



## Malnutrition among tribal children in Purulia district

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### ABSTRACT :

Purulia district is a backward one. In this district 11.2 percent of people are belonged to scheduled tribe. Again, about 12 different tribal groups comprises in this district. The objective of the study is to analyse the socioeconomic issues of the different tribal groups and role of the mothers for their children malnutrition. This study used 640 sample households from 32 villages of eight sample blocks in Purulia district. Santal takes a dominant part in respect of socioeconomic issues. Mothers play a remarkable role for their children malnutrition.

Key words: Malnutrition, socioeconomic status, different tribal group, anthropometric measures

### Introduction:

Malnutrition refers to a state where an individual's nutrition intake is inadequate to meet their body's requirements for growth, maintenance, and development. Malnutrition increases the risk of mortality among children, especially during infancy and early childhood. Indigenous communities, often characterized by distinct cultures, languages, and traditional practices, face a disproportionately high burden of malnutrition compared to the general population in many countries around the world. This complex problem stems from a convergence of historical, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors that have marginalized tribal peoples and constrained their access to nutritious food, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Purulia district in West Bengal is known for its diverse tribal population, including Santal, Bhumij, Mahali, and Orawn among others. These communities have distinct cultural practices, languages, and lifestyles, which often isolate them from mainstream society. More than 100 villages of the Purulia district are entirely inhabited by tribal people and they are the most unprivileged sections from the viewpoint of development.

The common anthropometric measurements of nutritional imbalance among children used in community level are:

#### Underweight

Underweight based on weight-for-age, is a composite measure of stunting and wasting and is recommended as the indicator to assess changes in the magnitude of malnutrition over time.

#### Stunting

Low length-for-age, stemming from a slowing in the growth of the fetus and the child and resulting in a failure to achieve expected length/height as compared to a healthy, well-nourished child of the same age, is a sign of stunting. Stunting is an indicator of past growth failure.

#### Wasting

Wasting is the result of a weight falling significantly below the weight expected of a child of the same length or height. Wasting indicates current or acute malnutrition resulting from failure to gain weight or actual weight loss.

The presence of poverty, along with limited access to education and healthcare, can make obstacles like malnutrition even more challenging to overcome. While considerable progress has been made in reducing malnutrition in recent decades, certain populations, such as tribal communities, continue to experience disproportionately high rates of malnutrition.

The 2011 Census Report indicates that Scheduled Tribes comprise 8.6 per cent of the overall population in India. In India, about 705 tribes spread across the country, accounting for 6.8 % of the total population. Purulia district of West Bengal comprises more than 10 tribes. However, three tribes have been randomly selected in our study. Some ethnic features of these tribals are briefly discussed below:

#### *Santal Tribe*

Mainly inhabits the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Assam. Santali language is the part of the Munda subgroup of the Austroasiatic language family. Santals have a rich cultural heritage with traditional music, dance forms like Sohrai and Baha and intricate handicrafts.

