



## Gujjars: Traditional Buffalo Rearers

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Received: 20 April, 2023

Revised: 19 May, 2023

Accepted: 23 May, 2023

### ABSTRACT

The dairy farming plays an important role in the economic development of rural India. More than 70 percent of the rural households still depend on agriculture and livestock sector for their livelihood (FAOSTAT, 2010). The Jammu & Kashmir state is blessed with 8.32 million population (20<sup>th</sup> livestock census). These animals are mainly reared by Gujjars, who own about 11.9 percent of the total population of the state (Census of India, 2011). Gujjar are pastoral ethnic group with population in India, Pakistan and a small number in north eastern Afghanistan. They are numerically third largest community of Jammu and Kashmir after Kashmiri Muslims and Dogras (Bhat, 2018). The population of Gujjars in Jammu district is 3.81% of the total population of the district (Census of India, 2011). The Rajouri district which thickly populated by Gujjar and Bakerwal is representing the highest proportion of the total tribal population of state followed by Poonch, Kargil, Leh and Reasi districts. They are mainly known for the rearing of livestock and is established with the fact that only 0.85% of the population is urbanized and remaining resides in rural areas and thrives on sustainable livestock production (Singh *et al.*, 2017).

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Dairy farming plays an important role in the economic development of rural India. More than 70 percent of the rural households still depend on agriculture and livestock sector for their livelihood
- Gujjar are pastoral ethnic group with population in India, Pakistan and a small number in north eastern Afghanistan.
- Gujjar wear traditional costumes and jewellery and have a peculiar hair style where hair are dressed in twelve to fifteen braids called Gundani.

**Keywords:** Dairy farming, rural, Gujjars, population, tribal

### 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 lead them economically and educationally backward. These tribes mainly depend upon the cattle for their livelihood selling milk, ghee and butter. They prefer to live in the areas having lush green pastures and plenty of water for their cattle. The harsh conditions during the winter months compels them to travel downwards on the foothills or plains. But in the summer, they climb again on the mountains. They are known as the preservers and caretakers of the environment and forests. They are very religious arid are bound by

tribal customs. These nomadic tribals are organised in Kabilas (clan) and Deras (units). Each Kabila or Dear has its own leader called Mukaddam. 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 (Kumar *et al.*, 1998). Although these tribals can communicate well in Punjabi

**How to cite this article:** Kour, S., Sharma, N. and Balaji, N. (2023). Gujjars: Traditional Buffalo Rearers. *J. Anim. Res.*, 13(03): 351-353.

**Source of Support:** None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



and Kashmiri language Gojri. The folk songs of gojri especially Barannah, 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 (Kumar *et al.*, 1998). The staple diet of these tribals is Maize, butter and butter milk. (Singh *et al.*, 2017) 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.

### Migration Pattern of Gujjars

With the onset of summers each year, the Gujjars and Bakkarwals migrate along with their livestock to upper reaches of Himalayas through seven major tribal migration routes. Besides, seven major migratory routes, there are many sub-routes also. All the major routes and sub-routes pass through various mountain passes which are known as Gallis in the local language. Various Dheras (clans comprising of various households) of nomads start their journey from various places like Marhot, Mendhar, Rajouri, Poonch, Surankote, Thanamandi etc. Every year around 20, 000 people migrate to summer pastures and return back after the grazing season is over. (Suri, 2014) Migration in the Jammu usually takes place from three regions: Poonch, Rajouri and Kishtwar regions. The Poonch and Rajouri migration makes for the heaviest route out of the three. All these routes lead to different passes or Gallis in the Pir Panjal ranges. Traditionally, the seasonal migration commences in the first week of April each year and generally the upward movement is completed in the last week of June or the first week of July (Kheraj *et al.*, 2017).

