

# **GUJJAR BAKARWALS - THE ECO-FRIENDLY TRIBALS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR SINCE CENTURIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to the ecological approach, health represents the adjustment of the human organism to his environment. The man of today is living in a highly complicated environment and his health problem is more complicated as he is becoming more ingenious. But, there are people who with their strong social structure are living in healthy relationship with their environment and are enjoying the transformation of their rich genetic potentialities into phenotypic realities since centuries. They are Gujjar Bakarwal tribals of Jammu and Kashmir.

Here, in this article, the traditionally hard life style of these tribals with reference to their social, physical and Biological environmental factors which make them eco-friendly has been discussed.

## **Introduction**

The quest for health is as old as the history of mankind from the man of the primitive age to the man of today, the wheel of time has taken innumerable turns. The values, patterns and technologies have changed altogether. But even today everytime we are faced with any hardship pertaining to health or life - we turn back to nature to find a suitable answer. And without fail we get a positive response.

The trend of study of disease in man in recent times has shifted to man in the midst of disease. In other words, it is study of man in his environment. The science of mutual relationship between living organism and their environment is

defined as ecology and human ecology is concerned with the broad setting of man in his environment. The basic theme of ecology is that everything is related to everything else. According to the ecological approach the health is a state of dynamic equilibrium or adjustment between man and his environment. The environment is not merely the air, water and soil but also the social and the economic conditions under which men lives. It is the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and the development of an organs, human behaviour or society.

Man by dint of his genius, has altogether changed to his demands and needs which, in turn, has disturbed the

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ecological system altogether. This change in the ecological pattern has made him to face new health challenges in the form of new diseases.

In the present era of satellite medicine which is benefitting only a fraction of the total global population, we still find people with jubilant health without ingesting the multicolored pills and tablets. Where this comes? From air conditioned mansions or from highly nutritious diet-nay, it is not the outcome of these facilities. It is not a miracle also. It is a reality that this class of people are the people with their roots in the culture of the land, wedded with nature and in close bondages with their traditions. This class of people are the Gujjar Bakarwals, the nomadic tribals of Jammu and Kashmir. Climbing and crossing the dales and vales, quenching their thirst from the nectar of virgin lakes and naughty springs, filling their lungs with the most purest of the air, singing songs in ecstatic state of mind living a life of tranquility they lead a complete life-complete in the true sense of the word.

In spite of their hard living conditions, their adjustment with their environment in respect of their social, physical and biological factors has made them the most eco-friendly people of the state since centuries.

### **Social Environmental Factors**

Gujjar Bakarwal tribals entered the territories of Jammu and Kashmir in about 1127 - 1154 AD during the empire of Maharaja Bijay Singh and settled in

the mountains of the state. Their nomadic life has obviously kept them economically and educationally backward. As per the latest data available they comprise 25% - 28% of the total population of the state. As these tribes mainly depend upon the cattle folk for their livelihood selling milk, ghee and butter, they do not build their permanent houses. They prefer to live in the areas having lush green pastures and plenty of water for their cattle. The snow on the mountains during the winter months compels them to travel downwards on the foothills or plains. But no sooner, the summer sets in they reverse their footsteps and again climb high on the mountains. They are very religious and are bound by tribal customs. However their living conditions compell them to lead a very tough life but they break the monotony of their routine life by arranging community gatherings on the happy occasions like marriage ceremonies and anniversaries of their religious saints whose tombs are found in every hilly part of the state. They practise Namaz (Religious prayer) collectively and regularly but Friday prayers are more important. These nomadic tribals are organised in Kabilas (clan) and Deras (units. Each Kabila or Dear has its own leader called Mukaddam.

The most striking trait of these tribals lies in their being nationalist and secular and at the same time most true to their religion. When even today we find it debatable and are at crossroads to build

up a consensus for the equal rights of the female folk in the society. These clans, although possessing no formal university degrees are so elevated mentally and spiritually that they serve the living example of giving practical equality to their women folk in their day to day social life. They have no inhibition for the women going down from the hills to the towns and villages to sell their animal products and make purchase of the goods of the household nature. This way it is a much advanced society with women having same rights as their male counter parts. Gujjar Bakarwal women can be distinguished from the other women folk with their strong and sturdy physical built up with a dignified gait. They wear traditional costumes and jewellery and have a peculiar hair style where hair are dressed in twelve to fifteen braids called Gundani.

Although these tribals can communicate well in Punjabi and Kashmiri language Gojri. The folk songs of gojri especially Baramah, Mayya, Sipayya, Dhol, Chan and Tajo are very popular among the other communities of the state. Vanjali or flute is perhaps the only intimate companion of the lonely herdman grazing his flocks. Lack of education and awareness in these tribals are the root cause of this community being over superstitious. In their day to day life they have the highest regards of their Peers (Religious priests). Phooks (a blow of breath by the peer) is considered to be a panacea for all

diseases of humans and animals. Almost every tribal member wears a Taweez (Talisman) for his/her good health, fortune and prosperity.

The staple diet of these tribals is Maize, butter and butter milk. Hukka, Beedi and Cigarette smoking and use of Naswar (snuff) are common addictions among them. But they are teetotallers. These tribals still practise polygamy and early marriages are very common and taken as a way of life.

