

# Unveiling the Literary Journey: Mapping the Development of Santali Literature from 1867 to 2021

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**Abstract :** *Adivasi or Tribal literature in India possesses a rich and profound history, evolving into a dynamic and influential medium of cultural expression. While these literatures are frequently associated with ancient texts and myths, they also represent a dynamic and evolving form of literature, continually shaped by the community's changing realities. Santali literature also plays a vital role in reflecting the culture, heritage, and unique worldview of the Santali people. Despite its rich and varied literary heritage, much Santali literature remains undocumented or poorly indexed, preventing its full integration into mainstream literary studies. This lack of comprehensive documentation limits a broader understanding of Santali culture and its potential contributions to academic and cultural discussions. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to explore and map the bibliometric data available on Santali literature from 1867-2021 available from multiple databases. The findings reveal a marked increase in literary output post-independence, with Indian scholars contributing extensively to research on historical, anthropological, social, and cultural dimensions. The study identifies key thematic progressions, including historical and anthropological themes, social and cultural themes, indigenous knowledge systems, and developmental themes, indicating a broadening of focus within the literature. On a broader note, the study emphasizes the need for a more nuanced, inclusive approach to documenting and disseminating Santali literary works, which could enrich both regional and national literary landscapes.*

**Keywords:** Santal, Santali Literature, Traditional Knowledge, Bibliometric, Mapping

## INTRODUCTION

Indian folklore has a rich and profound history, evolving into a dynamic and influential medium of cultural expression that serves as a crucial conduit for the transmission of societal values, traditions, and beliefs across generations (Ramakrishnan, 2023). While folklore is frequently associated with ancient texts and myths, it also represents a dynamic and evolving form of literature, continually shaped by the community's changing realities. (Handoo, 1989). However, a significant portion of folklore has persisted within the oral tradition, particularly in rural and less-developed regions where literacy rates remain low. In these areas, oral narratives play an essential role in preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage of the community (Xaxa, 2008). Historically, oral narratives have been the primary means of communication, independent of written texts, and continue to hold significance in contemporary times. In this context, folklore functions as a repository of indigenous knowledge encompassing cultural, literary, and historical domains. It includes a wealth of stories recounting the lives of the community's ancestors, highlighting their customs, struggles, and triumphs. These narratives often draw on myths, religious rituals, and ancient texts, imbuing them with layers of meaning and significance. They also reflect the spiritual connection between the community and the divine, frequently portraying gods, spirits, and supernatural forces as active agents in individuals' lives (Carine, 2020). However, in contemporary times, folklore is not solely confined to defining the traditional culture of a community through folk songs, dance, oral narratives, and puppet shows; it also serves as the collective voice of the community on cultural, social, and developmental issues (Ramakrishnan, 2023). In this context, folklore should not be perceived as a static tradition but as a dynamic narrative that adapts to the evolving needs and experiences of the community (Carine, 2022). It facilitates the ongoing renewal of cultural identity and provides a platform for the reinterpretation and reinvention of traditional stories in response to contemporary realities. Consequently, Santali folklore plays a crucial role in representing the identity of the Santali community, one of India's largest tribal groups. The Santali community, predominantly residing in eastern India, possesses a rich cultural heritage intricately woven into its folklore. Santali folklore serves as a vital expression of the community's identity, encapsulating its distinctive cultural practices, beliefs, and worldview.

The main objective of this study is to examine the development of Santali folklore and to categorize the themes that have

emerged over time. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the subsequent section outlines the methodology. The Results and Discussion section presents the findings of the evolution of Santali folklore studies. The paper concludes with a summary of the study.

## METHODOLOGY

This study explores the development of Santali literature by employing a bibliometric data collection and review approach. Data were sourced from multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, the library collection at Bankura University, and international journal repositories such as SAGE, Taylor & Francis, ScienceDirect, JSTOR and Wiley. A structured search string was used to retrieve relevant literature.

