

livelihoods

today and tomorrow

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‘Kshetram’

Shekhawati Region

Being in desert is hard! People inhabiting Thar Desert of Rajasthan are considered to be brave, sacrificing and hardworking people. Shekhawati region is located in Thar Desert of Rajasthan, having a special importance in history of India. The region is a semi-arid historical region located in north-east part of Rajasthan, India. It comprises of districts i.e., Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Churu and parts of Nagaur and Jaipur. Shekhawati region covers an area of 13784 square kilometers. The region is famously known as “open art-gallery” of Rajasthan, having the largest number of frescos in the world. The region is dominated by Marwari communities in cities; and farming communities in rural areas. The region is gateway to Thar Desert! Shekhawati region has a harsh and extreme climate.



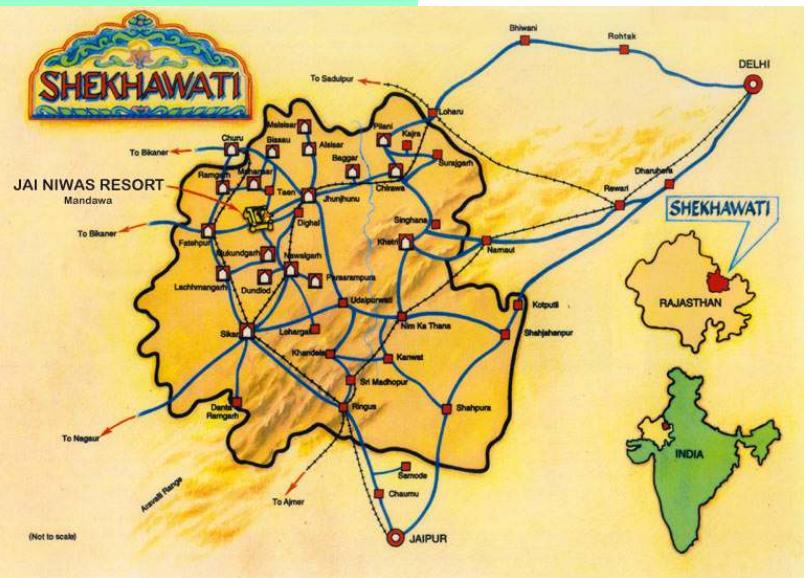
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The region is dominated by Marwari communities in cities; and farming communities in rural areas. The region is gateway to Thar Desert! Shekhawati region has a harsh and extreme climate. Local populations inhabiting the region over centuries have adapted to the climate and have developed various coping mechanisms to carry on with their livelihoods.

Jhunjhunu district, an old and a historical town, is located 180 km from Jaipur. It has its administrative headquarters in Jhunjhunu district itself. The district is famous for frescos and grand havelis. Sikar district is located midway between Agra and Bikaner, NH No. 11. The administrative headquarters are located in the district itself. This district too is a historical city and is home to Mughal-era architecture. Churu district is the gateway to Thar Desert of Rajasthan. The city is located in the desert region itself with the administrative headquarters located in Churu itself. Sikar district is situated in eastern part of Rajasthan and is located at 27.62°N 75.15°E; with an average elevation of 427 meters, whereas Churu is located at 28.30°N 74.95°E has an average elevation of 292 m (958 ft.).

Jhunjhunu district covers a geographic area of 5928 Km², comprising of 6 tehsils, 8 blocks, having 1063 villages; of them, 867 are inhabited and 2 are uninhabited. The district has hilly areas in south-eastern part. Undulating areas with isolated hills occur in south western part and desert plains in the northern part. Sikar district covers a geographic area of 7732 Km², comprising of 6 tehsils, 8 blocks, 1017 villages; 1004 are inhabited and 13 are uninhabited. The district has hilly regions in the east, undulation in the center with hillocks & desertic plains in the west. Churu district has an area of approximately 16,830 Km², with a road length of 1901 km. The district comprises of 7 tehsils and is covered with sand dunes.

A peculiar feature of this desert demography is that it is scattered! On the demographic front, as per Census 2011, Jhunjhunu has a population of 118,474 and has a male to female ratio of 950/1000. Children falling in the age bracket of 0 to 6 years are numbered at 16,710. Sikar district has a population of about 237,579, of which male and female are 123156 and 114423 respectively. The sex ratio of Sikar city is 929 per 1000 males. Total children between 0-6 age group in Sikar city are 32189 as per figure from Census India report on 2011. There were 17236 boys while 14953 were girls. Child sex ratio of girls is 868 per 1000 boys. Population in Churu is 119,846, female 940 per 1000 males, of which male and female are 61,771 and 58,075 respectively. Churu's urban / metropolitan population is 120,147 of which 61,936 are males and 58,211 are females. Under 0-6 years of age, Churu district has 17% of the population.



Shekhawati region has the highest literacy rate in the state. Jhunjhunu district has a literacy rate of 73.58%, whereas in Sikar it is 77.13 and total literates are 158413 of which 91403 are males and 67010 are females. In Churu district, average literacy rate is 62%, higher than the national average of 59.5%; male literacy is 72%, female literacy is 51%. On the transportation front, all the three districts are well-connected by road, rail and air.

Climatic conditions in Shekawati region are hot, harsh and extreme. The summer months brings hot waves of air called loo. Monsoon months are between June & September. Temperatures remain relatively high throughout the year. During summer months, the temperatures touch close to 50°C, with little to no humidity. Sikar district experiences several cold fronts that lead to temperatures below freezing to -3°C. Monsoons are frequent, with heavy rains and thunderstorms. Churu district touches freezing point in winters. Temperatures during summer noons are over 55°C. The district experiences great variation in minimum & maximum temperature. Annual rainfall in the region is between 450 to 600 mm.