### Traditional Buffalo Rearers

Buffaloes play a crucial role in economy and social status of Gujjars (Singh, 1993). They rear buffaloes for commercial purposes which is prime source of their livelihood. They sustain on sedentary livestock rearing and prefer to possess maximum numbers of buffaloes which could provide commercially viable quantities of milk (Bhat *et al.*, 1984). Livestock is a status symbol for Gujjars as more the number of animals a family owns, more dignified they are considered to be. Further, the major trade activity

elicited by Gujjars is in sale and purchase of buffaloes and their milk. Gujjars have a certain tendency and favoritism for buffaloes as compared to cattle as these animals are hardy in nature, have the capability to withstand stressful conditions and secrete more fat in their milk. Buffalo milk is used by the Gujjars for value addition and they process it to make Ghee, Butter, Curd, Lassi, Paneer, Kaladi and sell the surplus for profit after being self sufficient. The main source of income for the Gujjars is sale of livestock products, especially milk and milk product (Singh *et al.*, 2017). The milk is used for self consumption and value addition along with sale. The value added products are then directly sold to the households and most of the times people approach Gujjar settlements for obtaining milk products like ghee, curd, butter, paneer, kaladi, etc.

There is a huge dependence of these communities on the local flora for their basic needs, as they rear livestock on high pastures, lacking any modern conveniences (Shah *et al.* 2015). Gujjars in the literal practice of Rotational grazing graze their animals in the creation of natural feed bunks of different slopes of pastures separated by the streams or rivulets in the alpine pastures. They leave their cattle to be grazed in the open pastures which graze for around 14 to 16 hours and then they are shifted to a different slope after one week allowing the grasses to regenerate in the previous pastures. Moreover, the management strategy includes inherent decision of matching animal requirements with the pasture ability to supply nutrients. Animals with greater nutrient requirements (i.e. first calf buffaloes) have access to pastures first and graze the greater nutritive value forage. They can be followed by cattle with lower nutrient requirements (i.e. mature buffaloes).

The current level of productivity of buffaloes of Gujjars remains an area of concern as the productivity of their livestock is very low. The lower yield is due to the poor availability of feed and fodder resources in terms of quantity and quality, inferior breed of livestock, poor veterinary facilities and unhygienic conditions (Koundal, 2012). They are still practicing traditional methods of livestock rearing and have no concept of standard management practices on scientific lines viz. heifer management, calf management etc. (Kour *et al.*, 2018). There is poor management and ratio of dry, pregnant and milking animals in their livestock herds and the income they receive from marketing the milk and milk products is mostly spent on feeding of the animals (Anonymous, 2007). The price of milk and feed

are contrary to each other and they find it very difficult, to make the both ends meet. It has considerably affected the economic potential of Gujjars and they are in the same position in which they were hundreds of years before (Anonymous, 2007). The primary source of livelihood of Gujjars was animal husbandry and they were marginalized due to migratory lifestyle, small population and cultural stereotyping (Sudan *et al*, 2007). They take their animals for grazing in the morning and return in the evening. So, major nutritional needs of animals are fulfilled by grazing. This seems to be problem with availability of grazing lands is shrinking day by day. Further, the quality of green fodder changes after every three kilometres resulting in non fulfilment of nutritional needs of the buffaloes. The Gujjars have great faith on their own practices and are reluctant to leave them (Gaur *et al.*, 2010). Further, they don't have any access to newspaper because of their literacy level and less social bonding. Therefore, latest scientific updates on dairy management is not in the reach of this community.

## CONCLUSION

In this backdrop, it is apparent that there is a dire need for the strategies to be planned, to pursue the goal of higher milk production, to improve the productive and reproductive condition of their animals, to uplift the economic condition of this tribal community. It is recommended that stress should be given to enhancing the level of education of *Gujjars* of Jammu and Kashmir, along with providing better opportunities of information sources other than they have, in order to enhance the adoption level of improved animal husbandry practices. Appropriate steps to enhance the overall mass media exposure should form the first step prior to using mass media as an extension tool. Mobile schools, dispensaries and veterinary aid should be provided by the government along their migratory routes. The productivity of their animals can be improved to great extent with the help of nutrition management, as balanced feeding is one of the most important determinant in profit in the livestock farming and it plays a pivotal role for economic milk production to make dairy farming a successful enterprise because feed cost accounts about 75 per cent of milk production in cattle and buffaloes.

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