("Santal" OR "Santals" OR "Santhal") AND ("Literature" OR "Traditional Knowledge" OR "Language"). This query was designed to trace the trajectory of Santali literature from its origins to the present day, capturing both historical and contemporary developments, thematic trends, and influential contributions spanning 1867 to 2021. Following the initial data extraction, a rigorous manual verification process was conducted to ensure the validity and relevance of the identified studies. This involved reviewing the titles, abstracts, and keywords of each entry to evaluate their alignment with the study objectives. This step was critical for filtering out studies that were either tangential or unrelated to the core research focus. From an initial data download of 270 documents, 141 were selected based on relevance to key parameters such as keyword specificity, geographical context, and subject focus. In cases where titles or keywords were ambiguous or insufficiently descriptive, a more detailed content analysis was conducted to assess the paper's suitability for inclusion. This methodological rigor ensured that the final selection of documents provided a comprehensive and focused foundation for analyzing the evolution of Santali literature over the past century.

**Table 1 Overview of Bibliometric data**

Attributes	Search Content/Results
Database	Multiple Database includes Google Scholar, Libraries, Online database of Journals.
Search Keyword	(Santal or Santali or Santhali) OR (Literature or Indigenous knowledge or Language)
Time Span	1880-2021
Number of Documents Retrieved	257
Number of Documents included for the Study (after)	141
Document type	Article, Book, Book Review, Conference Paper
Language	English, Hindi

Source: Authors own compilation

## Data Analysis

To examine the scholarly landscape of Santali literature, bibliographic data were systematically retrieved from various academic databases. The data were organized and tabulated using Microsoft Excel to facilitate structured analysis. The primary aim of this study was to trace the development, scope, and thematic evolution of research in this field. In doing so, the documents were initially categorized year-wise to analyze the publication trend of the publication in Santali literature. Moreover, publication data are divided

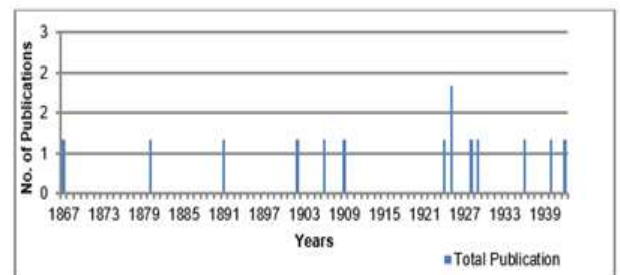
into two categories relative to the year 1947, marking India's independence as a significant historical milestone. In addition, the study employed thematic coding to classify the literature into major research areas. This approach enabled the identification of dominant themes, shifts in scholarly focus, and emerging areas of inquiry. The analysis also included an examination of authorship patterns to understand the distribution of scholarly contributions.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This section highlights the findings and discussions related to Santali literature and its development by mapping its progress from 1867 to 2021.

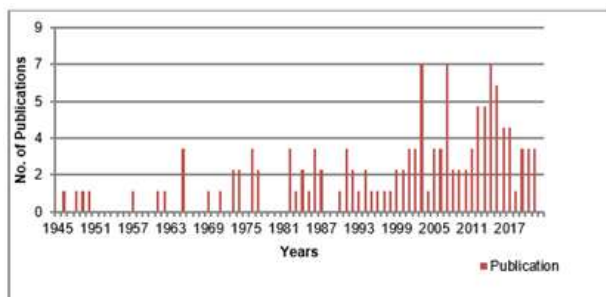
### Publication Trend in Santali Literature

The publication of Santali literature and its cultural content is deeply connected to the historical, political, and cultural development of the Santali community. The documentation and publication of Santali folklore and knowledge have evolved due to these influences. The publication trend of research on Santali literature shows a similar pattern. The study has visualized the data on publication trends in two parts: Figure 1 represents data on publications after independence, that is, 1947, and Figure 2 represents data from 1947 to 2021. The data reveal a substantial increase in scholarly output following independence, with approximately 90% of publications appearing post-1947. Moreover, only 10 percent of publications were published between 1867 and 1946, with missionaries or foreign authors being the main contributors in documenting the folklore, including scholars like E.G. Man's *"Sonthalia and The Sonthals"*, A Campbell's *Santal Folk Tales*, Brian Houghton's *"Aborigines of the Eastern Ghats"* etc. Furthermore, the post-independence era marked an increase in academic engagement with Santali literature, driven largely by Indian scholars. Their contributions have been instrumental in reframing Santali studies within broader sociopolitical and historical discourses. By introducing indigenous perspectives, these scholars have expanded the field and fostered a more nuanced understanding of Santali identity and cultural heritage issues. However, academic research on Santali literature between 2000 and 2021 began to concentrate on exploring the Santals' cultural, historical, and societal development through the lens of external influences such as colonialism, modernization, and globalization. While this approach has yielded important insights into community interactions with external systems, it has often marginalized the value of Indigenous epistemologies and locally embedded knowledge systems that are integral to the Santali worldview.



