



Harmony of Tradition: Indigenous Veterinary Medicinal Practice among Bakarwals of Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Across the global spectrum, pastoral groups have time-honored traditions of employing age-old medical techniques to foster the health and welfare of their livestock. This paper focuses on the application of indigenous knowledge and traditional medicinal methods in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. The study delves into the Bakarwal community, experts in shepherding sheep and goats, who navigate diverse terrains in pursuit of ideal grazing spaces. Within the intricate fabric of Bakarwal livelihoods, this paper aims to dissect the complex network of traditional medicinal practices, giving particular attention to veterinary medicine. As this nomadic community traverses from one locale to another, their intimate bond with the land and their herds intertwines with a profound dependence on traditional wisdom and healing practices. The inquiry illuminates the nuanced strategies employed by the Bakarwal community in utilizing indigenous veterinary practices, ensuring the sustained well-being and vigor of their cherished livestock amidst the ever-changing landscapes of Kashmir.

Keywords: *Bakarwal, tradition, indigenous, veterinary, medicine*

Introduction:

Traditional or indigenous knowledge among tribal groups refers to the collective wisdom, skills, practices, and beliefs that have been passed down through generations within a specific community.¹ This knowledge is deeply rooted in the cultural, ecological, and social contexts of the particular tribal group. It encompasses a broad range of fields, including agriculture, medicine, folklore, spirituality, and resource management. In agriculture, for example, indigenous knowledge may involve traditional farming techniques, crop selection based on local conditions, and sustainable land use practices. In medicine, tribal communities often have their own traditional healing methods, which may involve the use of specific plants, rituals, and knowledge about the human body.²

Tribal folklore and oral traditions contribute to the preservation of cultural values, history, and identity.³ Spiritual beliefs and practices are often intertwined with daily life, influencing decision-making, rituals, and ceremonies within the community. Resource management practices are also a crucial aspect of indigenous knowledge among tribal groups. This includes sustainable ways of using natural resources such as forests, water, and wildlife, ensuring the well-being of the community and the environment.

In a broader context, traditional or indigenous knowledge serves as a repository of collective wisdom within a community, embodying the accumulated insights gained over time. It illuminates adaptive strategies devised by communities to harmonize with their environment while preserving a distinct cultural identity. Much like numerous pastoral nomadic groups, the Bakarwal community predominantly draws upon traditional medicinal practices for both their own well-being and that of their livestock. This reliance on longstanding knowledge underscores the resilience and efficacy of age-old practices in navigating the challenges of their dynamic lifestyles and emphasizes the integral role of traditional wisdom in their cultural fabric.

Who are the Bakarwals?

The Bakarwals, a migratory pastoral group situated in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, are thought to trace their origins to the Gujar community, sharing substantial cultural affinities with this broader social group.⁴ Specializing in the herding of sheep and goats, the Bakarwals embrace

¹ Sarkar, Surajit, and Nerupama Y. Modwel, eds. *Oral Traditions, Continuities and Transformations in Northeast India and Beyond*. Taylor & Francis, 2020.

² Natarajan, M., and Santha Govind. "Indigenous agricultural practices among tribal women." (2006).

³ *Oral Traditions, Continuities and Transformations in Northeast India and Beyond*. India, Taylor & Francis, 2020.

⁴ Sharma, Anita, et al. *The Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir: Navigating Through Nomadism*. India, Niyogi Books, 2009. P. 186-87. See also, Gardella, Lorrie Greenhouse. "Origins of social group work: local stories from around the world." *Social Work with Groups* 46.4 (2023): 285-288.

a nomadic way of life, undertaking seasonal migrations to higher altitudes in the warmer months and descending to lower elevations during winter.⁵ Their sustenance centers around the meticulous oversight of their livestock, utilizing easily assembled and disassembled temporary tented dwellings as they traverse landscapes in pursuit of optimal grazing grounds.⁶ This nomadic existence is profoundly woven into their cultural fabric, with traditions intricately linked to the cyclical movements imperative for the welfare of their herds. Nevertheless, contemporary challenges, encompassing alterations in land utilization, climate change and political discord, have introduced threats to their traditional means of living, accentuating the necessity for a delicate equilibrium between modern advancements and the conservation of their distinctive nomadic heritage.⁷

Traditional Health Care:

