

Bad times for business in Kasera Bazaar

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LAHORE's traditional market for copper and brass utensils known as Kasera Bazaar is fast losing its significance and business, making the traders invite even the casual passersby to have a look at their ware in the hope of selling something.

Situated in Rang Mahal, in the heart of the Walled City, the market appears to have fallen victim to the changes in tradition, mushrooming of such shops elsewhere in the city, loss of purchasing power and the tension on the border.

The shops are full of crockery and utensils of all sizes and types, mainly made of stainless steel and silver steel. But there is little or no clientele.

The shops are located on both sides of the narrow and crooked lane just opposite Suha Bazaar, the city's historic bullion market. One could find most shopkeepers sitting amidst piles of shining crockery in their shops profusely lit up even during the daytime, waiting endlessly for the customers.

The traders recall the days when people would throng to get their supplies, especially for weddings but they talk more of the prevailing business conditions which they claim are disappointing.

"Business has been low for many years because of inflation and uncertainty but the current tension on the borders has almost destroyed it. Everybody seems to be saving money for the rainy day," Muhammad Asghar a shopkeeper said.

Kasera Bazaar was once a wholesale market of utensils made mainly of copper and brass, having a nationwide clientele. Before the creation of Pakistan, business was dominated mainly by the Hindus, attracting buyers from everywhere.

Till about two decades ago,

only copper and brass utensils used to sell here. But now, stainless and silver steel dominate.

The business of making or selling copper and brass utensils has now almost vanished and been overwhelmed by machine-made goods. "This has simply replaced the beauty of the local handicrafts with the mechanical products," says a shopkeeper.

While explaining the hard work the artisans used to put in to make a simple utensil appear like a piece of art, he said the production now was mammoth but it lacked the artistry of the old days.

He said out of 120 shops in the market only five were dealing in copper and brass utensils. Interestingly, he said, the utensils were not new. They were sold to the shopkeepers by the people who simply discarded them to buy new goods. These are repaired, polished and sold as handicrafts to those who want to have a feel of the past culture of the city. "The changing fashion and trends in household utensils are also making people take to stainless steel and silver steel utensils," says Muhammad Irfan, a Kasera Bazaar trader. He said for the last three to four years the number of customers had fallen considerably.

Kasera Bazaar used to provide copper and brass utensils nationwide but it is no more a wholesale market. "The utensils are now made in Gujranwala and it has become the wholesale market," says Rizwan Butt who has been running a shop for the last 60 years. "War has also badly affected the purchasing power of the people. They don't want to spend their money on anything," he says. Rizwan adds that due to the ban on serving food on weddings, the Kasera business has collapsed because many utensils that were used for



cooking food are not being utilized any more.

"The economic conditions are so bad that people don't even get sufficient money for basic necessities. How can they spend money on buying such things?" Mr Butt also said that copper and brass utensils did not cause the diseases that the steel utensils did but this was not generally known.

People don't go to far-off areas to buy things when they can get them nearer home. "Shopping centres like Ichhra and Anarkali

also have shops that sell a variety of steel utensils, so people can easily buy things from there rather than coming to this place," a shopkeeper said.

Shopkeepers also blame the government for this. They say that because of economic instability, business is going down. "Nobody comes here to buy these utensils as crockery. They have now become showpieces," says a shopkeeper. He added: "All copper and the brass utensils have now become antiques."

"The Evacuee Property Trust Board owns all the shops in Kasera Bazaar except for a few which are owned by the shopkeepers themselves. Rent for these shops is between Rs2,000 and Rs5,000. "Our sales are so low that we cannot afford the rent. We have been paying it from our own pockets," another shopkeeper Sajid Ali said.

There are only two shops left in Kasera Bazaar where chrome coating is done. "People are so busy that they hardly get any time to get their utensils coated with chrome," says Asif, a qali gar. He adds that there are no household utensils in his shop for nickel coating either except for degs, which belong to some hotels. "I make four to five thousand rupees a month which is not sufficient for my family and I cannot think of..."





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