



Pandit Raghunath Murmu And Olchiki' Script: A Brief Review On Education And Santali Cultural Progressiveness

Prasanta Kisku

Research Scholar

West Bengal State University, west Bengal, India

"Ol menah tama, rorh menah tama, Dharam menah tama, aam ho menam" (If you have your script, your language, and your religion, you exist).

—Pandit Raghunath Murmu

Abstract:

Pandit Raghunath Murmu played a transformative role in the cultural awakening and social progress of the Santali community through the invention of the Ol Chiki script in the early twentieth century. At a time when the Santali language was primarily oral and written using borrowed scripts such as Bengali, Odia, or Roman, Murmu recognized the urgent need for a distinct writing system that could preserve the linguistic identity and cultural heritage of the Santals. His creation of Ol Chiki in 1925 marked a historic milestone in the intellectual and cultural renaissance of the community.

The paper will explore the profound contributions of Pandit Raghunath Murmu to the Santali culture, focusing on his invention and promotion of the Ol Chiki script, a pivotal tool in the preservation and development of Santali language and identity. His work not only nurtured cultural pride but also aligned with the broader national goals of progressiveness, education, and social empowerment for indigenous communities. This paper will examine Murmu's legacy and the impact of Ol Chiki on Santali people's integration into the national fabric of India, while contributing to the cultural and intellectual diversity of the nation.

Keyword- Santal, Olchiki script, Santali culture. Educational scenario.

Introduction:

The Santali community is one of the largest indigenous tribes in India, primarily inhabiting the eastern states of India, including Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, and parts of Assam and Chhattisgarh. There are also significant populations of Santals in neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. Estimates of the Santali population vary, but it is generally considered to number around 7 to 10 million people in India alone, making them one of the most populous tribal groups in the country. Jharkhand has the highest concentration of Santals, where they form a substantial part of the tribal population. West Bengal and Odisha also have large Santali populations, especially in districts such as Purulia, Bankura, and Bardhaman in West Bengal, and Mayurbhanj in Odisha. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Assam are also home to significant numbers of Santals, though they are often more dispersed.

The culture of the Santali people is rich and diverse, deeply rooted in nature, spirituality, and community life. Their traditions reflect their connection to the land, forest, and the environment, and they have preserved their customs over centuries despite external influences. Sahrui is the principal festival of the Santali community. Besides that, Baha, Karam, Dashain, Sakrat, Mahmore, Rundo, and Magsim are important festivals. During their festivals, they traditionally perform dances accompanied by two drums known as the tamak' and the tumdak. Dance plays a vital role in their celebrations. Forms such as Chou, Santal Jogga, and Santal Dhol are commonly performed during festivals, rituals, and social gatherings, often featuring rhythmic and coordinated movements.

Objectives of the study

- I. To Explore the Pandit Raghunath Murmu's role in developing the Ol Chiki script as a tool for preserving and promoting the Santali language.
- II. To Examine the significance of Ol Chiki in the transmission of Santali folklore, traditions, and literature.
- III. To Explore the contemporary relevance of the Ol Chiki script in Santali education.
- IV. To Discuss the challenges and opportunities for further integrating Ol Chiki into formal education and governmental systems.

Methodology

In this study, the data is gathered from both primary and secondary sources, including academic journals, news articles, edited book chapters, and online news portals. The researcher used a qualitative document analysis approach to analyze the data.

Pandit Raghunath Murmu and Olchiki Script.

