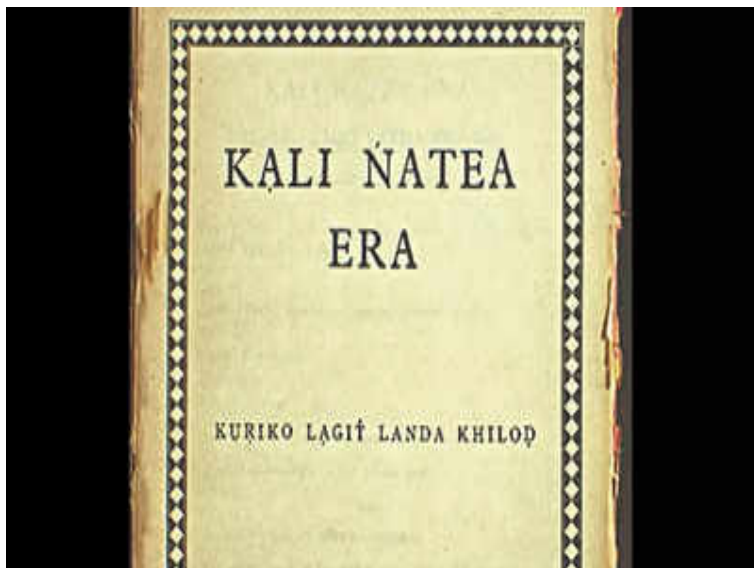


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Preserving history: Jadavpur University to digitise rare Santhali texts

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KOLKATA: Rare Santhali documents and manuscripts from 1890 till 1975 are being digitised and preserved by the School of Cultural Texts and Records (SCTR) at Jadavpur University under the 'Endangered Archive Programme'. The pilot project, financially supported by The British Library, will publish more than 5,000 digitised images by March. SCTR has also been declared the hub of endangered archives programme to acquaint people with the process of digitisation, preservation and conservation of fragile documents.

Rahi Soren, assistant professor at the School of Oceanographic Studies, who is leading the project, said written practices in

Santhali were initiated by the Christian missionaries as printed periodicals during the early 19th century. These are significant resources to trace the transformation from oral to written cultures, and the interconnection between indigenous religion and Christianity.

"The project aims to digitise and preserve the rare and endangered periodicals which provide primary research materials for scholars engaging with linguistic, folklore, folk songs and specific cultural forms. The other challenging task is locating rare manuscripts of Sadhu Ramchand Murmu and Pandit Raghunath Murmu, who have widespread contributions in the invention of the Santhali Ol-Chiki script," Soren said.

The digitised images will comprise short stories, dramas, poems, jokes, and writings on various subjects, to throw light on the lifestyle and culture of Santhali people. Soren said, "The collection of Dablu Soren, who had travelled to remote places in search of dramas and other literary genres in Santhali, forms the crux of the digitised images. His collection dates from the early 1900s. Some of the rare books that have been digitised are 'Chadni', 'Hor Sambah', a biography by Reverend Dr Andrew Campbell; issues of the Dharwak periodical from 1931 to 1936, and others."

The monthly reformist magazine 'Tetre', edited by Mahadev Hansda of Bandwan in Purulia, will also be digitised.

Soren, who travelled with her team to remote villages of Jharkhand, Odisha and Bengal in search of the documents, said it was difficult to make people realise the value of these texts.