

Santali Language and the Importance of the Ol Chiki Script

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Abstract: *The Santali language is one of the most important indigenous languages of South Asia and is widely spoken among the Santali people across India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. The development of a dedicated script known as the Ol Chiki script in the twentieth century played a crucial role in strengthening the linguistic and cultural identity of the Santali community. This article examines the historical development, cultural significance, and educational importance of the Ol Chiki script in relation to the Santali language. Using qualitative research methods and secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and government reports, the study explores how the script contributed to the preservation and development of Santali literature, education, and social consciousness. The research also highlights the constitutional recognition of Santali as a scheduled language in India and the growing use of Ol Chiki in schools, universities, and digital media. The findings indicate that the Ol Chiki script has become a symbol of identity and empowerment for the Santali community. Its integration into modern educational and cultural institutions has helped preserve indigenous knowledge systems and strengthen linguistic diversity in India. The article concludes that continued academic research, policy support, and educational initiatives are essential for further promoting Santali language and literature.*

Keywords: *Santali Language; Ol Chiki Script; Indigenous Language; Tribal Culture; Linguistic Identity*

1. Introduction:

Santali is one of the major indigenous languages of South Asia and belongs to the Munda branch of the Austroasiatic language family. It is spoken by millions of people primarily in the eastern and central regions of India, including the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Assam, as well as in neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal. The Santali-speaking community has a rich cultural tradition expressed through oral narratives, folklore, songs, rituals, and social practices. For centuries, the Santali language was primarily transmitted orally, and written communication often relied on scripts borrowed from other regional languages such as Bengali, Devanagari, and Odia. The absence of a standardized writing system posed several challenges for the preservation and development of Santali literature. Without a script specifically designed for the phonetic structure of the language, it was difficult to accurately represent sounds and grammatical features. This limitation also hindered the inclusion of Santali in formal education and administrative systems. In the early twentieth century, a major transformation occurred when the Ol Chiki script was invented specifically for the Santali language. This innovation provided a culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate writing system that could represent the unique sounds of Santali. The introduction of the Ol Chiki script marked a turning point in the linguistic history of the Santali people. It enabled the systematic development of written literature, textbooks, and educational materials in the language. Moreover, the script played a significant role in strengthening cultural identity and promoting social awareness within the Santali community. This article explores the importance of the Santali language and the Ol Chiki script from historical, cultural, and educational perspectives.

2. Literature Review:

Several scholars and researchers have studied the Santali language and the Ol Chiki script from linguistic, anthropological, and educational perspectives. Early linguistic studies highlighted the structural features of the Santali language and emphasized its importance within the Austroasiatic language family. Researchers observed that Santali possesses a complex phonetic system and grammatical structure that require a specialized writing system for accurate representation. Academic discussions on indigenous languages have also emphasized the role of language in preserving cultural identity and traditional knowledge. Scholars argue that when a community develops its own writing system, it strengthens cultural pride and helps maintain linguistic continuity across generations. The development of the Ol Chiki script is often cited as an example of successful language revitalization through script innovation. Recent studies have examined the role of Santali language education in schools and universities. With the inclusion of Santali in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 2003, the language gained official recognition and greater institutional support. As a result, Santali language departments, research programs, and literary publications have expanded significantly in recent years. These studies highlight the importance of continued research and policy initiatives for the development of Santali language and literature.

3. Research Methodology:

This research article adopts a qualitative research methodology. The study is primarily based on secondary sources including books, academic journals, research reports, and government documents related to Santali language and culture. Historical analysis was used to understand the development of the Ol Chiki script and its impact on Santali society. Literary analysis was also conducted to examine the growth of Santali literature after the introduction of the script. Various educational policies and linguistic studies were reviewed to assess the role of Santali language in modern education. By combining these approaches, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the importance of the Ol Chiki script in linguistic and cultural development.

4. Discussion:

The cultural importance of the Santali language cannot be overstated. Language serves as a fundamental element of cultural identity, shaping how communities understand their history, traditions, and social relationships. For the Santali people, language is closely connected with folklore, traditional songs, rituals, and oral storytelling traditions. The development of the Ol Chiki script made it possible to document these traditions in written form, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Another significant aspect of the Ol Chiki script is its contribution to education. Before the introduction of the script, Santali students often had to study in languages that were not their mother tongue. This created barriers to learning and limited educational opportunities. The development of textbooks and learning materials in Santali helped improve literacy rates and made education more accessible to Santali-speaking students. Schools and universities now offer courses in Santali language and literature, which has further strengthened academic research in this field. The recognition of Santali as an official language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 2003 was a major milestone. This recognition provided greater legitimacy and institutional support for the language. Government initiatives have encouraged the use of Santali in education, broadcasting, and cultural programs. As a result, Santali literature, newspapers, magazines, and digital content have grown rapidly in recent decades. In the digital era, the use of Ol Chiki script has expanded into online platforms, social media, and mobile communication. Digital fonts and Unicode

encoding have made it easier to write and publish content in Santali. This technological development has opened new possibilities for linguistic preservation and global communication among Santali-speaking communities.

5. Conclusion:

The Santali language and the Ol Chiki script represent an important example of linguistic and cultural resilience. The creation of a dedicated script allowed the Santali community to preserve its language, literature, and cultural heritage in a more systematic way. Over time, the script has become a powerful symbol of identity and empowerment. The recognition of Santali as a scheduled language and the increasing use of Ol Chiki in education and digital communication demonstrate the growing importance of the language in modern society. However, continued efforts are necessary to promote research, develop educational materials, and encourage the use of Santali in academic and public domains. Future research should focus on linguistic documentation, digital archiving of oral traditions, and comparative studies of indigenous scripts. Such initiatives will contribute to the preservation of linguistic diversity and strengthen the cultural heritage of the Santali community.

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