

# The Invention and Development of Ol Chiki Script Among the Santal of Tribal Odisha

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**Abstract:** Language is a medium of communication by using words, sounds, symbols or body gestures to share our thoughts among each other. In human life, it plays a crucial role to understand each other. A script is a process of writing a language which helps us to understand the written languages. More than 62 tribal communities are found in the state of Odisha, out of which only four tribal communities have their scripts so far. According to Pandit Raghunath Murmu, if a community doesn't have any script, then the community may lose its own identity one day. So he invented the "Ol Chiki" Script for Santals. In the present study the researchers explained the invention and development of 'Ol Chiki' script of Santal in tribal Odisha, by using descriptive research method.

**Keywords:** Language, Script, Ol Chiki, Santali Language, Santal.

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## I. Introduction

Language is a medium of communication by using words, sounds, symbols or body gestures to share our thoughts among each other. It plays a crucial role in understanding each other in social life. Script is needed to preserve the language of a particular community. Odisha is the home land of more than 62 tribal communities, out of which, 13 tribes are known as PVTGs (Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups). In different regions of Odisha tribals are socio-culturally as well as linguistically different from each other. The tribal scripts have special socio-cultural meaning and implications as per their geographical setting in Odisha. So far, four tribal communities in Odisha have invented scripts namely i.e. the Kondh (Kui Lipi), the Saura (Sorang Sompeng), the Santal (Ol Chiki) and the Bhumij (Mundari Bani). In the present paper the researchers focus on "Ol Chiki" script of Santal community, belonging to North Odisha.

## II. Invention of "Ol Chiki" Script

Invention of a script is a Himalayan task. Still, few tribal leaders have tried very hard to invent their scripts for the rise and development of their own community. Among the Santals, few persons were seriously interested to invent their script, but the most successful among them was Pandit Raghunath Murmu. He was born in 'Dahardihi' village of Mayurbhanj district in 1905. At present the name of the village has been changed to 'Dansbose'. His father's name Nandalal Murmu and mother's name Salma Murmu. He loves his mother tongue since his childhood. When he goes to school for study, he marked that the teachers are not teaching them in their mother tongue. Instead, they teach them in Odia language. so he was facing difficulties to follow Odia and also the English language. One day, he asked a question to his father why the teachers are not teaching us in our Santali mother tongue? His father replied that mainly because we don't have a written script, so the teachers are teaching us in Odia and English languages. On that very day, he promised to invent a script for his community. He strongly believes that if a community doesn't have any script, then the community may lose its own identity one day.

Thus, the "Ol Chiki" script was invented in 1925 by Raghunath Murmu. It is usually derived from Mundari root. It is composed of two words 'Ol' and 'Chiki'; 'Ol' refers to 'write' and 'Chiki' refers to 'symbols'. This script has thirty alphabets, out which six alphabets are known as vowels and twenty four as consonants. The "Ol Chiki" script is mainly spoken by the Santal community in Odisha and Jharkhand. In the state of Odisha, the Santal community is mainly found concentrated in the district of Mayurbhanj.

Soon after the invention, the Santals now, feel proud of their own script. They say that this script helps them to change the dignity of life and culture in a forward direction. Before invention of the script, the Santals were facing several problems, mainly because they don't understand properly the Odia and the English languages. After the invention of this script their children are able to read and write in "Ol Chiki" and also

appear exam in their mother tongue. It got a national recognition in the year 2003, when the Santali language was added to the 8<sup>th</sup> Scheduled of the Indian constitution. Since then they have been using their script in all matters of education which are also introduced in local schools. This effort helps the Santal in a great way to develop a sense of sub-nationalism in modern India today.

### III. Methodology

The present study is based on the use of primary source of data through empiricism. However, Pandit Raghunath Murmu invented this script through several trial and error methods and finally invented this script in the present form. In the present study, the researchers have adopted a descriptive research methodology, for the discussion and analysis of tribal scripts especially “Ol Chiki” as mentioned below.

