

Santals of Rural Mayurbhanj

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Almost all tribes of India have distinct languages or dialects. The Santals of Odisha is a predominant tribe of the state. They have a recognised language known as Santali. The Santali language is recognised by Govt. of India and Indian Constitution. This language has a script known as “*Olchiki*”. In the present scenario Santali has been taught from school to university. The Santali people are educationally advanced community in comparison to other backward tribes of Odisha.



If there is any culture which still carries the impress of the underlying philosophic speculation and order of thought that was widespread in India prior to the Dravidian culture, it was very likely the belief and social order of the Pre-Dravidian Santali in the Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian culture of India, the Santals rather than the Mundas or Hos of Chotanagpur stand in the limelight. Similarly their contact with Dravidian Culture which at one time was not at all confined to Southern India, is well proved from their neighbours, the Malers, who in language along with Chotanagpur Orans speak a Dravidian tongue. Linguistically the Santals belong to what has called the western most peripheral representative of what is the Hawaiian type family

in the pacific (Biswas, 1956). Out of total population of Odisha they contribute 9.54 per cent and their literacy rate is 55.57 per cent in 2011 census (Census of India, 2011). In 1981 census their literacy rate was 16.34 per cent (Census of India, 1981) and in 2001 census their literacy rate was 40.46 per cent in Odisha.

After pivotal endeavours of Pandit Raghunath Murmu, the Santali Language has received recognised script “*Olchiki*” and the Language received different Constitutional recognitions. The Santali language has been taught in Odisha from primary school to university levels. The important point here is that a few tribes have literacy rate more than the literacy rate of state tribal literacy and Santals are one among them. According to 2011 census the state tribal literacy

rate was 52.24 per cent where as in 2011 census Santal literacy rate was 55.57% in Odisha. (Census of India, 2011).

Against this backdrop, the Santals are educationally advanced tribe of Odisha. They have an interwoven relationship with their language, literacy and education. In recent past an anthropological study has been undertaken among the rural Santal community of Rengalbeda village of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha. Santals are predominant tribal community of Mayurbhanj District of North Odisha.

Methods Adopted for the Study:

Data were collected by a field work conducted among the Santals of Rengalbeda village dwellers. A structured schedule was administered to collect the data by interview method. Besides in-depth interview, Group Discussion (GD) and case study methods were implemented. A semi-structured interview schedule was administered for Focus Group Discussion (FGD). A few case studies were undertaken among the people. Observation and quasi-participant observation methods (Pelto & Pelto, 1978) were implemented for the present study. Our respondents were adult members of the family, school students, teachers, local workers, leaders and adult members of Santal community and interviews were taken from them without checklist and structured schedules. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed by simple statistics. Rather than quantitative findings, the qualitative data have been reflected in the present study.

Major Findings of the Study:

1. The data of the present study reveal that due to implementation of Santali language in the course curriculum the literacy rate has been

increased among the Santals and it is higher than even state tribal literacy rate.

2. The level of attainment of higher education among the Santals are more in comparison to other tribes of Odisha and the number of matriculates, graduates and post graduates is more in comparison to other tribal communities of the state.
3. Santal community has even more number of population who have received technical education.
4. Due to Constitutional recognition and initiatives taken by the State Government the Santali language is popular among the tribes and they have retained their ethnic identity through the Santali language.
5. Due to inclusion of Santali language in course curriculum a number of books have been published in different subjects in Santali. The Tribal language friendly programs implemented by the State as well as Central Government are indeed praiseworthy.
6. Though the processes of anthropological changes like assimilation, acculturation and detribalization have influenced the cultural traits & patterns of cultural life of Santali tribe but the introduction of Santali language has made it able to handing down the cultural tradition from one generation to other having written documentation in an amicable way.
7. The advent of intruders and market economy has brought changes in the tribal life in general and Santali in particular but the Language and Literature of Santali community have protected the Santali culture among their own people and social milieu.
8. The more interesting thing is that the Santali girls are more interested in Santali language

rather than boys. Therefore, to retain the language and culture the feminine gender played stupendous role in comparison to their male counterpart.

9. The unfortunate thing is that some vested interest teachers are discouraging the Santali students to read Santali as a medium of instructions and they are encouraging to opt. English language as their medium of instructions which should be intervened by the local administration and local Community Based Organisations (CBOs).
10. Constitutional Recognition of “Olchiki” script and Santali language have helped in documentation of different folk tales, folk songs, folk art and folk literature as a whole which is not only intangible treasure of the community to understand their cultural life but also it can play like an instrument to implement other administrative measures by administration, Non-Government Organization (NGOs) and other agencies for the development of these aboriginal people in toto.

Conclusion

In a holistic way if we understand the language, literacy and education of Santali tribe of Odisha it is tangible that implementation of Santali language in course curriculum and as medium of instructions in schools, colleges and universities the literacy rate of the Santals has increased relatively and the attainment of higher and technical education is relatively higher in comparison to other tribes of Odisha.

Further, the documentation of language and literature in their own language has preserved the intangible cultural heritage of Santals in spite of different forces of socio- cultural changes. The administration should utilise the cultural traits of

their language in developmental programs and particularly to develop Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials for fruitful implementation of different ameliorative measures for the development of the community in particular and society in general. From the present study it is ascertained that language can be utilised as a tool for not only preservation of culture of tribal and folk communities but also it can be an instrument for the administration to implement development programmes for better quality of life among the indigenous people.

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