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This Tribal Language Just Became India's First to Have Wikipedia Edition in Own Script!

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Spoken by over 6.4 million people in the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam, efforts to bring Santhali to the mainstream were going on, even before the Wikipedia page went live.

Santhali (Santali), a tribal language primarily spoken in India, Bangladesh and Nepal, received global recognition when it got a Wikipedia edition in its own script, earlier this month. Spoken by over 6.4 million people in the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam, efforts to bring Santhali to the mainstream were going on, even before the Wikipedia page went live.

The initiative to get a Santhali edition for Wikipedia, began six years ago, in 2012. Workshops were held to make people aware of the language, but the initiative had to be

paused because of a lack of contributors. The Bangladesh chapter of Wikipedia restarted efforts towards opening a Santhali Wikipedia page, last year, in September.

This time, contributors from India, Bangladesh and Nepal stepped forward, and the project was a success.



Children learning Santhali. Source: Indian Tribal Heritage.

Santhali, written in the Ol Chiki script currently has content of about 70,000 words. Jayanta Nath, who works for the Indian chapter of Wikimedia Foundation told the Hindustan Times, “The Santhali Wikipedia

got approval from the language committee of the Wikimedia Foundation on June 28 and went live on August 2.”

The home page of Santhali Wikipedia features an article on Raghunath Murmu – the inventor of the Ol Chiki script.

Scheduled languages like Dogri, Bodo and Manipuri have no Wikipedia versions. Assamese does but in the Bengali script. Speakers of Santhali hope that this initiative brings more importance to the language and that it is preserved over generations. Shikha Mandi, a radio jockey, became India’s first to host a show in the language in November 2017. Pashupati Prasad Mahato, an anthropologist, told HT, “The scope of higher education in Santhali is increasing over the past few years. Coming at this juncture, this will increase the scope of reading in Ol Chiki script and enthuse Santhali speakers to pursue higher education in their mother

tongue.”

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