Raghunath Murmu was born on 5th May, 1905 on the day of Baisakhi Purnima in a Santal village called Dandbose (Dahardihi). (Wikipedia). It is five kilometers from Rairangpur. Nandalal was his father and Salma was his mother. Chunu was the nick name of Raghunath. He passed the upper Primary from Bahalda School which was located 11kms. away from his village. He completed his matriculation from M.K.C. High School in 1928 in second division. He was married to Neha, the third daughter of Dashmat Baskey of Jamjola village, under Kuchoung Pir of Jharkhand. (Dr. Nakul Seth & Dr. Subash Chandra Karua, 2018). 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. (Sagun Mandi* and Swami Tattwasarananda, 2015). Before Ol Chiki was developed, Santali was written in the Roman, Devanagari, Bengali, and Oriya. Murmu realized the need for a unique script that could accurately represent the phonetics of the Santali language and preserve its rich oral traditions. So, he developed the Ol-chiki script in 1925. (Murmu, 2024). After developing the Olchiki script, Murmu is known as "Guru Gomke" (Great Teacher/Leader).

Pandit Raghunath Murmu was a renowned writer, educator, and the creator of the Ol Chiki script for the Santali language. He composed numerous songs, plays, and educational materials to promote Santali literature and culture. He also authored school textbooks in the Ol Chiki script.

Some of his notable works include:

Ol Chemed – a primary syllabus for learning Ol Chiki

Parsi Poha – essential elements of Ol Chiki

Dare Ge Dhon – a drama

Sidu Kanhu – a patriotic drama

Bidu Chandan – a well-known love drama

Kherwal Bir – a patriotic drama

Hital – a mythological scripture describing the evolution of the Earth and human beings according to Kherwal tradition

Hor Sereng – a collection of Santali literary songs

Ronor – a Santali grammar book

Elkha – a Santali mathematics book



Born on 5th May, 1905
Expired on 1st Feb, 1982

According to Murmu 'Ol' means only drawing the picture of the thing in mind without creating any sound and 'Chiki' means pictorial representation. (Dr.Nakul Seth & Dr Subash Chandra Karua, 2018). It contained 30 letters, including six vowels and 24 consonants.

𑒀	𑒁	𑒂	𑒃	𑒄
A (a)	At (at)	Ag (ak')	Ang (anj)	Al (al)
[a]	[t]	[k', g]	[ɲ]	[l]
𑒅	𑒆	𑒇	𑒈	𑒉
Aa (a)	Aak (ak)	Aaj (ac')	Aam (am)	Aaw (aw)
[a]	[k]	[c', ɕ]	[m]	[w/v]
𑒊	𑒋	𑒌	𑒍	𑒎
I (i)	Is (is)	Ih (ih)	Iny (in)	Ir (ir)
[i]	[s]	[h, ʔ]	[n]	[r]
𑒏	𑒐	𑒑	𑒒	𑒓
U (u)	Uch (uc)	Ud (ut')	Umm (un)	Uy (uj)
[u]	[c]	[t', d]	[ɲ]	[j]
𑒔	𑒕	𑒖	𑒗	𑒘
E (e)	Ep (ep)	Edd (ed)	En (en)	Err (er)
[e]	[p]	[d]	[n]	[r]
𑒙	𑒚	𑒛	𑒜	𑒝
O (o)	Ott (ot)	Ob (op')	Ov (ow)	Oh (of)
[o]	[t]	[p', b]	[w]	(K) ^h

Figure- Olchiki script

Pandit Raghunath Murmu made monumental contributions to Santali literature with the primary goal of celebrating and preserving the rich heritage of Santali culture. Through his writing, he sought to reform society by addressing issues he viewed as detrimental, such as the excessive consumption of *Handia* (rice beer) outside of ritual use, marriages within the same sept, and lapses in personal and social ethics. His works also emphasized traditional physical culture and the proper worship of deities. His diverse literary portfolio included **Dramas**: Popular plays like *Bindu-Chandan*, *Kherwal Bir*, and *Darege Dhan* became widely celebrated. **Devotional Texts**: *Hital*, an unpublished prayer book, and *Bakhen*, a collection of invocatory songs for various ceremonies, both focused on expressing gratitude to the "Creator. While these plays gained massive popularity, their influence went beyond mere entertainment. They acted as a vital catalyst for the adoption of the Ol Chiki script, as the community's engagement with his stories sparked a deeper commitment to using the indigenous writing system he developed.

