

Craft by Thatheras in Jandiala Guru- Amritsar

"The crafts village of Jandiala Guru is situated on the North-Western Railway in the Amritsar District of East Punjab. The effort of the community to stick to their tradition of keeping the intangible Culture Heritage alive has been recognized by UNESCO. History states that Charat Singh, the grandfather of the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh, invaded Jandiala to punish Niranjania Guru for having submitted to Ahmad Shah Abdali. Later under the colonial rule, in 1867, the municipality was created and Jandiala was made a constituent of the Amritsar Tehsil.



Jandiala Guru is well-known for its traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making by the Thathera community, which has been included in the UNSECO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.



The history of the Thatheras can be traced back to over 200 years. According to the District Gazetteer of 1883, the craftsmen colony was established during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who encouraged skilled metal workers from Kashmir, primarily Muslims, to settle in his kingdom. Jandiala Guru became a bustling mandi for brass and copper utensils. Another such mandi was in Kujranwala, now in Pakistan. The two towns had trade links between the artisan communities. In 1947, during the Partition of India, the metal workers' community of Kujranwala, primarily Hindus and Sikhs, crossed the border and settled in Jandiala Guru, while the Muslim craftsmen migrated to Pakistan. Jandiala was surrounded by a mud wall and had seven gates, ramparts of a few of which can be seen even now.



Till date, Jandiala Guru remains a crafts village. In fact, the element “Jandiala Guru de Thathere” is also included in the inventories of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA).



The Thatheras' craft represents the traditional art of making brass and copper products in Punjab. The technique itself, along with mud-brick kiln, traditional implements, specific type of wood chips, and the specialised process of hammering the wooden sheets, constitutes the traditional skills and knowledge systems of the community.

The products made by the Thatheras are usually not found in modern markets, and are considered to be highly beneficial for health.

Despite the UNESCO listing, the craft form is on the brink of extinction and there are no Thatheras willing to take it forward. From 400 families who used to practice this craft, the number has dwindled to a meagre 15. The growth of steel and aluminium industries has only added to the agony of the community, whose future looks nothing but dark.

The Government of Punjab, along with various organisations such as Enactus Shri Ram College of Commerce, are working actively towards the revival of this art form.

Jandiala Guru, despite being renowned for this beautiful craft form, also celebrates religious diversity. Shrines for Sikh, Hindi, Jain and Muslim deities can be seen around the town. Gurudwara of Baba Handal (Baba Handal Tap Asthan) sees pilgrims from across Punjab. "



“SAU SUNIYAR DI, EK THATHIAR DI”

As you walk the narrow streets of Jandiala, you are welcomed by the 'thak thak' sound of hammering of utensils by men desperately trying to hold on to their craft long forgotten. Called the Thathiars, these men hammer brass, copper and associated metals to make beautiful products such as clocks, kettles, vases etc to name a few, that were previously used by people for all household activities and for decor. The flames of fire have dimmed their eyesight; their hands show the enormous effort that is put in a single curve or a minute hole. As this craft form falls in the trap of discontented demand and poverty, we aim to create a brand for the promotion of this dying craft semblance.

PTAL, Punjab Thathera Art Legacy, is an entity that works for the rejuvenation of the craft form of hammering brass to make utensils. It is the only craft form of India to be inscribed in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Despite this great feat, the craft form is on the verge of extinction and the number of thatheras has reduced from 500 to mere 30. Thatheras, having lost the ability to listen, sit back saddened as the culture of their past fades away into a future that looks nothing but gloomy, dark and full of debt.

In spite of the fact that products are fully handmade and customisable, available in lots of designs and aesthetically appealing, these products still face the problem of low acceptance.

Not only does brass have historic value but various health benefits are accrued to it. They are key to healthy living in today's life of constant running and ignorance.

To see the traditional and contemporary products by the Thatheras, visit p-tal.org "

