



**GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL**  
**GOVERNMENT GENERAL DEGREE COLLEGE, LALGARH**  
**LALGARH :: JHARGRAM :: 721516**

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## **7. Institutional Value and Best Practices**

### **7.3. Institutional Distinctiveness**

#### **7.3.1. *Portray the performance of the Institution in one area distinctive to its priority and thrust (within 1000 words)***

### **INSTITUTIONAL DISTINCTIVENESS: COURSES IN SANTALI MEDIUM**

#### **Contextualizing the Initiative: Preserving Tribal Culture in India**

India is home to an incredibly diverse array of languages, dialects, and cultural practices, many of which are rooted in the country's indigenous and tribal communities. Over the past few decades there has been a growing recognition of the need to protect and preserve the heritage of these communities, including their languages, which are often at risk of extinction due to the pressures of modernization and assimilation into the mainstream culture.

In response, the Indian government has undertaken various measures aimed at safeguarding tribal languages and promoting their usage in educational institutions. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the importance of mother tongue-based education and encourages the promotion of indigenous languages at all levels of education. This policy aligns with the government's larger goal of preserving and promoting tribal culture through the establishment of language-learning programs, cultural centers, and incentives for tribal students.

Within this framework, the Government General Degree College Lalgarh's initiative to offer B.A. courses entirely in the Santali language represents a pioneering step in West Bengal's efforts to support the linguistic and cultural identity of its indigenous population.

#### **Introduction to the Santali Language and Ol Chiki Script**

Santali is a major tribal language spoken by the Santal community, one of the largest tribal groups in India. Spread across states like West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, and Assam, the Santal community has maintained a rich cultural and linguistic heritage. Santali holds significant importance for the Santal people as it not only represents their medium of communication but also reflects their myths, folklore, and cultural expressions.

The Ol Chiki script, developed by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925, is a writing system specifically created for the Santali language. This script has played a crucial role in the revival of the language, fostering literacy and helping preserve the cultural identity of the Santals. Over the years, Ol Chiki has been recognized by the Indian government as the official script for Santali, further contributing to its institutionalization and standardization.



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### **Overview of B.A. Courses in Santali at Government General Degree College Lalgargh**

Established in 2021, Government General Degree College Lalgargh became one of the first institutions in West Bengal to introduce undergraduate (B.A.) courses entirely in the Santali language, making it a significant milestone for the state's tribal education initiatives. Initially, the college offered B.A. Honours courses in History, Political Science, and Philosophy, each with an intake capacity of 30 students. Due to growing demand and the success of the program, the intake capacity has been increased to 55 students for each subject, and also 60 more for B.A. General Course.

What sets this initiative apart is the exclusive use of the Santali language as the medium of instruction and evaluation. Classes are conducted in Santali, and students write their examinations in Santali, using the Ol Chiki script. This approach not only makes higher education more accessible to students from the Santal community, who are often more comfortable with their native language than with Bengali or English, but also actively promotes the language in academic spaces.

The decision to introduce these courses reflects the increasing importance of language as a tool for preserving cultural identity. By offering courses in Santali, the college is contributing to the revitalization of a language that is often marginalized in mainstream education systems. Additionally, this move aligns with broader national and state-level efforts to uplift tribal communities through education and linguistic preservation.

### **Impact on the Local Community**

The introduction of Santali-medium courses at Government General Degree College Lalgargh has had a significant positive impact on the local tribal communities. For many tribal students, particularly those from the adjacent rural areas, pursuing higher education in their native language provides a sense of comfort and cultural continuity. Many students who might have struggled with the language barrier in Bengali or English-medium institutions now have the opportunity to excel in their academic pursuits without the added pressure of mastering a foreign language.

Moreover, the courses have attracted students not only from the immediate locality but also from other districts in West Bengal, such as Bankura, Murshidabad, and Purulia, where Santali-speaking communities are prevalent. This influx of students from diverse districts highlights the growing demand for education in indigenous languages and underscores the significance of this initiative as a regional hub for Santali-language education.

### **Preserving Santali Language and Culture**

GGDC Lalgargh's Santali-medium B.A. courses are playing a vital role in preserving and promoting the Santali language and, by extension, the culture of the Santal people. Language is a fundamental component of cultural identity and the use of Santali as the medium of instruction ensures that students are not disconnected from their cultural roots while pursuing modern education.



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Efforts are being made to develop and translate textbooks and study materials into Santali using the Ol Chiki script, which is critical for the sustainability of this initiative. The process of creating academic resources in Santali not only fosters linguistic development but also encourages intellectual growth in the language. Through this initiative, the college is ensuring that Santali is not limited to informal or oral use but is also respected as a language of academic and intellectual discourse.

The availability of these courses in Santali enables students to engage deeply with their history, politics, and philosophy from the perspective of their own linguistic and cultural framework. This is particularly important in a globalized world where many indigenous languages are disappearing, and cultural assimilation threatens the survival of tribal traditions.

### **Challenges and the Way Forward**

Despite the notable progress, there are challenges that need to be addressed for the long-term success of Santali-medium higher education. One of the primary challenges is the shortage of academic materials and textbooks in the Santali language. While efforts are being made to translate existing materials, the process is time-consuming and requires substantial resources. Additionally, there is a need for trained faculty who are not only proficient in their respective disciplines but also fluent in Santali and capable of teaching complex subjects in the language. As of now, the college is being served in this regard by guest faculty sent by various Santali socio-cultural groups like Bharat Jakat Santal Pathuwa G West Bengal, Adivasi Socio-Education and Cultural Association (ASECA) and Majhi Pargana Mahal.

The government's support in the form of grants, scholarships, and infrastructure development will be crucial to overcoming these challenges. More initiatives, such as establishing language labs, developing Santali-language research programs, and creating Santali digital libraries, could further bolster the status of the language in academic settings.

### **Conclusion**

The Government General Degree College Lalgarh's decision to offer B.A. courses in Santali marks a groundbreaking step in preserving the Santali language and promoting tribal education in West Bengal. By integrating the Santali language into higher education, the college is not only providing students from tribal communities with greater access to academic opportunities but also contributing to the broader goal of cultural preservation. As India continues to focus on inclusive education and the protection of its diverse cultural heritage, initiatives like this one stand as shining examples of how education can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity.