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Copper Bells of Nirona, Kutchh, Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

Metal bells, also known as "Ghantadi," are one such craft that has its roots in cattle rearing and is popular in Kutchh, Gujarat. The craft is thought to be over a thousand years old, started in Sindh, (now in Pakistan). These bell were originally made in Zura, but over time, other places, like Nirona and Bhuj, also adopted this craft. In order for the owner to be aware of their whereabouts, they were fastened around the neck of the cattle. Tradition has it that the bells fend off witchcraft and evil spirits. In Kutch and Saurashtra, the pastoral communities, black is the color of authority, and black yarn is used to wrap bells around the necks of livestock. They are tuned to an instrument called 'Ekal'.

Keywords: Copper Bell, Nirona, Jhumar, Livestock, Pastoral Communities.

INTRODUCTION

It requires a great deal of skill and the sensitive use of both touch and sound. The sound that the bell produces is determined by its size, shape, and wooden tongue. Bells come in thirteen different sizes and are made specifically for various animals. A small, high-pitched bell would be found on a goat, but a larger, deeper bell would be found on a cow. The metal bell was initially used to identify cattle. The herdsmen could identify which animal of his flock it is and where it has wandered off from based on the distinctive sound of the bell fastened around its neck. The bell's loud, resonant sound is claimed to both warn the herder to the whereabouts of troubled animals and to soothe them.

These bells are still used today for ornamentation. Metal bells embellish the interiors and entranceways. Additionally, they are utilized as holiday décor and to make wind chimes by combining them with metal frames.

HISTORY

The art of creating metal bells is thought to have been practiced for more than a thousand years and is thought to have started in Sindh, which is today in Pakistan. The pastoral nomad tribes of Sindh region patronized it. These bells were used to ornament the livestock as they traveled while herding them. Each animal has a bell around its neck that made a different sound. This was both attractive and useful for locating the stray animals. These bells are made by members of the Lohar caste in Kutch, and some of them claim that their family have been producing bells. Communities in India have long had a close relationship with animals. Animal-focused holidays include Govardhan Puja, camel racing, and cattle fairs. The cattle were also used as a means of bartering by these nomadic tribes as they travelled slowly over the Banni region. They have remained in this area for many years and have generally enjoyed sustainable lives. The functions of the metal bell have expanded beyond cattle warning to include modern ornamental reasons due to the growing fame of their art and non-nomadic lifestyle.

Figure: Copper Bells

Figure : Copper Bells

Design:-

There are thirteen various sizes of the metal bells. These are tailored for certain species. Even bells of the same size can occasionally have their sound altered by altering the dent formed close to the rim of the bell. This aids in separating the animals of various owners. Up to five or six different notes can be played on each size. The bell's typical construction consists of a cylindrical body and a curving dome-like covering. A wooden tongue is linked to a flattened metal pole with a looped end that is inserted through the head.

Figure: Design of Copper Bells

Main Formation:-

The body of the bell is made from iron plates that have been cut into rectangular strips and shaped into a hollow cylindrical shape. The length and breadth of the iron strip to be used depend on the size of the bell that will be built. The stone that was used to create the iron bars is also distinctive. It has a range of hole sizes that can hold iron strips for bells of varying sizes.

Figure : Tools Used For Making Bells

Upper half:-
The cylindrical body is topped by a hollow, semicircular, half-orange crown made of a thin iron band. The cylindrical body and dome-like top of the bell are perfectly welded together, giving it a bowl-like appearance.

Loop:-
The clasp loop at the summit of the bell is secured to the rope or twine by which the bells are suspended. The very thin iron strip's horseshoe-shaped ends are inserted through the bell's top and into the body of the bell. A narrow circular or oval loop with one half on top of the bell and the other inside is created by twisting both ends together inside the bell and fastening them.

In order to create the textured and burnished copper coating, several different steps, each requiring a different process, must be taken. The uncoated iron bell is rolled in a mixture of brass and copper powder after being submerged in a mud-and-water solution (this process is typically carried out by women). The bell is covered in a wet mud combination, and this metallic dust sticks to it. Cotton scraps are stretched into thick pancake-like forms after being dipped in the mud and water mixture. The bell, which has brass and copper powder adhering to it, is enveloped in a cotton pancake and baked in a bhatti for 30 to 45 minutes. The length of time a bell is baked in a bhatti depends on its size; the smallest bells bake for 30 to 45 minutes, while the biggest bake for more than an hour. Larger bells must be baked one at a time; smaller bells can be arranged in clusters of four or five in the fire. After baking, the cotton wrapping is taken off, and any remaining mud is rubbed off the bell. The metal-coated surface is then burnished to a glossy, shiny finish. The hollow bell is then transformed into a musical instrument by joining the cylindrical component of the bell construction with a shaped piece of wood, usually shisham, which is both hard and dense. The piece is secured to the bell's dome top by a thin iron hoop that is punched through solid wood at one end.

Tonal and music settings:-
The tone of each craftsman's bell is distinctive and recognizable. By hearing a bell in his town ring, an artist can tell who made it. The person who constructs the bell actually has power over the sound it makes thanks to a device called an ekalavai. Each bell builder creates Ekalavai on his or her own.

The bell's shape and curvature, as well as the quality of the metal's beating, all influence the music it produces. Different-sized chimes should never be used in the same sequence or jhumar. This is due to the resulting cacophony that would arise from mixing chimes of different sizes due to tonal conflicts. A jhumar's bells must all have similar rims in order to attain tonal harmony. A group of bells that are similar in height, shape, and tone settings is what is known as a well-made jhumar. The bell's shape and curvature, as well as the quality of the metal's beating, all influence the music it produces. Different-sized chimes should never be used in the same sequence or jhumar. This is due to the fact that mixing bells of various sizes would result in a cacophony due to a clash in tonal settings. A jhumar's bells must all have similar rims in order to attain tonal harmony. A group of bells that are similar in height, shape, and tone settings is what is known as a well-made jhumar.

In the local market (in Bhuj and Nirona), bells are commonly referred to by their original names, such as chota-paila, paila, dingla, and do-dingla, rather than by their sizes. These names correlate to the local currency equivalents of the bells at that time. Within each size, the bells' shapes can vary, and the rims come in a variety of patterns. Some have undulating edges with numerous rows, while others have an undulating design. The rims are occasionally strengthened or made heavier by the addition of thin metal strips to create a different sound.

Figure : Copper Bells

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