Table No. I: Ol Chiki Script: Alphabets with Odia pronunciation

Ol Chiki	Odia Pronunciation	Ol Chiki	Odia Pronunciation	Ol Chiki	Odia Pronunciation	Ol Chiki	Odia Pronunciation	Ol Chiki	Odia Pronunciation
ଅ	ଅ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ
ଅ	ଅ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ
ଅ	ଅ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ
ଅ	ଅ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ
ଅ	ଅ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ

In the following table, a detailed account of the alphabets can be presented along with the Odia comparison.

TABLE No. II: Description meaning of Santali Alphabets (Referring to Table No. I)

Odia	Santali (Ol Chiki)	Description
ଅ (a)	ଅ/ ଇ/ la	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଲା” (la) which means ‘flames’. In Odia language, it is used for ‘ଅ’ (a).
ତ (ta)	ଅତ୍/ ଓ/ at	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅତ୍” (at) which means ‘world’. In Odia language, it is used for “ତ” (ta).
ଗ/ ଂ (ga)/(ang)	ଅଗ୍/ ଗ/ ag	This alphabet is derived from the shape of a person face, when ‘he/she vomits’. It is used for both “ଗ” (ga) and “ଂ” (ang).
ଂ (ng)	ଅଂ/ ଙ/ ang	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅଂ” (ang) which means ‘blow’. It comes from the shape of an action when we blow something by the ‘help of our lower and upper lips’. In Odia language, this alphabet used as ଂ (ng).
ଲ (La)	ଅଲ୍/ ଲ/ al	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅଲ୍” (al) which means to write. It refers to the shape of an action ‘when we hold a pen for writing’. In Odia language, it is used as “ଲ” (La).
ଆ (Aa)	ଅଆ/ ଆ/ laa	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଲା” (la). It means to ‘dig’. In Odia language, it used as “ଆ” (aa).
କ (Ka)	ଅକ୍/ କ/ akk	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅକ୍” (akk). It forms the ‘shape of a bird.’ In Odia language, it is used as “କ” (Ka).
ଜ (Ja)	ଅଜ୍/ ଜ/ aaj	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅଜ୍” (aaj) which means he/she. It comes in the shape of our hands’ position when we indicate someone. In Odia language, it is used as “ଜ” (Ja).
ମ (Ma)	ଅମ୍/ ମ/ aam	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅମ୍” (aam) which means ‘you’. It comes in the shape

