



## Santali Languages and Literatures of the Culture Society

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### ABSTRACT

The Santali Language and Literature of the culture are the main constituents of the identity of a people. Language develops with the educational progress of a people and cultural boundary expands with the changing taste of the people. It is necessary to evolve a standard measure to make a proper appreciation of the subject in question. The language and culture are two ingredients of any society, be it 'modern' or 'primitive' which could be used as yardsticks to determine the 'level' of civilization of the community.

### Introduction :-

While language, which is the vehicle of thought, expression and means of communication among the members of that particular social group, has its own domain or boundary to hold the people together making for their identity, the culture tends to scale the language barrier and expand its frontiers slowly by accepting foreign on alien ones which appeal to its people. Some conservative families of our country who were against Western culture, for example, slowly accepted the Western ways of life. Initially there was an attitude of abhorrence to the Westerns ways of life among the orthodox Hindus. The Language of a nation or a community binds it together making it distinct from others. The more the cultural life of the people expands its frontiers, the more they rise towards higher realms of civilization, towards perfection. The language, on the other hand, is a mirror which reflects the total cultural world of a community. Its literature, which is enriched by education and learning of the community, imagination of the poets, writers and artists holds together the entire expanse of the cultural canvas from the past to the present and gives a new twist to the cultural life of the community. The Santals belong to the tribal stock of people spread over Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Assam. Although they are a much written about



people, there is a scope to study them from closer quarters. The missionaries have studied them and their dialect from the standpoint of spreading Christianity among them. Many aspects of Santal heritage and culture, therefore, remain unexplored till date.

Out of 64 tribes of Odisha, 25 tribes have their own languages 13 are major languages, 8 belong to Austro-Asiatic Language (Santali, Ho, Kharia, Munda, Bhumija of Mayurbhanj, Juanga of Keonjhar, Soura of Ganjam and Godaba of Koraput) and 5 belong to Dravidan family (Kondha of Phulbani, Koya, Kui, Gondi of Koraput, Kurkuh). Santali is a uniform and agglutinative language. It is spoken over a vast part of our country. It comprises the South of Bhagalpur and Monghyr, the west of Beerbhum and Burdwan, almost the whole of Bankura the western corner of Midnapur the greater portion of Mayurbhanj and Nilgiri the North-east of Keonjhar, Dhalbhum, Soraikela, Kharsuan, Manbhum the Santal Pargana and the east of Hazaribagh. It is also spoken in South-West of Murshidabad, in the Central part of the 24-Pargana, in the South of Dinapur and the adjoining tracts of Malda, Rajasahi, Bogra, and in the South-West of Rangapur. Maxmuller was the first linguist to distinguish between Munda and Dravidan languages and he placed Santali under Munda language in 1860. Peter W. Schmidt named it as Austro-Asiatic language.

‘Santali’ literally means the language of the Santals. It is the name applied by the foreigners to the tribe, living in the Santal Pargana. According to L.O. Skrefsrud, it is a corruption of Santal or Santal the common name of the tribe used by Bengalis. When they are asked about their names and casts, usually reply the title, Majhi, headman to themselves. Santali has been largely influenced by Bihari rather than Bengali, but still it retains its culture and intellect. They are bilingual as well as poly-lingual. Besides their mother tongue, they are required to learn regional languages, which are current in their habitation. In west Bengal they can speak Bengali fluently: Similarly, they can speak Hindi, Odia and Assamese in Bihar, Odisha and Assam respectively. For the inter state conversation generally English language is used by them.

### **Development of Santali Language :-**

The Britishers adopted three dimensions towards the tribals for the development of English language. These are closely inter-related viz. Suppressing the periodical tribal revolt, adoption by the non-tribals. The Missionaries were the first, who made their contribution in writing Santali and other tribal languages in Roman script. J. Philips, an American Baptist Missionary settled at Balasore was the first person who wrote a book named “Introduction to Santali language” which was published in 1852. His another book was published in 1854 in Bengali script called Enejrenang Seren. E.L. Puxley and W.T.



Stoor travelled many Santal Villages and learned Santali. At the same time they helped the local people directly or indirectly by establishing schools and dispensaries. They succeeded in winning their social habits. Puxley published “The Gospel of Matthew.” E.G. Man published a number of Santali Songs, Riddles, folk tales which were collected from Sarenga and Bankura village. His book, The Sonthalia and Sonthals published in 1867 gave enormous spectrum of knowledge about Santal culture and its significance. He has given a first hand report of the Santals particularly of the Santal Rebellion and its after math.

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fluently: Similarly, they can speak Hindi, Odia and Assamese in Bihar, Odisha and Assam respectively. For the inter state conversation generally English language is used by them.