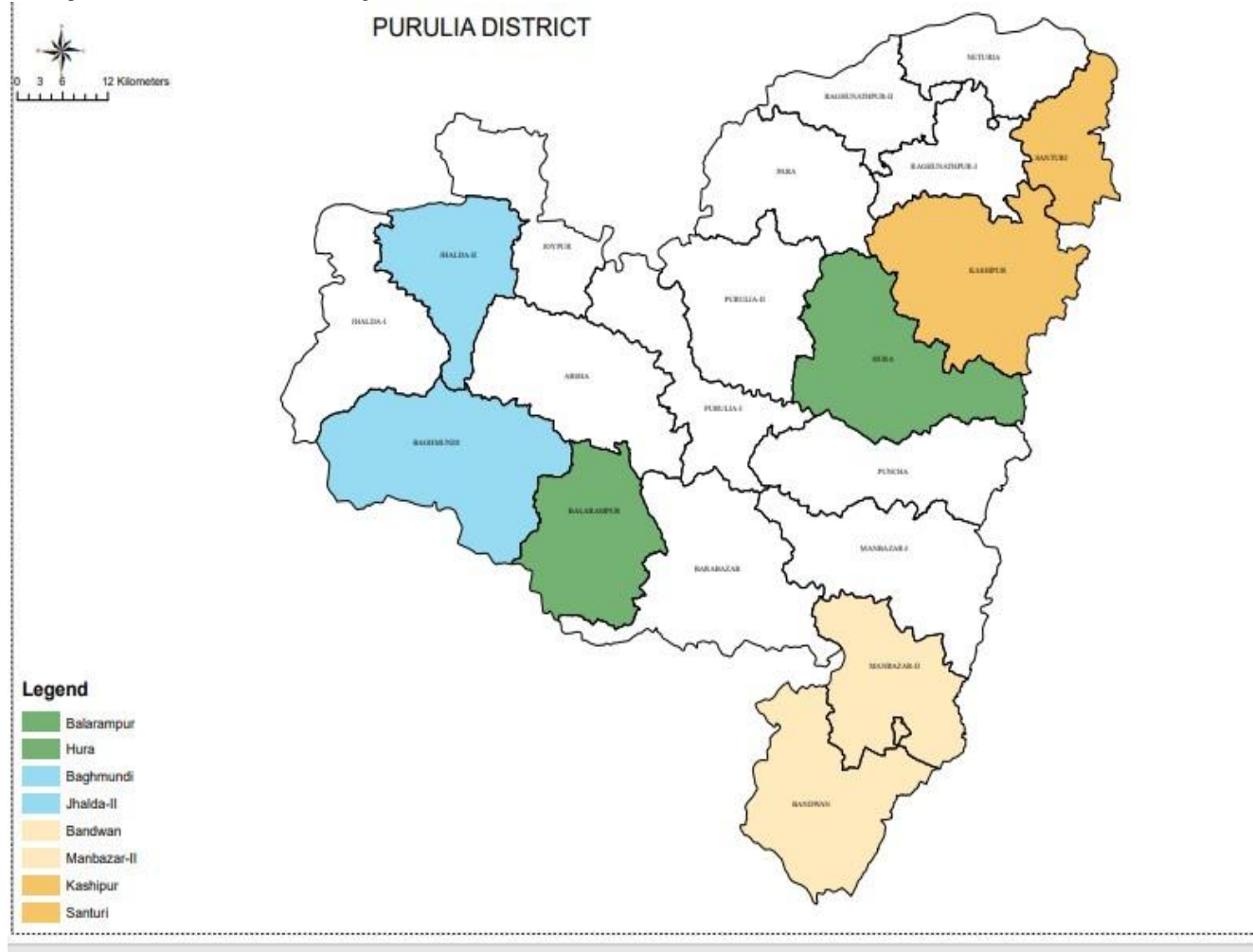
### *Orawn*

The Orawns, rank among the five largest tribal communities in South Asia. They inhabit the lush uplands of east-central India, primarily in the Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand and its neighbouring states. A substantial population of Orawns can be found in the Purulia District, which is part of the Chota Nagpur plateau. In Purulia, the majority of Orawns are engaged in farming, either as landowners, sharecroppers, or agricultural laborers.

### *Bhumij*

The Bhumij people belong to the Mundari group and have received official recognition as Scheduled Tribes from the Government of India. However, this classification is applicable only in the states of Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Their primary concentration is in West Bengal, particularly in the districts of Midnapore, Purulia, Bankura, and 24 Parganas. Bhumij society is distinguished by its preference for nuclear families, a patrilineal kinship system, the practice of exogamy, and the presence of hereditary village chiefs.

The map of the Purulia district of West Bengal



### **Objectives of the study**

1. To analyse the child health related socioeconomic status of different tribal group in Purulia district of West Bengal
2. To analysis the malnutrition of the children of different tribal groups.

