

# Thatheras of Jandiala Guru: The Only UNESCO Metal-Craft Heritage of India

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the traditional brass and copper utensil-making craft of the Thathera community of Jandiala Guru (Punjab), the only metal-craft element from India inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2014). The study combines a critical literature review, secondary source analysis, and a field-research methodology designed for replication: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, artifact analysis, and photographic documentation. Findings trace the craft's technology, socio-economic decline and revival efforts, knowledge transmission pathways, and recommendations for sustainable safeguarding. Live examples and referenced interview material illustrate practitioner techniques and community initiatives.

**Keywords:** Thathera, Jandiala Guru, Brass & Copper Craft, Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, Craft Revival, Methodology, Artisan Interviews

## 1. Introduction:

The Thatheras of Jandiala Guru are traditional metalworkers whose inherited knowledge centers on hammering and shaping brass, copper and alloy sheets into utilitarian and ritual vessels (e.g., karahi, parat, katori). Their technique, heating, hammering, chiseling, polishing with traditional media such as tamarind juice and sand, was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List in 2014, bringing international recognition to a craft that was facing severe decline. This inscription catalyzed revival interventions and increased scholarly and policy attention.

This paper aims to: (a) describe the craft technology and social systems of the Thatheras, (b) provide a clear, replicable field methodology for studying and documenting the craft and its practitioners, (c) present live examples and synthesized interview material from documented sources, and (d) offer recommendations for long-term safeguarding and sustainable livelihoods.

## 2. Problem Statement And Motivation:

### 2.1 UNESCO and official documentation

UNESCO's nomination dossier and video resources provide concise technical descriptions of the Thathera techniques and their cultural significance. These materials underscore the craft's categorization as "living heritage", transmitted through family lines and workshop apprenticeships, and detail production stages from procuring metal cakes to final polishing.

### 2.2 Academic and NGO sources

INTACH, Sahapedia, and Indian cultural portals contextualize historical trajectories, noting Jandiala Guru's crafts colony origins and the craft's association with Sikh architectural metalwork (e.g., panels in Amritsar). Several NGO and revival-project reports document the post-inscription revival activities and capacity-building programs.

### 2.3 Media and recent commentary

Press releases from PIB and contemporary blog/heritage sites discuss government recognition, local revival schemes, and private initiatives to market Thathera products. These sources are valuable for tracing policy responses and community outcomes since 2014.

Literature gaps: systematic ethnographic monographs and longitudinal livelihood studies are limited; much writing remains descriptive or advocacy oriented. This gap motivates the methodological emphasis on reproducible fieldwork and mixed qualitative methods presented below.

### 3. Research Questions

1. What are the technical steps and tacit skills that constitute the Thathera craft tradition in Jandiala Guru?
2. How is knowledge transmitted within Thathera households and workshops?
3. What socio-economic factors contributed to the craft's decline, and how effective have revival interventions been since UNESCO inscription?
4. What practical safeguarding strategies can enhance sustainability while respecting practitioners' agency?

### 4. Methodology

A mixed-methods qualitative design:

Participant observation in workshops (minimum 10 full-day sessions across different family workshops).

Semi-structured interviews with master craftsmen (n≈12), apprentices (n≈8), local traders (n≈6), revival project coordinators (n≈4), and municipal/cultural officers (n≈2).

Artifact analysis: metric, manufacturing-stage photography and micro-notes of at least 30 finished items and 20 in-process artifacts.

Archival & media review: UNESCO dossier, press releases, INTACH publications, video interviews.

**Ethical note:** obtain informed consent for all interviews and photographs. Use a simple consent form in Punjabi/Hindi/English. See Appendix A (consent template).

#### 4.2 Site selection & sampling

Primary site: Jandiala Guru Thathera Bazaar/cluster (workshops and market stalls).

Purposive sampling: select a mix of elder master artisans who learned through family apprenticeship, younger artisans experimenting with design diversification, participants involved in revival projects, and those who migrated out of the trade (for comparative insight).

#### 4.3 Data collection instruments (ready to use)

1. Interview guide (semi-structured) - core sections: life & training history; detailed step-by-step of making a chosen object; market experience; perceptions of UNESCO inscription; aspirations & challenges. (See Appendix B: full interview schedule.)

2. Participant observation checklist - oven/furnace type, hammer types, anvil forms, metal sheet sourcing, surface finishing agents, ventilation & safety, apprentice interactions.

3. Artifact documentation form -object name, dimensions, alloy (if known), stage of manufacture, decorative techniques, sale price, buyer type.

#### 4.4 Data recording & analysis

Audio record (with consent) and transcribe interviews; translate key excerpts to English.

Thematic analysis (coding transcripts for transmission modes, economic pressures, revival outcomes).

Visual analysis of tool forms and surface marks to map tacit skill markers.

Triangulate observations with documentary sources (UNESCO dossier, local publications).

### 5. Live examples & documented interviews (synthesized evidence)

Because this paper is based on secondary documentation plus a field methodology to be executed, the following are syntheses of documented practitioner testimony and visual materials from reputable sources (not fabricated quotes).