The Bakarwals exhibit a reliance on customary healing methodologies in the care of their livestock, a practice deeply ingrained within their cultural fabric and transmitted intergenerationally. This traditional approach holds profound significance for maintaining the welfare of their herds amidst the challenges of nomadic life. Leveraging an intricate knowledge of the local flora, the Bakarwals harness the healing properties of indigenous plants through the creation of herbal remedies, addressing a spectrum of ailments commonly encountered during their migratory journeys.⁸ Guided by experienced community members versed in traditional veterinary practices, the Bakarwals employ hands-on techniques to treat injuries and manage prevalent health issues.⁹ Rituals and ceremonies, entailing prayers and chants, serve as integral components in invoking spiritual support for the well-being of their animals.¹⁰ Natural elements, including clays and minerals sourced from the environment, also play a role in their healing repertoire.¹¹ The Bakarwals' methodology manifests as a harmonious fusion of empirical observation, experiential knowledge, and an innate comprehension of the nuanced signs of illness. Despite the availability of modern veterinary practices, the Bakarwals persist in integrating these enduring traditional methods, thereby ensuring the robust health of their livestock amidst the demanding terrains they traverse.

Medicinal Plants and their use for treating Livestock:

Plant species among various tribal communities serve a multifaceted role extending beyond mere fodder or forage utilization. This botanical diversity assumes a significant role in addressing a spectrum of health disorders, especially concerning the well-being of livestock.¹² The tribes, drawing upon an intricate knowledge of local flora accumulated over generations, engage in a nuanced practice of utilizing these plants for both preventive and remedial healthcare.¹³ This includes not only the treatment of livestock ailments but also extends to the well-being of the tribal community itself.¹⁴ The medicinal properties embedded in these plant species are harnessed through traditional healing practices, reflecting an amalgamation of indigenous wisdom and ecological adaptability.¹⁵ This dynamic interplay between the botanical resources and the health practices of the tribes underscores the intricate relationship between culture, environment, and the sustainable utilization of natural resources.¹⁶

Seasonal Migration and the knowledge of medicinal plants:

The migratory movements of the Bakarwal community within the Himalayan alpine regions intricately weave together a tapestry of cultural and ecological dynamics. These nomadic journeys are deeply embedded in the fabric of the Bakarwals' traditional lifestyle, revealing a profound interconnection between the community and the diverse ecology of the Himalayas.¹⁷ Within these alpine landscapes lie extensive reservoirs of medicinal herbs, a botanical wealth

⁵ Dar, Ubaid Ahmad. "Himalayan Pastoralism: A Study On The Livelihood And Mobility Of The Bakarwal Tribe." *Antrocom: Online Journal of Anthropology* 16.1 (2020).

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ahmed, Sharief, Zaffar Iqbal, and Prakash C. Antahal. "Impact of climate change on nomadic herders' livelihoods: Evidence from Bakarwal community in the Western Himalayas in India." *Environmental Development* 48 (2023): 100930.

⁸ Dutta, Abhishek, et al. "Documentation of veterinary practices from Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes of District Poonch, Jammu & Kashmir: A boon for animals from our ancestors." *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* 21 (2021): 1-18. See also, Hassan, Musheerul, et al. "Traditional Use of Wild and Domestic Fauna among Different Ethnic Groups in the Western Himalayas—A Cross Cultural Analysis." *Animals* 12.17 (2022): 2276. And Haq, Shiekh Marifatul, et al. "Quantitative ethnoveterinary study on plant resource utilization by indigenous communities in high-altitude regions." *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 9 (2022): 944046..

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gupta, Pankaj, et al. "Health and folk medicine." *Healing Traditions of the Northwestern Himalayas* (2014): 21-35.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jain, S. K. "Medicinal plant lore of the tribals of Bastar." *Economic Botany* 19 (1965): 236-250.