**Figure 1 Santali Literature Publication Trend Pre-Independence (1867-1946)**

Source: Authors own compilation

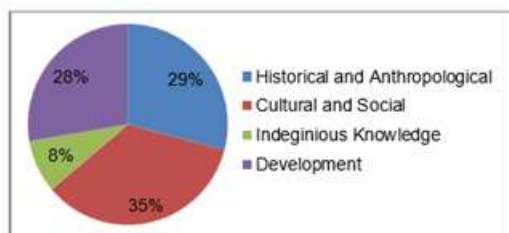


**Figure 2 Santali Literature Publication Trend Post-Independence (1947-2021)**

*Source: Authors own publication*

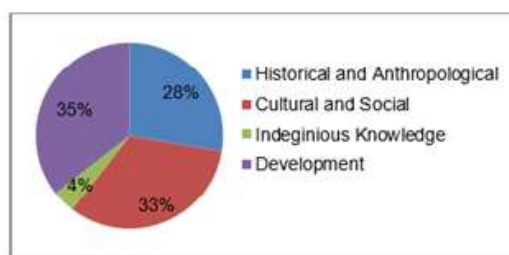
### Publication Pattern of Santali Literature

The data on the publication pattern of Santali literature shows the thematic development of the literature. The study shows that there has been substantial development in research in various domains that balances the rich folklore culture with the incorporation of contemporary themes. In doing so, the study finds four major themes: *Historical and Anthropological Aspects*, *Indigenous/ Traditional Knowledge*, *Social and Cultural Aspects*, and *Developmental Issues*. The data plotted in Figure 3 show the dominance of research on cultural and social aspects, with 35 percent of articles on this theme, which includes religion and culture, Santali songs, tribal design, witchcraft and leprosy, tribal festivals, and many more. In addition to this wide range of research on cultural aspects, articles on historical, anthropological, and developmental issues have taken up 29 and 28 percent of the research, respectively. Further, post 2000, research on developmental themes has escalated significantly from 28 percent during 1947-1999 to 35 percent between 2000-2021. The shift reflects a broader research perspective of researcher on themes which impacted the development of Santal community, some of the highlighted research topics are tribal rights, alienation and restoration of tribal land, marginalized identity and many more. Besides this incremental, the data show that 8 percent of research was published in the domain of indigenous knowledge systems, which deescalated to 4 percent post 2000. This highlights a significant gap in the recognition and exploration of Santali knowledge and traditions in academic research. On the broader note, the data underscore the need for a more balanced and inclusive research agenda that not only continues to explore developmental issues but also re-engages with the cultural, historical, and epistemic dimensions of Santali life. Addressing this imbalance would contribute to a more holistic understanding of Santali society and ensure the preservation and recognition of its rich heritage in academic discourse.