Santali Culture:

The Santal tribe, mainly found in Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha, is a lively, nature-revering community known for its settled farming practices, rich musical heritage, and the distinctive Ol Chiki script. They typically live in neatly arranged, beautifully decorated mud houses and maintain deep respect for ancestral spirits and community traditions. Santals also have a strong sense of social equality and a proud history of resistance against colonial rule. (Priyanka Soren and Waluneba Jamir, 2020). The Santals do not worship in temples; instead, their religious rituals take place in sacred groves called **Jaherthan**, usually situated among **Sal trees**, where offerings and sacrifices are made to spiritual entities known as **bongas**. They believe in a supreme creator, often linked to the **sun**, and maintain a deep reverence for nature.

Santal homes are often decorated with detailed and vibrant wall paintings called **Bhitti Chitra**. In traditional attire, women wear checkered sarees known as **panchi-parhat**, while men typically wear the **kopani**. Music and dance play a central role in Santal cultural expression. Among their major festivals are **Sohrai**, which celebrates the harvest, and **Baha**, a festival marking the arrival of spring. The **Santali language** is part of the Austroasiatic language family and uses its own writing system called **Ol Chiki**, created by **Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925**. Historically, the Santals are well known for the **Santhal Rebellion of 1855–56**, a significant uprising against British colonial rule and oppression.

Promoting olchiki through Education:

Ol Chiki Script 100 Years inaugural celebration:

Recently, the centenary of the Ol Chiki script was inaugurated by President Smt Droupadi Murmu on **February 16, 2026**, at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi, organized by the Ministry of Culture in New Delhi. On the occasion, the President released a commemorative coin and postage stamp on the completion of 100 years of Ol Chiki. She also felicitated 10 achievers from the Santal community for promoting wide use of Ol Chiki script among the Santhali people. (pib.gov.in). Pandit Raghunath Murmu created it for the Santhali language. As a distinct scientific alphabet, it helps preserve tribal identity. With Santhali included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 2003, the focus now shifts to NEP-aligned mother-tongue education, digital inclusion, and Bhashini-led integration.

The President stated that the centenary celebration of the Ol Chiki script should inspire renewed commitment toward its promotion and preservation. She emphasized that although children may receive education in languages such as Hindi, English, Oriya, Bengali, or others, it is equally important for them to learn their mother tongue, Santhali, using the Ol Chiki script. She expressed happiness that many writers are actively contributing to the growth of Santhali literature through their creative works and encouraged them to use their writing to inspire and awaken society. The President also remarked that India resembles an orchard filled with diverse

languages. Language and literature act as strong bonds that maintain unity within communities. She suggested that the exchange of literature among different languages can enrich them all. Therefore, efforts should be made to translate and share Santhali literature with students of other languages, while also making literature from other languages accessible to Santhali readers.



Figure 1 inauguration the Centenary Celebration of the Ol Chiki script

Constitution of India translated into olchiki script:

Santhali was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India through the 92nd Amendment Act of 2003. On December 25, 2025, the Constitution of India was translated into the Santhali language and written in the Ol Chiki script. The translated version was released by the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. (Ministry of Law and Justice)

The translation was officially published by the Legislative Department of India and aims to improve accessibility for Santhali speakers in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar. This initiative ensures that the Santhali-speaking community can read and understand their constitutional rights in their native language.