### **Ol-chiki Script Development and Process :-**

The Ol-Chiki script 1925 invented by Pandit Raghunath Murmu, was an epoch-making invention, which provided appropriate writing symbols to the Santals. The scripts of most other major Indian languages originated in the hoary past and the story of their origin has been a matter of historical research. But the Ol-chiki has been invented only 100 Years back. Pandit Raghunath Murmu first conceptualized the script in the 1920s and gave it the final shape in the 1940s. Though a recent phenomenon, the creation of the script has been associated with some myths and play of supernatural powers. Moreover, the characters of the script are not merely an imitation of those current in other language around. Most of them are inventions of Pandit Raghunath Murmu. The alphabet is also quite limited in size consisting of only 30 characters and is convenient both for printing and writing (Appendix-1). The script, therefore, provides sufficient scope for study from the following points: -

1. (a) Origin of Ol-chiki script : myths and beliefs.  
(b) Depiction of natural, physical environment in the characters of Ol-chiki and their relationship with everyday life of the Santal; symbolism in shape of the alphabet and the pronounced sound.
2. Association of script with ritual drawing.
3. Methods of transmitting Ol-chiki script.

On the face of it, the dissertation of Shri Parimal Chandra Mitra under the nomenclature “SANTALI : THE BASE OF WORLD LANGUAGES” is a very bold and challenging endeavour which, on the acceptance of his bone of contention as expressed through the nomenclature by the linguists and scholars at large, might cause ripples, if not tremors in the field of linguistic research and wash away or shake the very foundation and edifice of our century old contention that the Indo- European languages lay at the very root of our languages and in the case of India, it was Iranian and more specifically, Indo-Iranian was the base of all languages and that the Rg-Vedic language and Avestan were just the offsprings of the old Iranian Mother. In the said context of history of our language, Shri Mitra’s work is surely a deviation and off-the-track, due to his non-traditional manner of thinking and adopting quite a novel approach of the kind -1.



## SANTAL CULTURE AND SOCIETY :-

Santal society is Governed by a sophisticated system of traditional laws and social structures that have been preserved through generations. At its core, the community emphasizes collective living, democratic decision-making, and a deep spiritual connection to nature.

Here is an overview of the foundational social and cultural rules :-

1. **The Village Governance (Majhi Pargana System)** – The Santal social structure is strictly organized at the village level. Every village operates under a five-member council known as the “Mone Hor” (The Five People), ensuring order and justice –
  - a) Majhi Halam : The village headman. He is the secular and judicial head who presides over meetings and settles disputes.
  - b) Paranik Baba : The assistant headman who acts in the Majhi’s absence.
  - c) Jog Majhi : The “Guardian of morals.” He oversees the conduct of the youth and ensures social rules are followed during festivals and weddings.
  - d) Godet Baba : The village messenger. He informs the villagers of meetings and collects contributions for rituals.
  - e) Naeky Baba : The village priest who performs all public religious sacrifices to the Bonga Buru (spiritual).
  
2. **Santal Social Laws and Kinship** :- Santal society is divided into 12 exogamous clans (Kherwar), such as Murmu, Hansdah, Mardi and Kisku.
  - a) Exogamy : Marriage within the same clan is strictly forbidden. Breaking this rule is considered one of the most serious social offenses.
  - b) Equality : Historically, Santal society is egalitarian. While the Majhi holds authority, decisions are typically made through consensus in the village assembly (Kulhi Durup).
  - c) Lo Bir Sendera : This is the “Hunter Council” or the highest court of the Santalis. Once a year, representatives meet in the forest to discuss major social issues that cannot be solved at the village level.

### 3. Cultural Pillars and Rituals –

Santal Culture is expressed through a cycle of festivals linked to the agricultural calendar :



- a) Sohrai : The most important harvest festival, celebrating cattle and the year's labor.
- b) Baha Bonga : The Fhagun Bonga flower festival, marking the arrival of spring. No one may pick or wear New Year flowers until the Naiky Baba has offered them to the spirits.
- c) Dasai : A dance and ritual performed during the time of Puja, involving a distinct form of storytelling and music.
- d) Ancestral Respect: The Santals believe that their ancestors (Haplamko) continue to guide them. Every house has a small space called the “**Bhitar Bonga**” dedicated to the family spirits.

#### **4. Taboos and Restrictions :-**

Traditional Santal law includes several “Don't's” to maintain social harmony:

- a) Bitlaha: This was a traditional form of social boycott used only for the most extreme violations of social taboos (such as forbidden relationships) Today, it is largely replaced by fines or symbolic rituals.
- b) Respect for Nature: Certain trees and groves (Jaher Than) are sacred and cannot be cut or desecrated.

#### **Conclusion :-**

The conclusion of any study into Santal culture is that the language and its literature are not static relics. They are dynamic force that continue to shape the social governance, spiritual life, and political aspirations of the Santal people, ensuring their voice remains distinct in a globalized world.

#### **Notes and References :-**

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