhali, and Sindhi. Languages that are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India are entitled to state support in various fields such as subsidies for printing books, preparation of text books for schools and many more. A great recognition of Santali was achieved in December, 2013 when the University Grants Commission (UGC) decided to introduce the language in the National Eligibility Test (NET) to recruit future faculties for the Santali language in colleges and universities. Among 22 scheduled language of Indian Constitution 6.5 millions speak Santali which stands 14<sup>th</sup> rank after Hindi, Bengali, Telegu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujrati, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Punjabi, Assamese and Maithili.

The new script invented by Pandit Raghunath Murmu though established a foundation for a distinctive literary culture, it is true that the script Ol Chikli have to travel more distances. Not only to secure a place in the Indian Currency Note but also among the Santal community also. It is because many educated Santals though, are trying to establish Ol Chiki as the only script by which Santali could be written; only a small number of people have accepted it as a means of writing. No doubt, the scope of studying Santali with the help of Ol Chiki is somewhat very minimal. The condition of job opportunities is too poor

to be discussed in the present Indian context of job opportunities. Whatever may be the situation is, it has to be admitted that Santali is a fast growing language and Ol Chiki, the creation of Pandit Raghunath Murmu, is definitely acts as an anchor of Santali.

**Santali in the Present Educational Context:** Perhaps the most active association that promoted Ol Chiki as a written script for Santali is Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association (ASECA). This association was established in Odisha in 1964 and it spread its wings in West Bengal and Bihar also. In 1973, a conference held in Pakur, Bihar (now in Jharkhand), for the development of Santali language and to eliminate the problems of using various scripts in writing Santali. But no such positive decision was taken by the Santal associations. Later, ASECA and some other organizations took firm steps to promote Ol Chiki as the only writing script to be used for Santali all over India. Intellectuals of Santal community gave importance upon teaching in mother tongue in primary schools. They felt that learning in Bengali language presents a handicap to Santali-speaking children though there was a difficulty which script to use. But majority of them have their opinion for teaching in Ol Chiki would be fruitful.

At last, Ol Chiki was approved in 1979 as the official script of the Santali language and for the instruction of Santal children at the primary stage by the Government of West Bengal. Many Santali medium schools in primary level in different districts of West Bengal, such as, Puruliya, Bankura, Birbhum, Paschim Medinipur and Coochbehar have been set up. The schools have been operational from 2008-2009 academic years. Text books have been drafted accordingly. There is flexibility for the learners in switching the medium from Santali to Bengali, if they wanted so.

The Government of West Bengal has already trained some teachers to teach in Ol Chiki. The teacher recruitment norm is similar to other institutions i.e. the schools have to recruit teachers through Primary TET for teaching in Primary schools and through School Service Commission for teaching in high/higher secondary schools. In West Bengal OlChiki is also taught in informal centres and schools taught by the LAMPS organization.

### **Findings and Conclusion:**

1. The Santali language is spoken by more than 6.5 millions of people in India. This stands 14th rank among 22 scheduled languages of Indian Constitution.
2. The script for writing Santali is Ol Chiki which was invented by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925.
3. Ol Chiki as well as the language had to face many obstacles on the way of their official recognition. At last Santali was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 2003 though; Ol Chiki was recognized as the official writing script for Santali much earlier, in 1979 by the Government of West Bengal.
4. Many schools were established for teaching Santali in Ol Chiki script. Books have been published, teachers have been recruited. Many colleges and some universities offer Santhali courses. Infrastructures have been built for teaching Santali in Ol Chiki.

5. The picture of teaching Santali in Ol Chiki in rural areas is not at all satisfying as teachers are not willing to go to the remote areas (though this is true to all the subjects).
6. There is a huge gap between demand and supply i.e. though there is a huge demand in learning Santali and learning in Santali but the scarcity of properly trained teachers jeopardizing the whole process.
7. Although in some of the schools medium of instruction is Santali but the students have to switch their medium over to Bengali as there is no provision in taking classes in Santali in the secondary/higher secondary level. Therefore the students from Santali medium schools lagged behind from other students. In some of the cases they even drop out.
8. Though Government of West Bengal has made various steps to promote Santali as well as Ol Chiki, these are not enough as there is no state of the art infrastructure to teach and develop the language in Ol Chiki.
9. As far as the economy is concern, the job opportunity by learning Santali and Ol Chiki is too low to be discussed. That is why the educated Santals, though they have immense respect and pride for their language and script, they prefer to educate their children in Bengali, Hindi or English medium schools.

