# Ol Chiki Script

***Mains:*** *GS-I - History, Art & Culture*

## Why in News?

*The Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with Fagun (a monthly Santhali newspaper), is organising the Inaugural Function of the Centenary Celebrations of the Ol Chiki Script at Dr Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi.*

## What is the Ol Chiki Script?

- **Oral Tradition** – For centuries, knowledge and cultural memory were transmitted through speech rather than writing.
- Rooted in rich traditions of folklore, songs, rituals, and storytelling, the Santhali language sustained its continuity through a vibrant oral heritage that preserved identity across generations.
- **Script Development** – The Ol Chiki script is the *official script of the Santhali language*, one of India's prominent tribal languages.
- **Spoken widely** – Across Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar.
- **Belonging to** – The Austroasiatic language family, Santhali has historically thrived through these oral traditions.
- **Strengths & Challenges** – While oral traditions kept Santhali culture alive, the lack of a standard script created major hurdles in documentation, formal education, and literary growth.

## What is the Historical Background?

- **Using Borrowed Scripts** – Prior to the 20th century, Santhali was transcribed using various borrowed scripts, including Roman, Bengali, Odia, and Devanagari.
- These scripts facilitated limited written expression, but they were not designed to capture its unique phonetic features accurately.
- Tribal languages historically faced marginalisation under dominant linguistic groups (Bengali, Odia, Hindi).
- **Phonetic Challenges** – The language includes unique sounds, such as glottal stops and specific vowel patterns, which have been difficult to accurately represent using external writing systems.
- **Impact –** Consequently, this often led to distortions in pronunciation and meaning, thereby creating obstacles in educational contexts and hampering systematic linguistic development preservation.
- **Rise of Ol Chiki** – At the heart of the Ol Chiki movement stands the visionary who

transformed Santhali from an oral tradition into a written legacy.
- This innovation gave the language a script tailored to its phonetics, enabling literary growth and cultural revival.

## Who was the key architect of Ol Chiki script?

- **Development** – Ol Chiki was developed in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu to provide Santhali with a scientific and dedicated writing system.
- **Guru Pandit Raghunath Murmu** – A revered figure in the Santhali community, was born in 1905 in Dandbose village of Mayurbhanj district in Odisha.
- Deeply immersed in Santhali traditions from a young age, he was driven by the need to give his language a distinct written identity.
- This vision led to the creation of the Ol Chiki script, providing Santhali with its own scientific and phonetic writing system.
- **Title** – His dedication to cultural preservation and education earned him the honorary *title of "Pandit*".
- **Literary Contributions**
    - High Serena (1936) – First book written in Ol Chiki.
    - Bidu-Chandan – A celebrated work reflecting Santhali culture and emotions.
    - Authored other influential texts to promote literacy and awareness of Ol Chiki.
- **Recognition –** His contributions received wide recognition, including an honorary doctorate from Ranchi University and honours from the Odisha Sahitya Akademi.

## How the Ol Chiki Script was created?

- The creation of Ol Chiki was not merely a linguistic reform but a cultural resistance movement against assimilation.
- **Key Linguistic Features**
- Designed exclusively for Santhali
- 30 letters representing vowels and consonants
- Each symbol corresponds directly to a specific sound
- Accurately captures glottal stops and unique phonetic elements.
- **Tool of Identity and Resistance** – By developing a distinct script, the Santhal community asserted
    - Intellectual autonomy
    - Cultural sovereignty
    - Resistance to linguistic homogenization.
- This reflects how language becomes a political instrument of identity formation.
- **A Distinct Script** – Unlike adapted scripts, Ol Chiki provided a linguistically precise and culturally rooted medium of written expression.
- **Turning Point in Language Evolution** – The introduction of Ol Chiki marked a turning point in the evolution of Santhali as a written language.
- By providing a script rooted in linguistic authenticity, it enabled the language to transition from an exclusively oral medium to a structured written form.
- **Accuracy & Standardisation** – The script made it possible to record vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation with accuracy.
- It also facilitated the standardisation of language use, thereby supporting teaching,

translation, and publication.

## What was the Constitutional Milestone of Santhali language?

- **Inclusion in 8th Schedule** – The Santhali language was formally included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India through the ***92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003***.
- This milestone shifted Santhali from a culturally rich but marginalised language to one formally acknowledged in India's linguistic framework.
- **Institutional Support** – It enabled Santhali to receive support in education, governance, and public communication.
- It facilitated its use in competitive examinations, literary promotion, and academic research.
- **Strengthening Ol Chiki** – This recognition strengthened the adoption of the Ol Chiki script in formal domains such as school curricula and state-level publications.
- It was not merely a linguistic inclusion but an affirmation of the identity, heritage, and intellectual traditions of the Santhal community.
- **Constitution in Santhali** – The Constitution of India was *officially translated into the Santhali language* using the Ol Chiki script and released in December 2025.
- Published by the Legislative Department, marked the first time that the nation's foundational legal text became available in Santhali in its own indigenous script.
- **Significance of Translation** – It ensures that constitutional values and rights are accessible to Santhali-speaking citizens in a linguistically familiar form.
- By enabling direct engagement with constitutional provisions related to governance, equality, and tribal safeguards under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules.
- **100 Years celebration of Ol Chiki Script –** To honour the cultural and linguistic legacy of Ol Chiki, the Government is issuing a Rs.100 commemorative coin and a postage stamp marking its centenary (1925–2025).
- The coin shows the Lion Capital of Ashoka, the denomination, and a portrait of Pandit Raghunath Murmu, set against Ol Chiki characters, with an inscription celebrating 100 years of the script.

## What lies ahead?

- Today, Ol Chiki represents far more than a writing system.
- It stands as a symbol of linguistic dignity, cultural resilience, and intellectual self-determination.
- The 100 years of Ol Chiki mark not just time, but the enduring power of language as a foundation of identity, dignity, and cultural continuity.
- As Ol Chiki enters its next century, it serves as a bridge between tradition and modernity and a guide for future generations.
- It reaffirms that language is not just a tool for communication, but a living expression of memory and identity.

## Reference

PIB | Ol Chiki Script - 100 Years of Linguistic Empowerment



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