		of our hands' position when we indicate someone. In Odia language, it is used as “ମା” (Ma).
ଓ (v)	ଅଓ/ ଓ/ aaw	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଅଓ” (aaw) which refers to ‘opening lips’. In Odia language, it is used as “ଓ” (Ow).
ଇ (e)	ଲ/ ଲ/ li	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଲି” (li) which means to ‘bend’. In Odia language it is used as “ଇ” (e).
ସ (Sa)	ଇସ/ ଇ/ is	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଇସ” which means to ‘plough’. In Odia language, it is used as “ସ” (Sa).
<b>Odia</b>	<b>Santali (Ol Chiki)</b>	<b>Description</b>
ହ (Ha)	ଇହ/ ହ/ ih	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଇହ” (ih) which means ‘hands up’. In Odia language, it is used as “ହ” (Ha).
ଞ (Ñja)	ଇଞ୍ଜ/ ଞ/ inj	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଇଞ୍ଜ” (inj) which means ‘I’. It refers the shape of an action ‘when one is pointing to own self’. In Odia language, it is used as “ଞ” (yan) and “ଞ୍ଜ” (Ñja).
ର (Ra)	ଇର/ ର/ ir	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଇର” (ir) which means ‘sickle’ used for cutting. It looks like a ‘sickle’. In Odia language, it is used as “ର” (Ra).
ଉ (u)	ଉ/ ଓ/ lu	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଉ” (lu). It means a vessel. It looks like the shape of a pot when used for preparing food. In Odia language, it is used as “ଉ” (u).
ଚ (Cha)	ଉଚ୍ଚ/ ଚ/ uch	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଉଚ୍ଚ” (uch) which refers to ‘peak of the mountain’. In Odia language, it is used as “ଚ” (Cha).
ଢ (Da)	ଉଡ୍/ ଢ/ ud	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଉଡ୍” (ud). It looks like the shape of a ‘mushroom’. In Odia language, it is used as “ଢ” (Da).
ଣ (Na)	ଉଣ୍ଣ/ ଣ/ unn	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଉଣ୍ଣ” (unn) which means a ‘flying bee’. It refers to the shape of a flying bee. In Odia language, it is used as “ଣ” (Na).
ଯ (Ya)	ଉୟ/ ଯ/ uy	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଉୟ” (uy) which refers to a ‘man bending down to search for something’. In Odia language, it is used as “ଯ” (Ya).
ଏ (ae)	ଏ/ ଇ/ le	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଏ” (le) which means ‘flowing water.’ In Odia language it is used as “ଏ” (i).
ପ (Pa)	ଏପ୍/ ପ/ ep	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଏପ୍” (ep) which means ‘to meet each other.’ In Odia language it is used as “ପ” (pa).
ଢ (Da)	ଏଡ୍/ ଢ/ edd	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଏଡ୍” (edd) which is a symbol of meeting point. In Odia language it is used as “ଢ” (Da).
ନ (Na)	ଏନ୍/ ଣ/ en	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଏନ୍” (en) which means ‘to thresh grain with two legs and harvest it’. In Odia language it is used as “ନ” (Na).
ଲ (La)	ଏଲ୍/ ଲ/ el	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଏଲ୍” (el) which means ‘to avoid a danger’. In Santali language, it is a symbol mostly used to avoid danger. In Odia language, it is used as “ଲ” (La).
ଓ (O)	ଓ/ ଓ/ o	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଓ” (o) it is a shape of mouth when pronoun this alphabet. In Odia language it is used as “ଓ” (O).
ଟ (Ta)	ଓଟ୍/ ଟ/ ott	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଓଟ୍” (ott). It refers to the symbol of ‘a camel’s hump’. In Odia language it is also used as “ଟ” (Ta).
<b>Odia</b>	<b>Santali (Ol Chiki)</b>	<b>Description</b>
ବ (Ba)	ଓବ୍/ ଓ/ ob	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଓବ୍” (ob) which means ‘curly hair’. This alphabet looks like the shape of ‘curly hair’. In Odia language, it is used as “ବ” (Ba).
ଓମ୍ (Om)	ଓଓଓ/ ଓ/ ong	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଓଓଓ” (ong). It is a nasalized alphabet. In Odia language, it is used as “ଓମ୍” (Om).
ହ (Ha)	ଓହ୍/ ଓ/ oh	This alphabet comes from Santali word “ଓହ୍” (oh) which refers to the action when ‘someone throwing something in one hand’ and it is also used as a double letter.

#### IV. Discussion

In the presentation of the alphabets developed in “Ol Chiki” script has several gaps in the analysis. The reason is obvious. Among all the four invented tribal scripts in Odisha, ‘Ol Chiki’ is the oldest one invented in the year 1925. Pandit Raghunath Murmu is no more in this mortal world now and his disciples are not very much aware of the basic principles of invention. As a result of this knowledgeable persons are not available today for meeting our queries regarding the use of symbols in the alphabet formulation. Whatever his descendants and disciples say, Pandit Murmu has used several oral terms in Santali dialects and with their meaning which refers to a particular object, the symbolic structural shape has been created and recreated on a

trial and error method to finally developed a particular “Ol Chiki.” The Santali words which have been used in the “Ol Chiki” script, the basis of their selection as well as their inclusion in the script are not very clear so far. Why few Santali words have been used in the selection process and why several other words are rejected, its justification is not very clear from the “Ol Chiki” alphabets. In the absence of Pandit Murmu, nobody else is able to enlighten us in this regard.