### *Data source*

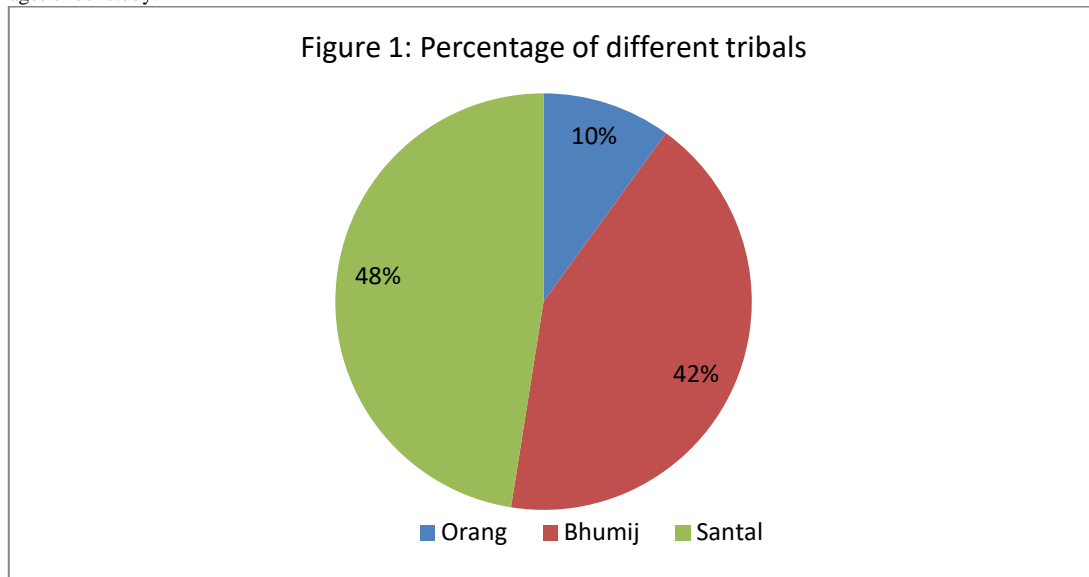
The whole study is based on Primary data which have been collected through field level survey for the analysis of this study. The survey was conducted through door-to-door interview process. The blocks of Purulia District have been selected on the basis of projected tribal population based on Census of India, 2001 tribal population data (Figure-2). From each subdivision two blocks have been selected in our study based on highest projected tribal population with red coloured. We have randomly selected two villages. Again, 15 households from each village have been surveyed. Therefore, total

tribal households were 240. Out of them, three tribal households have been randomly selected from those who have at least one child aged 0-59 months. Since our study based on malnutrition of tribal children in the age of 0-59 months, the total number of children under study was 280. The three tribes under study were Santal, Bhumij and Orawn.

Analysis of the study

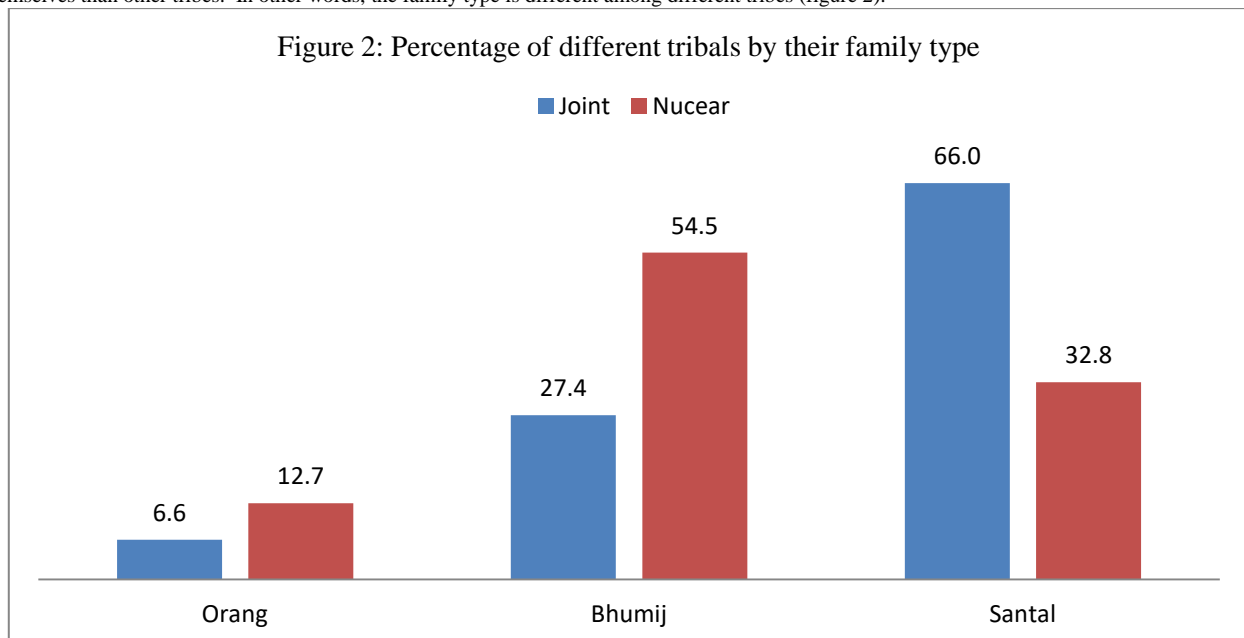
Socioeconomic status of sample tribal household related to malnutrition

