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Milk Products: An Alternative Route to Boost Tribal Economy: A Case Study of Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu & Kashmir, India

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Abstract:

The pastoral nomadic community of Gujjar and Bakarwals, in India's northern most state of Jammu and Kashmir, is always on the move, from the plains to the mountains in summer and from mountains to plains in winter, along with herds of livestock, which is its mainstay. The vast treasure trove of cows and buffaloes and goats and sheep has always been a critical resource for the tribe, providing them with dairy proteins in their diet, labour and manure for their fields and yes, surplus income through sale of milk and its by-products. Milk available in each house is more than the family requirement but there is no resource of sale to the market. While in plains, getting away with the surplus milk is no big an issue as it gets sold in the nearby towns and cities but while in the higher reaches, the milk from the cattle is in plenty, given the fresh nutritious grass, it gets to eat. Moreover, it isn't too easily feasible for them to either consume all or transport back in their villages and ultimately to the towns and cities, which hold a good market for this white gold. Thus the 'marketable surplus' opens up a window of opportunities to strengthen them economically and boosting the economy of the state. The present investigation is an attempt to throw light on milk products that are far less perishable and are economically equally paying. This study also offers certain suggestions that can streamline the dairy economy of Gujjars and Bakarwals and at the same time ascertain that the milk-potential is tapped properly.

Keywords: Gujjars & Bakarwals, dairy economy, milk products, marketable surplus, J&K, tribe

1. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir is the northern most state of India. It is home to 1, 25, 41302 people belonging to diverse cultures. Of them, Gujjar and Bakarwal, the nomadic tribe, forms more than 20 percent of the total population. They are scattered in all the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir, with highest concentration in Poonch and Rajouri.

Gujjars, who were primarily a nomadic community, now combine the cultivation of land with nomadism. In search of green pastures for their flock, they move to the lower and middle mountain areas like PirPanjal in the summer and retreat back to the plains in the winters. Bakarwals on the other hand, are the goat and sheep herders. They go to the higher reaches of the Himalayas, reaching up to Gurez and spend their winter in plains of Jammu, mainly in *kullas*, temporary huts.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the economic conditions of Gujjar & Bakarwals in J&K
2. To explore their dependence on milk and milk-products for sustenance.
3. To recommend strategies through which the twin-tribes can be economically stronger.

3. Methodology

The research is based on both primary as well as secondary sources. The firsthand knowledge of the researcher is employed, the researcher being a Gujjar herself. Besides, the secondary sources including various government documents, reports, books, research papers in journals, J&K economic surveys, magazines and periodicals have been consulted for the present study. The census 2011 data and data of various NGOs working for tribes, has also been consulted.

3.1. Gujjar and Bakarwals: Reliance on Milk and Relevance of Milk

The pastoral nomadic community of Gujjars and Bakarwals, in India's northern most state of Jammu and Kashmir, is always on the move, from the plains to the mountains in summer and from mountains to plains in winter, along with herds of livestock, which is its main stay.

The vast treasure trove of cows and buffaloes and goats and sheep has always been a critical resource for the tribe, providing them with dairy proteins in their diet, labour and manure for their fields and yes, surplus income through sale of milk and its by-products. While in plains, getting away with the surplus milk is not an issue as it gets sold in the nearby towns and cities but while in the higher reaches, the milk from the cattle is in plenty, given the fresh nutritious grass, it gets to eat. Milk available in each house is more than the family requirement but there was no resource of sale to the market. Moreover, it isn't too easily feasible for them to either consume all or transport back in their villages and ultimately to the towns and cities, which hold a good market for this white gold.

According to a survey conducted by Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation (TRCF) NGO, 66% population of nomad Gujjar-Bakarwals fall below the poverty line. Moreover the community lack basic facilities like proper shelter, health, drinking water, and education. The survey also revealed that more than 71 percent of nomads were not even aware of the upliftment-schemes of the government.

3.2. *The Way Out: A variety of By-products*

Forced by the circumstances, what this tribe does is to convert the milk to useful (and tasty) by-products to avoid wastage of excess milk. The by-products do not rot easily, and thus can be carried back in a feasible manner, and thus sold off.

To start with, the milk is kept at a cooler place in the cool dhoks, the summer meadows of Gujjars and Bakarwals, and then allowed to freeze. Once it converts to curd (*Khatta Dudh*, in local parlance), it is consumed as it is or converted into lassi, the trade-mark drink of the tribe. Conversion of milk into curd happens on its own given cool temperature but in Jammu and other sub-tropical areas, they have to devise other techniques.

The froth during the whirling of *lassi* is collected as butter, which also holds a good selling power. But in due course of time, it begins to smell bad. In that case, this tribe boils up this butter and converts it to ghee, which fetches them good money in the market.

After taking out butter, the *chachh* is consumed as fresh lassi by the tribe themselves. But still it being in plenty, it became apparent for them to devise more ways, so as not to waste a drop of milk, their prized possession.

There are basically two ways of making use of this left out lassi.

1. In case, the lassi is fresh. Milk is boiled, and fresh lassi is added to it at low heat. When this mixture splits, the remnants are collected and made into a chapatti like round thing, *Kalari*. It is then covered with Banbaya leaves. It has been found that the size of *Kalari* is smaller in Jammu, but larger in Poonch and Rajouri, owing to the large size of Banbaya leaves. *Kalari* is to be consumed when fresh. And is sent back to the plains, as a token for nears and dears and not for commercial purposes. The thin liquid that's left behind is used to prepare curry.
2. In case the lassi is not fresh i.e. *khatti lassi*, no milk is added. It is boiled and after splitting, it is collected in a cloth, that is tied tightly, and it comes out as cake-like paneer, locally called *kadaan*. This is consumed as a paneer curry, then as a gift and moreover can be roasted on red hot coal, and relished.

While *Kalari* is seen as a product indigenous to the state, but it is attributed to Kashmiri and Dogri cuisine but they make it for delicacy, contrary to this tribe that makes it because of compulsion, to make use of every drop of milk. Because every drop counts, right?

3.3. *Suggestions*

Now, this is what they have been doing since centuries. But it should be eyed as a booster of local economy.

- The places like Marhote (Surankote), Loran, Mandi, Sawjian, Bufliaz and Pir-ki-Gali hold a great potential of being sale points of *Kalari*. The large scale production can improve the economy of tribe and equally it can satisfy the customers with quality product. Sale-points have come up all along the Bufliaz-Shopian Mughal Road stretch. This can be replicated in other parts of the state.
- There is need to formulate special poverty eradication programme for migratory tribes by the government.
- It also lies on the state to provide them scientifically-proven technologies to preserve the milk-products.
- Community-run mobile vans, can help improve the availability of fresh dairy products.
- The younger lot of Gujjar and Bakarwal population has to be trained on the improved techniques of milching and preservation. To boost economy of the state, this segment of population needs grave attention.
- High Yielding Varieties of milch-animals have to be introduced.
- The government must organize tours to Haryana, Gujarat etc. and interactive workshops for them.
- As the milk of sheep is richer in fats, solids and minerals, it is ideal for making cultured dairy products like cheese.
- A dairy farm, in the pattern of Amul Dairy Gujarat, has to found by the Govt of J&K and if it shows a lukewarm response, the tribe itself can collectively make it function and the day won't be far away when our state would make a name like Gujarat.
- They face stiff competition from outside the state. It lies on the part of the government to promote local products.
- *Curry* of Gujjars and Bakarwals need to be patented. And made a tourist-dish like *Makki-ki-roti*.
- No doubt, there are few dairy units working but they are exploiting the innocent G & B. Credit should be given to the right stakeholders.

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