

Chapter 1

Maharashtra

Khandesh Region-

Dhule and Jalgaon districts make up the Khandesh region of Maharashtra. Khandesh is bounded on the west by Gujarat, in the east by the Vidarbha part of Maharashtra, in the south by Nashik district and the Marathwada part of Maharashtra and in the north by Madhya Pradesh. The Tapi Basin lies in the north-west of Dhule district now comprising Shahada, Talode and Nandurbar talukas (blocks). It forms a distinct topographical unit, delimited from neighbouring state, Madhya Pradesh by Satpura mountain and from the south by Satmala hilly ranges. An arc of Sahyadris or Western Ghats stretches in the easterly direction. Dhule and Jalgaon districts make up the Khandesh region. Tapi River passes through it with black soil and fertile plains along its bank. The region comprises of Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgaon districts. Previously, Khandesh was divided into two districts namely, West Khandesh and East Khandesh and were then renamed after the district headquarters as Dhule (Dhulia) and Jalgaon districts, which have been carved presently into Dhule and Nandurbar districts. Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgaon districts comprises of four, six and thirteen administrative blocks respectively.

Khandesh



Map of Khandesh Region

Predominantly an agricultural region the main crops in Khandesh are cereals, millets and pulses. Cotton, sugarcane, vegetables, edible fruit yielders and spices are grown. The region harbours fairly rich flora. Few plant-based industries for oil, cotton (fibre), starch, sugar, pulses, timber, etc. are running well in the region. Staple food is derived from sorghum (jowar), pearl millet (bajra), wheat, maize, rice and some pulses like black gram, horse gram, mung bean (green gram), pigeon pea (arhar dal) etc. Maize and rice are common crops in tribal region. Sugarcane, Banana and Cotton are major cash crops in Khandesh. The region is fairly rich in its biodiversity, bio-resources and culture or ethnicity. The adivasis have to rely upon natural resources in their vicinity. They still inhabit in hilly forested areas and have symbiotic relationship with the nature.

Predominantly agrarian region of Maharashtra but animal husbandry is the branch of agriculture concerned with animals that are raised for meat, fibre, milk, eggs, or other products. It includes day-to-day care, selective breeding and the raising of livestock. Although, agriculture is the mainstay of livelihood for many of the communities, especially adivasis partially depend upon bio-resources from wild vegetation in the hilly parts of Khandesh.

Adivasis living in Khandesh region

The major adivasi community living in Khandesh region are Bhil, Bhil Garasia, Banjara, Pawara, Gamit, Gamta, Gavit, Kokna, Kokni, Kukna, Koli Dhor, Tokre Koli, Pardhi and Advichincher. Majority of the adivasis reside in hilly forest areas of Satpura mountain and extended ranges of Sahyadris (offshoots of Western Ghats). Very few among the Bhils and Banjara have migrated and settled in the plains. Each tribe has its own language, customs, rites, ceremonies, rituals and beliefs. Dhule and Jalgaon districts have approximately 20% adivasi population each, whereas Nandurbar district has nearly 61% adivasi population.

However, the Bhils, who form the largest part of the population of the north-west basin, are believed to be a group of tribes occupying the whole area of the Satpudas and its northern parts. The Bhil have been pressed southwards so that they occupy the large forest belt starting from the Thane district in the west to the western parts of the Vindhya Mountains.

Adivasis are concentrated Sakri and Shirpur blocks in Dhule district, Nawapur, Nandurbar, Akkalkuwa, Dhadgaon, Taloda and Shahade blocks of Nandurbar district and Chopda, Yawal and Raver blocks of Jalgaon district. Adivasis usually have small landholdings and they are compelled to rely on forest and agroforestry. Most of them reside in hamlets or small villages. Generally,

adivasis maintain homestead gardens inclusive of cultivated and wild plant species, besides few domesticated animals.

Bhils and Pawraadivasis

According to folk linguistic perspective, the relatively numerically smaller Pawraadivasi assert their ethnic distinctness from the Bhil adivasis as well as their superiority over the Bhils in terms of social practices, personal hygiene and aspirations in the resettled regions as it's equally acknowledged by the Bhils. A close reading of the historical documentation of the tribes in the Satpuda region at the borders of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh confirms that, despite the linguistic unity of the two tribes described by the umbrella term "Bhili" in most of the available records, the Pawras have asserted their ethnic distinctness for centuries (British Gazette of the Bombay Presidency 1882 re-published in 1980, Thompson 1895; Grierson 1907; Enthoven 1892, 2nd edition 1992).