The man folk are tall and well built. They wear majestic turbans, colourful waist coats, loose shirts, Tehbunds (unstitched loose cloth tied on the waist covering the whole of the lower portion of the body) and excessively iron nailed pointed leather foot wears. They lead a very harmonious, contented and healthful life away from the cut throat competition of the present era minus the stress related psychological outbursts which are a part and parcel of the present life. Their good faith is proverbial and they are generous people giving their milk in charity in Fridays. They believe in the policy for forgive and forget even when they are badly deceived and cheated. They have a strong faith in the day of judgement where wrong doers are destined to be punished. Never can they be seen begging, designing murders or looting. They earn their living with the dignity of labour. They are, infact, the glory & pride of the state.

### **Physical environmental Factors**

The physical environmental factors

which are a part and parcel of the human existence play an important role in the healthful life of the gujjar - bakarwals. As they live on the hill tops away from any radiation, industrial and vehicular pollution, they breathe the purest of the air devoid of any toxic foreign particles which can be harmful for the human breathing apparatus. They consume the sage and whole-some water which is pleasant, sweet, tasteful and completely free from any poisonous chemical substances. The cold climatic and weather conditions prevent them from a number of biological disease creating agents of the zones.

As reported earlier their staple food is maize. They rarely take rice or wheat. As they depend upon the milking animals (Buffalo, Sheep and Goat) for their livelihood. They have surplus quantity of milk with them and they make a good use of it by processing it in different forms as Curd, Butter, Clarified butter, butter milk etc. Their living conditions being very specific, they in addition to sell these products, themselves make a good use of them for their own also. Rarely can be a gujjar seen wearing a spectacle as they consume lot of milk, ghee and butter. This is also a reason that avitaminosis and anemias are not their diseases.

### **Biological Environmental Factors**

Gujjar Bakarwals rear a large group of sheep and goats for their livelihood and travel to and fro higher up to mountains and lower down to plains according to

seasonal variation. In order to keep a vigil on their herd they have domestic dogs who faithfully serve their masters. In addition they also possess horses and mules for transporting their luggage women folk, children and aged members of the family. Sometimes certain reptiles and wild animals prove harmful for them and their herd also.

Owing to their constant association with animals, cold climate of the hills and other living conditions it becomes somewhat difficult for them to maintain the optimum hygiene with the result they suffer from lice infestation and a variety of skin ailments and allergic disorders.

These tribes make a good use of available plant kingdom at their disposal for their day to day ailments. To name a few kutha (*Saussurea lappa*) Pushkarmula (*Inula racemosa*) Katuki (*Picorrhiza kurroa*) Banafsa (*Viola odorata*) are the important ones. However certain poisonous plants cause harm to them and animals also for which they have their own folk concepts of treatment by using certain antidotes and chanting different hymns from the Holy Koran.

High mountain ranges of J&K are almost isolated from the outside world where these tribes inhabit. Although these tribals fall under high risk group of rabies but the history reveals that these tribals remained unaffected from the contagious and infectious diseases which spread in the state of J & K at different part of time. Even the deadly disease cholera which took a heavy toll

of human life during more than twenty times in the state since 1824, only once spread to the higher mountains in 1910-11 and that too with a very few deaths. The out break of other diseases as Plague, Smallpox, Influenza, Measles etc. in J&K never affected these tribes at the higher mountain ranges although the incidence of different eczemas, sexually transmitted diseases showed a high graph in these tribals.

### Conclusion

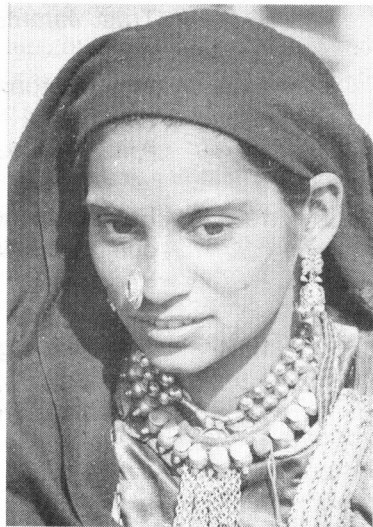
The health is said to be a process of

continuous adjustment to the changing meaning we give to life itself. The Gujjar Bakarwal tribals of J & K inspite of their hard living conditions are the most healthful people in respect of their social, physical, mental and spiritual health. Without indulging in any sort of clash or conflict with their environment since centuries, these tribals are enjoying a jubilant health status owing to their being most eco-friendly.

## REFERENCES

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Gujjar Bakarwal Man and Woman in their traditional Costumes.



सारांश

## गुज्जर बकरवाल- जम्मू कश्मीर की सदयियों से पर्यावरण मित्र जनजाति

- अनिल कुमार एवं नरेश कुमार

पर्यावरण के दृष्टिकोण से मनुष्य का अपनी परिस्थितियों के साथ समायोजन उसके स्वास्थ्य का प्रतिनिधित्व करता है । वर्तमान मानव एक जटिल परिवेश में जी रहा है । उसके अधिक महत्वाकांक्षी हो जाने के फलस्वरूप उसके स्वास्थ्य की समस्या और अधिक जटिल हो गई है । परन्तु कुछ लोग अपने समृद्धसामाजिक ताने-बाने के आधार पर अपने पर्यावरण के साथ मैत्रीपूर्ण सम्बन्धों से रह रहे हैं । इस प्रकार सादियों से उनके जीवन में उनके समृद्ध आनुवंशिक गुणों का वास्तविक रूपान्तरण हो रहा है । यह लोग जम्मू और कश्मीर की गुज्जर बकरवाल जनजाति है । इस जनजाति की पारम्परिक कठिन जीवन शैली का उनके सामाजिक, भौतिक एवं जैविक परिस्थितियों के सन्दर्भ में उल्लेख किया गया है ।