From the above findings, it is clear that promoting Ol Chiki in the present educational scenario is not an easy work to execute. Pandit Raghunath Murmu's dream of having Santali language which would be uniformly bound with only an independent script i.e. Ol Chiki, has partially been fulfilled. It is because of the negligence and ignorance of both some of the people from Santal community itself and Government officials about the language and the script. The situation may be altered if necessary steps are taken by the Government and the Community itself.

There are some recommendations provided below that may be helpful in this regard:

1. A continuous support has to be given to promote Ol Chiki script.
2. The teachers who teach Santali must be provided a thorough training in Ol Chiki script.
3. In secondary/higher secondary section Santali must be retained as an optional but it must be studied through Ol Chiki only.
4. More institutions and academies have to be set up for the study of the language as well as Ol Chiki.
5. Above all, the trained persons must be provided job opportunities.

### **References:**

- Baskey, D.N. (1987). *Paschim Banger Adibasi Samaj (Vol. I)*. Kolkata, India: Subarnarekha.
- Culshaw, W.J. (1949). *Tribal Heritage: A Study of the Santals*. New Delhi, India: Gyan Publishing House.
- Hembram, P. (2010). *Saontali Bhasha-Charcha O Bikasher Itibritta*. Kolkata, India: Nirmal Book Agency.

Mahapatra, S. (1986). *Modernization and Ritual Identity and Change in Santal Society*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

Mohapatra, S.S. (2001). *Formation of Ol Chiki Script and Process of its Transmission*. In Nita Mathur (Ed.). *Santhal Worldview* (pp. 75-81). New Delhi, India: Concept Publishing Company.

Troisi, J. (1979). *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals*. New Delhi, India: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.

### Web References:

1. <http://www.aiswa.org/about-ol-chiki/>
2. [http://www.anagasarkalyan.gov.in/htm/raghu\\_murmu.html](http://www.anagasarkalyan.gov.in/htm/raghu_murmu.html)
3. <http://www.archive.indianexpress.com/news/govt-plans-santhali-schools-to-woo-tribes/485895/>
4. [http://www.bangalorenates.com/ol\\_chiki.htm](http://www.bangalorenates.com/ol_chiki.htm)
5. [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_Data\\_2001/Census\\_Data\\_Online/Language/Statement1.htm](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Language/Statement1.htm)
6. <http://www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>
7. <http://www.edustories.blogspot.in/2007/11/from-2008-state-to-have-santhali-medium.html>
8. <http://www.indiankanoon.org/doc/54782341/?type=print>
9. <http://www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/JSS/JSS-08-0-000-000-2004-Web/JSS-08-2-085-178-2004-Abst-PDF/JSS-08-2-129-142-2004-Lotz/JSS-08-2-129-142-2004-Lotz.pdf>
10. <http://www.languages.iloveindia.com/santhali.html>
11. <http://www.oneindia.com/2007/12/17/santhali-medium-schools-in-the-pipeline-1197889711.html>
12. <http://www.paschimmedinipur.gov.in/culture/>
13. <http://www.saarculture.org/old-site/portal/countries/index.php>
14. [http://www.suedasien.uni-halle.de/Brandt/Cardoso\\_2014.pdf](http://www.suedasien.uni-halle.de/Brandt/Cardoso_2014.pdf)
15. <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2002/02456-ol-chiki-comment.pdf>  
<http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2005/05243r-n2984-ol-chiki.pdf>
16. [http://www.worldlibrary.org/articles/pandit\\_raghunath\\_murmu](http://www.worldlibrary.org/articles/pandit_raghunath_murmu)
17. <http://www.wesanthals.tripod.com/id45.html>