Three types of tribes are taken as tribal in our study. They are Santal, Bhumij and Orawn. Out of all tribes in this study, 48 per cent of them are Santal, 42 per cent Bhumij (figure 3). The percentage of Orawn is only 10 per cent. This is due to the fact that we found less number of this tribe in our selected villages under study.



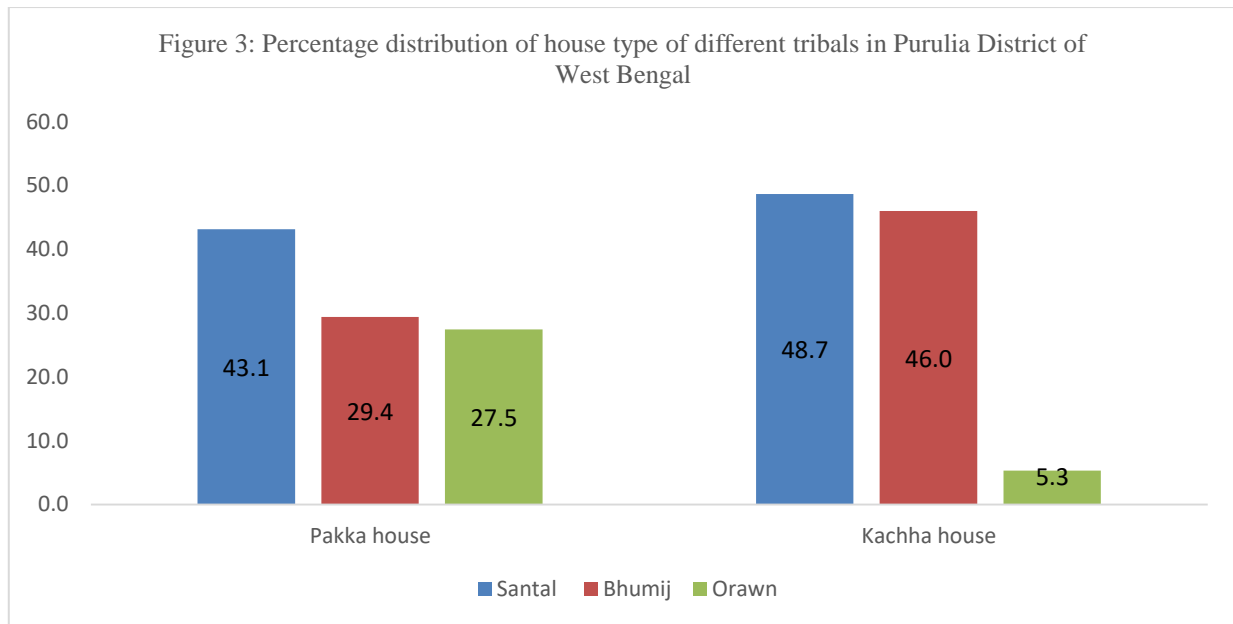
Source: Field survey, 2021-22

Out of three tribes, Santals as tribe have more joint families (66%) than others two tribes which implies that santals are more united from the social point of view. On the other hand Bhumij communities have shown highest nuclear families (54.5%). It indicates that this tribe are more independent themselves than other tribes. In other words, the family type is different among different tribes (figure 2).