**Figure 3 Publication Pattern 1947-1999**

*Source: Authors own compilation*

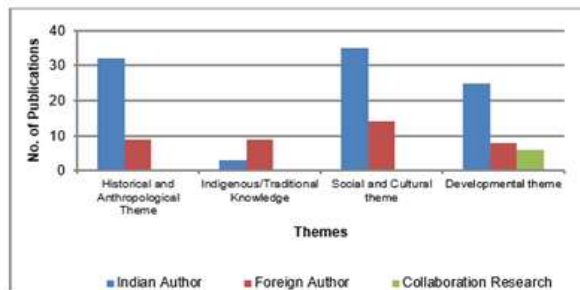


**Figure 4 Publication Pattern Post 2000**

*Source: Authors own compilation*

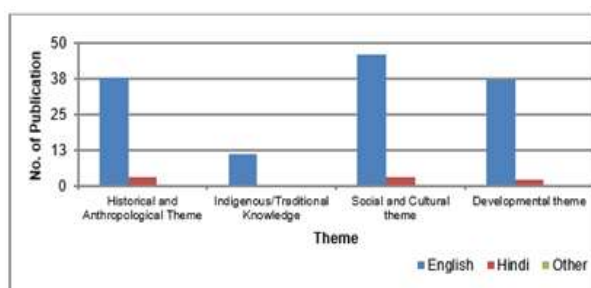
### Authorship Pattern in Santali Literature

An analysis of authorship patterns within the domain of Santali literature reveals a multifaceted landscape of scholarly contributions across diverse thematic areas. This study underscores the active involvement of both Indian and international researchers in the development and dissemination of knowledge related to Santali literature. Initially, foreign authors and missionaries played a foundational role in documenting Santali oral narratives, particularly folklore. Pioneering figures such as P.O. Bodding, A.A. Campbell and Cecil Henry Bompas were instrumental in this early phase, and their contributions laid the groundwork for documenting the indigenous knowledge of the Santali community. Further, the scope of research expanded beyond oral traditions to encompass historical, anthropological, developmental, and socio-cultural dimensions in which the work of scholars like Marine Carrin, Mary Girard, and Mary Douglas significantly advanced this academic discourse by exploring a more holistic understanding of Santali communities' society. Moreover, in addition to the early contribution by foreign authors, the data on publication trends post-independence era highlight the increasing participation of Indian scholars. According to the data presented in Figure 5, Indian authors have demonstrated substantial scholarly engagement, particularly in the historical and anthropological (78%) and socio-cultural (71%) domains. These figures emphasize the contribution of Indian academics to exploring the knowledge repository of the Santali community. Furthermore, the data on preferred languages of publication show the dominance of English over other languages chosen for publication (for details, refer to Figure 6). The preference for English as a preferred language acts as a barrier in highlighting the knowledge domain of these "adivasi" knowledge repositories, which are often recorded in regional languages. On a broader note, the data on authorship patterns provide insightful data on the dynamics and thematic orientations within Santali literature research.



**Figure 5 Authorship Pattern in different theme**

*Source: Authors own contribution*



**Figure 6 Publication Language in different theme**

*Source: Authors own contribution*

## CONCLUSION

This study undertook a detailed exploration of the development of Santali literature from 1867 to 2021, offering an in-depth mapping of its progression across a variety of thematic domains. The study finds escalating progress in the literature after independence, with 90 percent of the research published between 1947-2021. However, in the pre-independence period, Santali literature research was primarily characterized by the efforts of foreign authors and Christian missionaries, who played a foundational role in preserving Santali oral traditions, folklore, and cultural practices. This study also traces the thematic progression of Santali literature across several key areas, including historical and anthropological perspectives, social and cultural contexts, indigenous knowledge systems and developmental themes. This thematic diversity underscores the rich and multifaceted nature of Santali literary expressions. However, despite the wide range of topics covered, a recurring pattern is the predominance of research focused on historical and cultural themes, while Indigenous and traditional knowledge remains underexplored. The study also mapped the authorship pattern while analyzing the progress of Santali literature. Accordingly, the study finds that while the early contributions to Santali literature were largely driven by foreign authors, post-independence trends show a significant involvement of Indian scholars, accounting for more than 78 and 71 percent contributions in the historical and anthropological and socio-cultural domains, respectively. However, despite this thematic progress, researchers have unfortunately not paid much attention to exploring research on indigenous and traditional knowledge, which accounts for only 8 percent of research publications in this domain. In addition, the preferred language of dissemination, English, has created a barrier to bringing out the traditional knowledge of the Santali community. Thus, this study suggests a more nuanced approach to documenting and preserving Santali literature.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest relevant to the content of this article.

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