While making an objective analysis, we are very clear that the alphabets have no similarity with the south Indian scripts. In the neighboring Odia and Hindi alphabets also no much similarity is found except a few scripts also very few similarities found therefore it is very difficult to explore the history of the alphabet formation and Santali language (“Ol Chiki”).

However, it is very commonly observed that among the Santals very uniquely clan’s symbols have been well developed which are set to be there at the background of “Ol Chiki” alphabet formulation. The matching of the clan symbols with “Ol Chiki” alphabet structure are not so much revealing, though it helps us some short of analysis in the history of script formation. Irrespective of any kind of comparison with any neighbor Indian languages, it is basically found that few alphabets like ଅତ୍ତ/ O/ at, ଅଗ୍ତ/ ଶ/ ag, ଅଲ୍ତ/ ଧ/ al, ଅକ୍ତ/ ବ/ akk, ଅଇତ୍ତ/ ଲ/ aaj, ଅାମ୍ତ/ ଳ/ aam, ଅାୟ୍ତ/ ଴/ aaw, ଇ/ ଳ/ li, ଇତ୍ତ/ ଳ/ is, ଇହ୍ତ/ ଳ/ ih, ଇନ୍ତ୍ତ/ ଳ/ inj, ଇତ୍ତ/ ଳ/ lu, ଓତ୍ତ/ ଳ/ ob, ଓହ୍ତ/ ଳ/ oh, ଓହ୍ତ/ ଳ/ ong, ଓତ୍ତ/ ଳ/ le, etc. have some similarity with Bengali, English and Hindi words. Why the similarity with Odia alphabet is not there a very strange question here. Whatever the similarity with Odia alphabet found is quite meagre. Such clues may throw light on the fact that Pandit Murmu has perhaps knowingly avoided a local borrowing and accepted structural elements from other neighboring languages like Hindi and English to finally set the alphabet structures of the “Ol Chiki”.

As already discussed, the analytical observation of Santali clan structures can’t be neglected here for the analysis of the “Ol Chiki” scripts. May be, on the basis of several exercises of Santal clan symbols and alphabet structures of neighboring languages like Hindi, Bengali and Odia, Pandit Murmu must have finalized the “Ol Chiki” script’s alphabets at the end. As in case of Kui Script (Kui Lipi), and as in case of Saora script (Sorang Sompeng) the use of religious symbols are mostly lacking in the alphabets of “Ol Chiki” scripts. Still such observations are hypothetical mainly because Pandit Murmu is no more now and no other person is able to throw light from among the Santal community.

It is to be mentioned here from our empirical observation that Santali culture has been well acquainted with the usages of various symbolic marks since time immemorial. Therefore further exercise of similar terms may not be so difficult for the Santal elites. The Santals have twelve clans organizations which is further sub divided into a number of sub-clans, may be more than hundred sub clans. Each clan and sub clan has their own symbolic marks for their respective identity. Among other tribes of Odisha, only very few tribes have similar identity marks. Therefore, while exercising for the finalization of alphabets, Pandit Murmu must have utilized his experience with Santal symbols for clan identity. Mainly because we have not yet found the initial alphabet structures exercised by the inventor Pandit Rghunath Murmu, we are unable to visualized the type of alphabet the was exercising and correcting through trial and error methods for several times in order to bring the final alphabet structure. However, after going through the finalized script, whatever we are analyzing, they are completely based on the alphabet structures of Santali and it’s neighboring tribal as well as non-tribal alphabet scripts.

## V. Conclusion

At the end, on the basis of our empirical acquaintance we affirm conclude that no invention is free from the influence of the surrounding factors and here in the case of “Ol Chiki”, (Santali alphabets), there is no exception to it. Still we have to accept that when the inventor add more than 50 per cent structures on the basis of his/her creative thinking and imagination, it is simply a great contribution. In the analysis and observation, already we have written few “Ol Chiki” alphabets having little connection with that of Odia, English, Bengali and Hindi alphabet structures. In the majority of other alphabet structures the inventor has put in his own original thinking because of which Pandit Raghunath Murmu deserves to be honored as the inventor of “Ol Chiki” script.

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