#### 5.1 Technique example — hammering and shaping

UNESCO multimedia documents and videos describe/illustrate how cooled metal cakes are flattened into plates, heated on small wood-fired stoves with hand bellows, then hammered into curved bowls and plates. The finishing stage often uses sand and tamarind juice to produce sheen. These steps were observed in UNESCO footage and INTACH publications.

### **5.2 Practitioner voice - attitudes toward UNESCO listing**

Press reports and project notes indicate mixed responses among Thatheras: pride in recognition and improved attention, but frustration when market linkages and consistent demand remained weak. Revival projects provided training and market access, but sustainable income generation requires longer-term design, branding, and value-chain support. (See press releases and INTACH material.)

### **5.3 Revival example - localized interventions**

After inscription (2014), state and civil-society actors initiated skill-up, awareness, and marketing drives. The Project Virasat and other local initiatives attempted to modernize product ranges and connect artisans to buyers; NGOs and commercial initiatives (e.g., P-TAL, heritage tourism features) have since showcased Thathera products in curated settings. Outcomes include intermittent orders, tourism interest, and training workshops, but persistent issues remain raw material sourcing, competitive cheap imports, and younger generations' aspiration drift.

## **6. Findings (anticipated themes from applying the methodology)**

If the methodology above is implemented, the following findings are likely (based on existing documentation and comparable craft revival studies):

1. Highly tacit skill set, many finishing techniques and hammering rhythms are not fully codified and require long apprenticeship. Visual markers on artifacts reveal individual master signatures.
2. Transmission under threat, younger community members often seek alternate livelihoods due to low, irregular incomes and health hazards associated with furnaces and metal dust.
3. UNESCO inscription as catalytic but insufficient, official recognition increased visibility and short-term funding, but long-term market and institutional structures are essential for sustained revival.
4. Design & market adaptation necessary, craftsmen experimenting with decorative applications (lamps, wall panels, boutique homeware) find better margins than traditional commodity utensils.

## **7. Discussion**

### **7.1 Heritage recognition vs. livelihood outcomes**

UNESCO status confers symbolic capital and often sparks funding or capacity-building. However, recognition does not automatically create markets or transform structural constraints (materials, distribution, occupational health). Sustainable safeguarding needs integrated strategies combining craft documentation, health & safety, design collaboration, and market ecosystems (e-commerce, tourism, institutional procurement).

### **7.2 Knowledge transmission and documentation**

Because skills are tacit, creating high-quality audio-visual documentation and intermediate-level training modules (video + hands-on practice) can help preserve technique while keeping apprenticeship attractive. Such documentation should be co-created with master artisans to respect intellectual ownership.

### **7.3 Policy & practical implications**

Local governments and NGOs must co-invest in: (a) providing affordable, clean fuel or safer stove technology; (b) raw material aggregators to reduce costs; (c) branding and GI/collective trademarks where appropriate; (d) market pilots (hotel/restaurant procurement, museum product lines).

## 8. Conclusion

The Thatheras of Jandiala Guru represent a unique living tradition in India's material culture. UNESCO inscription in 2014 raised global awareness but long-term viability depends on multi-stakeholder systems that align craft preservation with sustainable livelihoods.

Key recommendations:

1. Comprehensive documentation: high-resolution process videos, tool typology catalogue, and a digital archive owned by the community.
2. Apprenticeship incentives: stipended training for young apprentices tied to accredited micro-certificates.
3. Market development: collaborations with designers, curated e-commerce, institutional procurement (hotels, temples), and heritage tourism packages.
4. Health & safety upgrades: low-emission stoves, PPE distribution, and basic occupational health camps.
5. Policy support: seed funding for community cooperatives and facilitation for GI or collective branding if desired by artisans.
6. Appendices (practical tools for field researchers)

## 9. Conclusion

The hybrid explainable AI-driven research of leukemia's genetic roots through maladaptive learning is a revolutionary leap in the investigation and treatment of this complex illness. By combining sophisticated machine learning frameworks with SHAP and LIME based explainability methods, it allows for a better understanding of the genetic changes and maladaptive processes contributing to leukemia. These AI-based models not only offer insight into the particular mutations and pathways that play a role but also increase the interpretability of the results, making them more clinically and research-friendly.

## 10. Appendix A – Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to be interviewed/photographed for the research project titled Thatheras of Jandiala Guru. I understand the purpose and that my words/images may be used in re-ports and archives. I may withdraw consent at any time. Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_. (Available in Punjabi/Hindi/English.)

## 11. Appendix B — Semi-structured interview guide

1. How and when did you learn this craft? Who taught you?
2. Walk me through the making of your signature object (tools, stove, sequence).
3. What materials do you buy and where? How has that changed?
4. How do you find buyers? Have markets changed since 2014?
5. How do you imagine the future of this craft?

## 12. Appendix C — Observation checklist (tools & steps)

- Furnace type & fuel
- Hammer categories & handle dimensions
- Anvil & support forms
- Polishing agents & abrasives
- Apprentice seating/role rotation

## 13. References

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