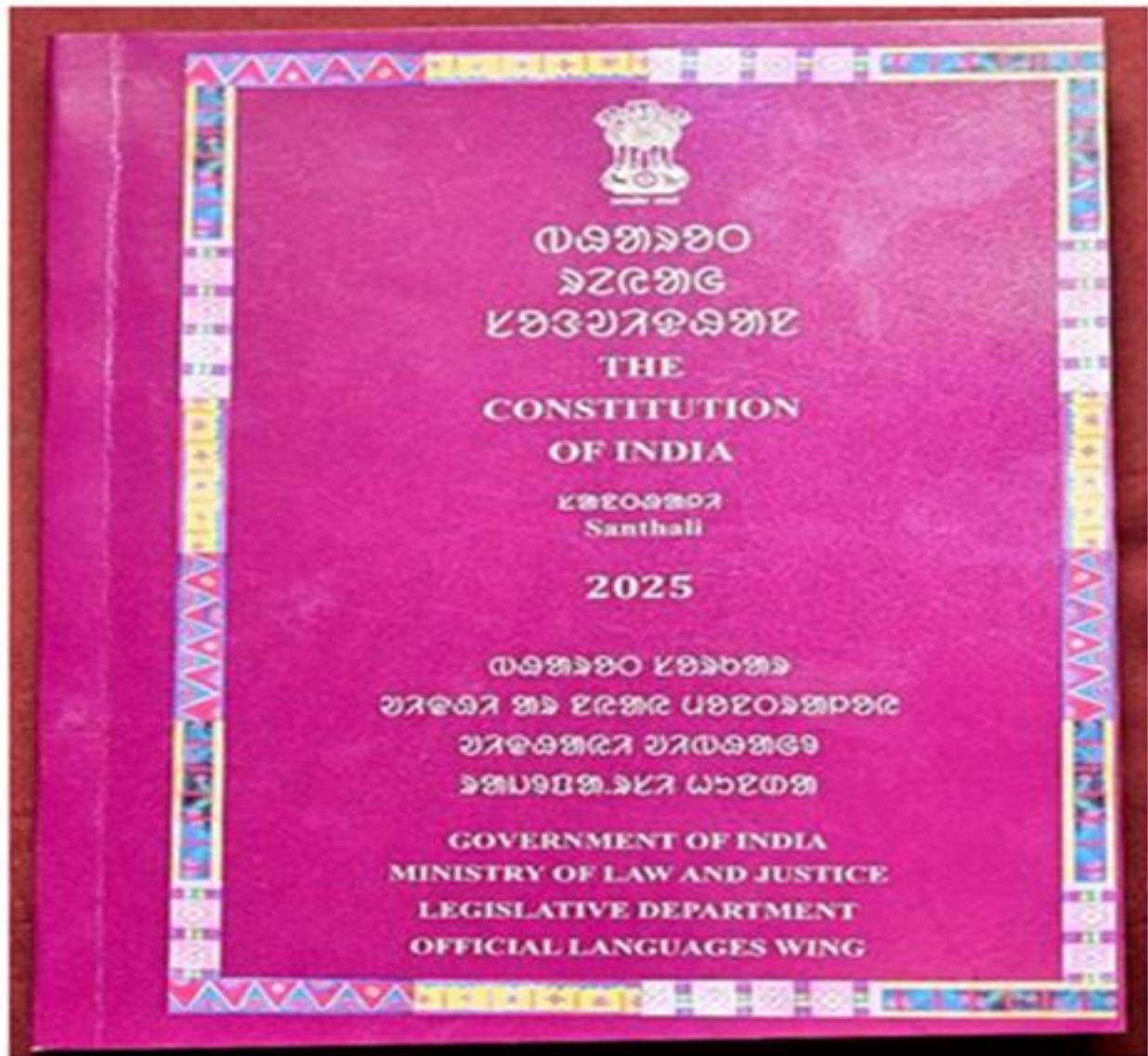


Figure 2 Constitution of india in olchiki script.

Present educational scenario of olchiki script:

Perhaps the most active organization promoting the Ol Chiki script for the Santhali language is the Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association (ASECA). Over time, it expanded its activities to regions such as West Bengal and Bihar. Later, ASECA, along with several other organizations, took strong initiatives to establish Ol Chiki as the standard writing system for Santhali across India. Intellectuals from the Santhal community have emphasized the importance of mother-tongue education at the primary level. As a result, many Santhali-medium primary schools have been established in districts of West Bengal, including Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum, Paschim Medinipur, and Cooch Behar.