Soil types in the region vary in Jhunjhunu district, the major soils are desertic, sand dunes, red desertic, lithosols, regosols, older alluvium. In Sikar district, the soils are desertic, red desertic, serozems, saline, lithosols, regosols and old alluvium. Major drainages in the region include the non-perennial river Kantli in Jhunjhunu district; the other streams are Dohan, Chanderwati, Budhi, Nala, Sukhnadi. In Sikar region, Mendha, Kantli, Dohan, Krishnawati & Sabi streams flow. The water table is as deep as 200 feet and in a few places, groundwater is hard and salty and local populations in the region depend on rainwater harvesting. The rainwater, harvested during the months of July & August, is stored in pucca tanks and used throughout the year for drinking purposes. Step wells, locally known as Bawadis, are synonymous with the region. Forest area in Jhunjhunu district is 395.27 sq km; Sikar district has forest coverage of 703.79 sq km.

Flora and Fauna of the region are largely endemic to the region. The ecosystem is diversified, as the vegetation, human culture and animal life is very rich. The region has about 23 species of lizards and 25 species of snakes which are endemic to the region. It is home to black buck, chinkara, Indian wild ass, red fox and caracal; but these wildlife species are fast vanishing. There are 141 species of migratory and resident birds in the region such as eagles, harriers, falcons, buzzards, kestrel, vultures, short-toed eagles, tawny eagles, greater spotted eagles, laggar falcons, reptiles and kestrels. Indian peafowl is found in abundance in the region. Fauna includes North-Western thorn scrub forest. The fauna occurs in small

- Trees and Shrubs: *Acacia jacquemontii*, *Balanites roxburghii*, *Ziziphus zizyphus*, *Ziziphus nummularia*, *Calotropis procera*, *Suaeda fruticosa*, *Crotalaria burhia*, *Aerva javanica*, *Clerodendrum multiflorum*, *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, *Lycium barbarum*, *Grewia tenax*, *Commiphora mukul*, *Euphorbia nerifolia*, *Cordia sinensis*, *Maytenus emarginata*, *Capparis decidua*, *Mimosa hamata*
- Herbs and Grasses: *Ochthochloa compressa*, *Dactyloctenium scindicum*, *Cenchrus biflorus*, *Cenchrus setigerus*, *Lasiurus scindicus*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Panicum turgidum*, *Panicum antidotale*, *Dichanthium annulatum*, *Sporobolus marginatus*, *Saccharum spontaneum*, *Cenchrus ciliaris*, *Desmostachya bipinnata*, *Eragrostis* species, *Ergamopagan* species, *Phragmites* species, *Tribulus terrestris*, *Typha* species, *Sorghum halepense*, *Citrullus colocynthis*

The endemic floral species include *Calligonum polygonoides*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Acacia nilotica*, *Tamarix aphylla*, *Cenchrus biflorus*.

clumps scattered more or less openly. Density of fauna and size of patches increase from west to east, following increase in rainfall. Various types of trees, shrubs and herbs are found in the region. Churu district has Tal Chhapar sanctuary, known for blackbucks and is home to a variety of birds.

Shekhawati is the dialect spoken in the region. The predominant farmer communities in rural areas inhabiting the region are Jats, who comprise the largest single caste in the state. The other caste groups are Rajputs, Gujjars, Ahirs and Dalits. Agriculture activity in the region is spread over in both kharif and rabi seasons. Kharif cultivation is rain-fed and rabi cultivation is mostly based on groundwater. The different types of crops grown in Jhunjhunu district are bajra, wheat, mustard, barley, jawar and maize. Irrigation methods used are dug-wells, tank wells, borewells, tanks, ponds and canals. In Sikar district, vegetables, oil seeds, bajra, wheat, barley, pulses, condiments and spices are cultivated. Major crops cultivated in Churu district are bajra, pulses, rapeseed, mustard and gram.

Economy as well livelihoods in Shekhawati region are highly varied. They are agriculture, agriculture labour, mining, quarrying, livestock, household industry, construction, trade, commerce, transport and storage. In Jhunjhunu, livelihoods are mainly based on business and trading. The district has a cluster of stone crushing units and provides employment to 500 workers while indirectly benefiting more than 7000 people. The textile product Bundi Bandej is produced in Mandawa town, and engages around 77 artisans mainly belonging to SC/ST & minorities category. The artisans are spread across nearly 20 villages. A type of footwear famous here called juties are a leather product made with traditional art and machinery. There are around 350 artisans working in this sector belonging to SC category, spread across 3-5 villages. Khetri tehsil in the district is famous for mining i.e., Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) is located in the town; it is one of the largest copper mines in India. Animal Husbandry is another key livelihood activity in the region. In Sikar district, one of the semi desert districts of Rajasthan, agriculture and animal husbandry are the main occupations. According to census 2011, 49.81 percent cultivators, 8.73 percent agriculture labours. Around 2.26 percent engaged in household industry and 39.20 percent engaged in other works. In Churu district, due to extreme climatic conditions, the scope of agriculture is very low. Women are engaged in embroidery and number around two lakh. Animal husbandry is another important and main source of income. Milk production, sheep rearing for wool, subsistence farming are the primary economic activity in the area. Churu district also has a few small-scale industries such as granite slabs, tiles, cutting, polishing, mustard seed crushing, and the local populations are engaged in these small-scale industries. The region has a few pockets in Thar which are perpetually drought prone, and where conditions make the living in desert hard. With poor infrastructure facilities, rural population's lives continue to be largely pastoral in nature, dependent on animal husbandry activities and localized production of handicrafts. With MGNREGS and other government initiated schemes, there has been marginal improvement in lives of populations living in Shekhawati region. ♦