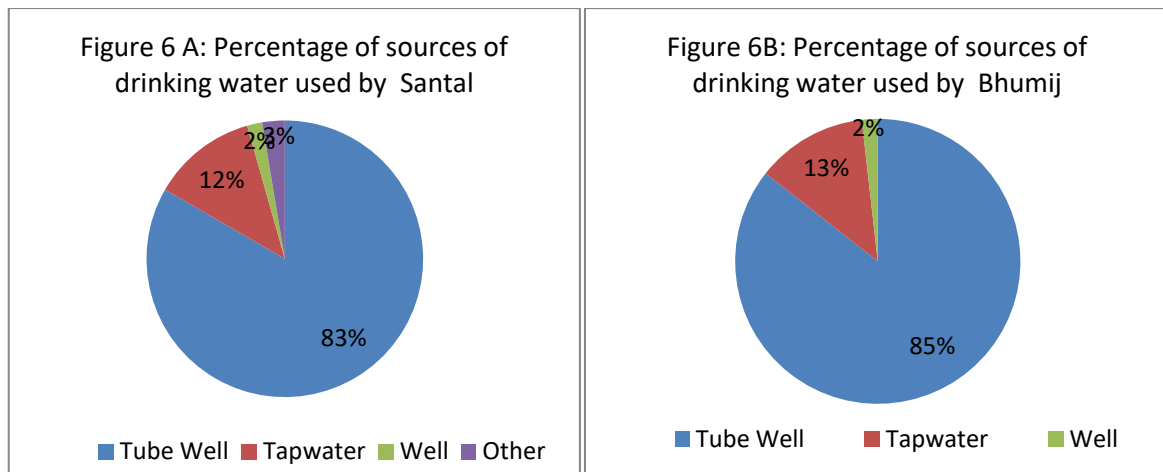
Source: Field survey, 2021-22

Besides the family types of the tribal, the house type is important as it is related to malnutrition of the children. About 49 per cent of santals reside at kachha house followed by Orawn (46%) in Purulia district in West Bengal. However, a large section of santals (43%) reside at pakka house. This implies that the tribes are living both in kachha and pakka houses. This is shown in figure 3.



Source: Field survey, 2021-22

The safe drinking water is required for the children for not affecting malnutrition. Therefore, sources of water are important from the view point of nutrition of the children. We have taken four sources of water in our study, viz., tube well tap water, well and other source of water. Most of the Santal (83%) and Bhumij (85%) tribes are used tube well as their water sources.



Source: Field survey, 2021-22

**Maternal issues related to malnutrition**

We will discuss the maternal issues relating to mothers BMI, marriage age and mothers’ education which also relates to the malnutrition of tribal children.

The study finds that 49.4 per cent of tribal mothers are undernourished with low BMI. Again, overweight (25-29.9) is higher for tribal mothers aged less than 18 compared to other age groups. The BMI status and malnourished children according to tribal groups are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of malnourished children according to their mother’s BMI status

BMI Status	Underweight (Moderate & severe)			Stunting (Moderate & severe)		
	Bhumij	Orawn	Santal	Bhumij	Orawn	Santal
<18.5	54.3	0.0	45.7	47.6	11.9	40.5
18.5-24.9	36.4	7.3	56.4	45.7	17.3	37.0
25-29.9	0.0	25.0	75.0	16.7	16.7	66.7

>30	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
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Source: Field survey, 2021-22

### ***Mother's Education***

In our study we find that 20.3 per cent of tribal mothers are illiterate. Now, we analyse the percentage of malnourished children in terms of stunting, wasting and underweight according to the mothers' education level. The stunting of the tribal children is 54.3 per cent. The study finds that the prevalence of stunting, wasting and underweight are more than 50% for the children of the mothers who are illiterate from different tribal groups in Purulia district. The study finds the same result from the study of Yorke et al. (2023).

### ***Marriage age***

The marriage age, particularly under-age marriage (Black et al., 2008) and the first pregnancy of the mother are important factors in the malnutrition of the children. The first pregnancy of the mother is not before 20 years of age which also creates the many physical and biological problem. This is also true to the fact that poor maternal nutritional status, lack of access to healthcare services were the factors responsible for adolescent pregnancy (Nguyen et al., 2019).

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