The Government of West Bengal has also trained teachers to teach using the Ol Chiki script. The recruitment process for these teachers follows the same norms as other institutions: candidates must qualify through the Primary TET for primary schools and through the School Service Commission for secondary and higher secondary schools. Additionally, several colleges and some universities now offer courses in Santhali, and the necessary infrastructure has been developed to support teaching in the Ol Chiki script.

Santali medium schools are listed below:

Several Santali-medium schools in West Bengal are affiliated with the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) and the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE), and they emphasize instruction through the Ol Chiki script.

1. Jamindardanga High School (Santali Medium): is a co-educational, Santali-medium secondary school in Jhargram, West Bengal, Pin-721514, (Established in 2013 and upgraded to a secondary school in 2018).
2. Pakhiradanga Jr. High School (Santali Medium): is a government-aided institution located in Nabagram, Murshidabad, dedicated to providing education in the Santali language. Situated in the Murshidabad district, it serves the local community with classes typically covering junior high levels.
3. Barasarsa High School (Santali Medium) is a educational institution located in Itachuna, Hooghly, West Bengal, specializing in providing education in the Santali language.
4. BirSidhu Kanunagar High School (H.S.): in Kalyani, west Bengal 741235.

Pandit Raghunath Murmu Abasik Schools: Government-run residential schools located in Bankura, Purulia, Bardhaman, Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur, and Alipurduar, providing education from Classes V-XII in the Olchiki script. These schools offer free boarding and lodging, managed by the Tribal Development Department.

Several universities, primarily in West Bengal and Jharkhand, offer dedicated departments and courses for Santali language and literature, largely focusing on Bachelor's (Honours & Program) and Master's degrees. like, Visva Bharati university (west Bengal), Vidyasagar university (west Bengal), Bankura university (west Bengal), the university of Burdwan (west Bengal), Sidho-kanho-birsha university (west Bengal), Rabindra Bharati university (west Bengal), Kazi Nazrul university (west Bengal), Murshidabad university (west Bengal), Ranchi university (Jharkhand). Dr. Shyama prasad Mukherjee university (Jharkhand, North Odisha university (Odisha).

Teacher Training Centers (Santali Medium):

DIET (District Institute of Education and Training), 2nd Campus, Paschim Medinipur (Santali Medium).

Contemporary Issues and Challenges:

The promotion of the Ol Chiki script encounters several challenges, largely due to its roots in an oral tradition, the dominance of major regional languages, and gaps in infrastructure that hinders its widespread adoption.

Education:

A significant challenge is the lack of teachers trained to instruct in Ol Chiki, along with the limited availability of textbooks and educational resources in the script, especially in rural areas. Historically, most Santali textbooks have been simple translations from other languages rather than materials originally developed in Ol Chiki.

Social and Economic Issues:

As an indigenous community, many Santals reside in rural and underdeveloped regions, where they face challenges such as poverty, limited access to quality education, and discrimination. Despite their rich cultural heritage, they continue to struggle with socio-economic inequalities and marginalization.

Uneven Integration: Although the Santali language has constitutional recognition and is officially acknowledged in states such as West Bengal, the integration of the Ol Chiki script into formal education systems and everyday life remains inconsistent across regions.

Parent's attitude:

Many guardians employed in government jobs prefer to enroll their children in Bengali, Hindi, or English-medium schools due to the limited job opportunities associated with Santali. At the same time, younger generations—exposed to global cultures and languages through media and the internet—often feel less motivated to learn and use the Ol Chiki script.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that the great contribution of Pandit Raghunath Murmu and Olchiki script on the education and cultural development. Murmu's contributions reflect a remarkable balance between education and cultural advancement. Through his dual role as an educator and cultural advocate, he not only promoted learning but also strengthened the preservation and growth of Santali identity, fostering a sense of cultural progressiveness within the community. He is rightly remembered not only as a writer but as a visionary who provided a "vision" to his community by preserving their language, script, and religion. Pandit Raghunath Murmu's work ensures that the Santal community can navigate modern life without losing their linguistic and cultural essence.

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