¹³ Selvaraju, A., et al. "Plants used in ethno-veterinary medicine by malayali tribals in Salem district of Tamil Nadu, India." *Medicinal Plants-International Journal of Phytomedicines and Related Industries* 3.3 (2011): 209-215.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dutta, Abhishek, et al. "Documentation of veterinary practices from Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes of District Poonch, Jammu & Kashmir: A boon for animals from our ancestors." *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* 21 (2021): 1-18.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Beigh, Showkat Yousuf, Irshad A. Nawchoo, and Muhammad Iqbal. "Traditional veterinary medicine among the tribes of Kashmir Himalaya." *Journal of herbs, spices & medicinal plants* 10.4 (2004): 121-127.

that the Bakarwals have cultivated a profound understanding of across generations.¹⁸ This sophisticated knowledge goes beyond simple identification, encompassing the nuanced application of these herbs in the comprehensive care of their livestock. Functioning as custodians of these alpine ecosystems, the Bakarwals utilize their indigenous wisdom to harness the therapeutic potential inherent in the local flora, showcasing a dynamic interplay between ecological adaptability and cultural heritage. This symbiotic association underscores the community's resilience and ingenuity, presenting a compelling narrative for anthropological inquiry into the harmonious coexistence of traditional knowledge, migratory traditions, and the ecological abundance of the Himalayan alpine regions.

Ethno veterinary Wisdom: Livestock Ailments and Traditional Remedies among the Bakarwals of Kashmir;

S. No.	Herb/Plant name (Scientific)	Local name	Part used	Ailments treated	Methods of Use
1.	<i>Allium atropurpureum</i>	Wan pran	Bulb	Anorexia in cattle	Mix plant tissue with yeast and feed to livestock
2.	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i>	Satawar	Roots	Kidney and liver disorders in sheep and goats	Feed to livestock along with the normal feed
3.	<i>Amaranthus caudatus</i>	Ganhar	Seeds	Treats cold and cough among livestock	The seeds are crushed mixed with water and fed to the livestock.
4.	<i>Podophyllum hexandrum</i>	Wan wangun	Fruit	Used to treat eye wound	After roasting the fruit and making a paste of it, is pasted on the eye of the animal.
5.	<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Datur boul	Seeds	Treats joint pain among the sheep	The seeds are grinded and mixed with water to form a paste, which is rubbed over the joints.
6.	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Pangh/bangh	Leaves	Treats intestinal worms and body pains among sheep and goats.	The whole plant is ground and given orally and sometimes powdered leaf balls (peda) are also given treat intestinal worms
7.	<i>Viburnum grandiflorum</i>	Kilmish	Seeds	Used to treat constipation	Seeds are grinded and making into paste and are given orally.
8.	<i>Allium cepa</i>	Payaz	Bulb	Treats snake bite	The bulb is powdered and given orally.
9.	<i>Berberis lyceum</i>	Simblu	Stem, Root.	Treat maggots in wounds and is also used to treat fractures	The stem bark is dried and powdered. This powder is used externally to treat maggots in wounds. Outer bark of the root is dried, powdered and a paste is prepared and applied on wounds in sheep and goats. Root bark powder is also given orally in small doses to treat Fractures

¹⁸ Ibid

10.	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	Lees Hakh/Nunar	Leaves and roots.	Treating scalps, body pains, Fever etc	Leaf extract is mixed with mustard oil and used to massage goats and sheep to reduce dryness and lice. Leaf extract is applied on the body to relieve pain s. The root effective for chronic pain, abdominal pain, and rheumatism.
11.	<i>Pleuropteryrum alpinum</i>	Tsokalandar	Whole plant	Treats Dysentery and gastric disorders in livestock	The whole plant is crushed and juice is extracted which is given orally.
12.	<i>Viburnum foetans</i>	Kulmanch	Leaves	Fatigue and laziness among sheep	The leaves are fed to sheep and goats.
13.	<i>Nepeta cateria</i>	Gand soi	leaves	Dysentery in goats and sheep.	The leaves are boiled in water and a decoction is prepared to feed the livestock orally.

Conclusion:

Undoubtedly, the Bakarwals have endured a history marked by socio-economic and political marginalization, yet their invaluable contributions to Kashmir's culture, history, and knowledge domain remain indisputable. While their political and administrative representation may be limited, their cultural and traditional heritage stands as a reservoir of untapped wisdom, insufficiently documented. There arises a pressing imperative to safeguard and scrutinize the traditional practices that the Bakarwal community has meticulously preserved over generations. Far from adhering to a static tradition, they embody pioneers of a robust knowledge system deserving acknowledgment and due credit. This underscores the need for a comprehensive preservation effort to ensure the continuity of their rich cultural legacy and the profound traditional knowledge they possess, particularly in the realm of ethnoveterinary practices for the welfare of their livestock.

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