



The song of



Thathera

The song of Thathera

Proposed by

Fanindra Maharana
Gokulkrishnan K
Shruti Tiwari

Guided by

Amitanshu Shrivastava

Thathera

Step into the streets of Jaipur and art is all around you. From block printing to marble carving, For the real taste of city's spirit, there is no better introduction than it's craft scene.





Table of contents

Introduction

04 History, 36 kharkhanas
Crafts of jaipur

Thathera

14 Myths, Raw materials
Tools

Process


19 Significance
Challenges

Insights

23

Acknowledgement

30 References



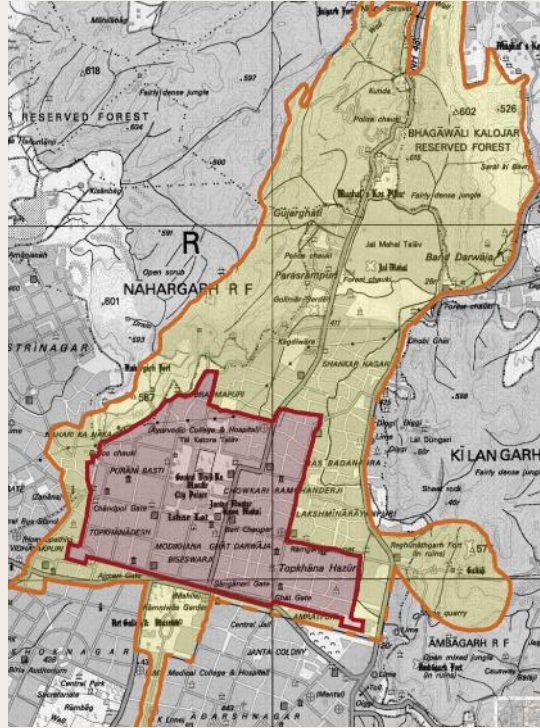
*"The desire to create is one of the
deepest yearnings of the human soul."*

– Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Introduction

Jaipur

Jaipur the historic walled city, which was founded in 1727 A.D. by the Rajput ruler Sawai Jai Singh of Kachwaha dynasty. The city wall encloses the historic urban region, divided into nine sectors, with main roads intersecting at right angles. Jaipur is planned as an inviting trade and commerce city. It reflects hindu concepts with mugal and western ideas. The main bazars and craft settlements are planned to maintain iron grid structure, ensuring continuity of architecture, urban form and cultural character.



Walled city of Jaipur- sourced from The City Archive Project

Developed by rajput ruler Sawai Jai Singh with chief architect from Bengal, Vidhyadhar Bhattacharya. The city is built in the form of 8 part mandala known as pithapada. The city consists of 9 blocks, in which 2 blocks are dedicated for state building and palaces and 7 for all the public.

Hawa mahal

Located at Badi Chaupar, Pink City of Jaipur, Hawa Mahal was built in 1799. It has 953 windows on the outside walls.

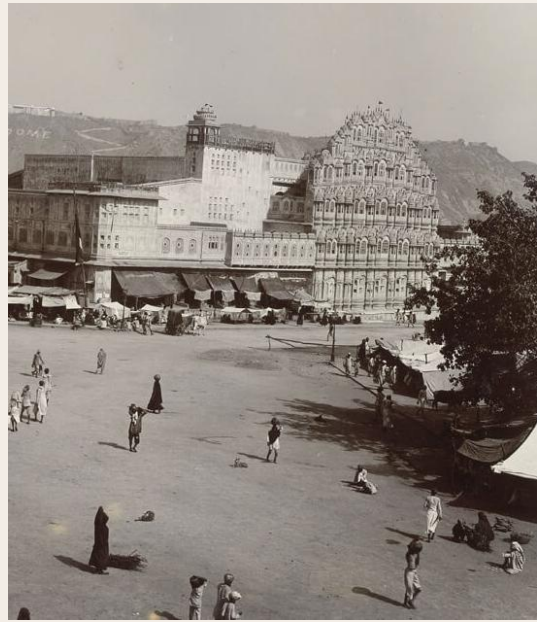
Albert Hall Museum

The Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur is the oldest museum of the state and functions as the state museum of Rajasthan



Sourced from Past India

The city of Jaipur is remarkable other premodern Indian cities, the streets were laid into 6 sectors separated by broad streets of 111 feet. The dimension 111 feet is chosen as it is considered a holy number in Hinduism and is considered lucky. In 1876, Queen Victoria's son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (who would later become King Edward VII) visited India. At the time, pink was the symbolic colour of hospitality.



Sourced from Past India

As the people of Jaipur are known for their incredible hospitality, Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh I had the whole city painted pink to welcome the royals.

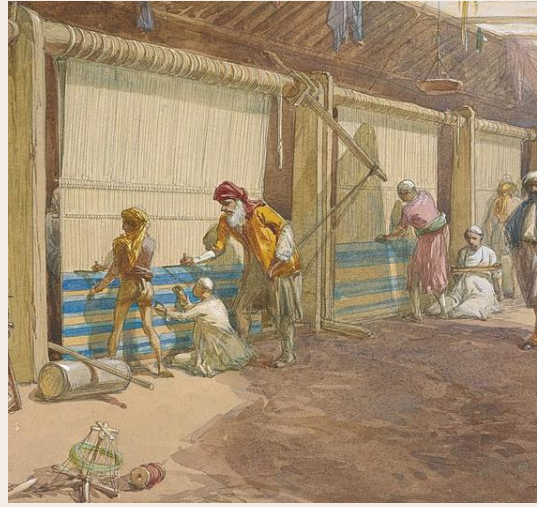
The Maharaja also oversaw the construction of a grand concert hall, naming it Albert Hall, in honour of Prince Albert. Today, the building is the Albert Hall Museum and is the oldest museum in the state of Rajasthan. The building itself is a stunning display of Indo-Saracenic architecture.

After independence, Jaipur merged with Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner to form the largest Indian state - Rajasthan with Jaipur as its capital.



Badi Chapaur- Sourced from Past India

In Jaipur, Sawai Jai Singh II embraced and adapted the tradition of the 36 Karkhanas to meet the needs of his newly founded city. Historical records, including Dastur Komwar, Buddhivilas, and Karkhanajat papers, provide detailed accounts of artisans from various regions who migrated to settle in Jaipur. These documents reveal that Jai Singh not only encouraged local craftsmen from Amber, the former capital, to relocate but also invited artisans from other parts of India, such as Gujarat, Agra, Delhi, and Bengal. This blending of local and imported techniques enriched the city's artistic and craft traditions, making Jaipur a thriving hub of innovation and creativity.



Sourced from Past India

The concept of the 36 Karkhanas, or industries of artisans, took root in India during the Sultanate period and flourished under the Mughals, especially in northern India. These state-sponsored workshops employed numerous artisans across a wide range of crafts, serving the dual purpose of fulfilling royal household needs and state demands. The imperial Karkhanas represented a collective and large-scale organization of skilled craftspersons, with major centres located in Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Gujarat and Lahore.

36 kharkhanas



Kapad Dwara



Surathkhana



Khyalkhana



Silakhkhana



Farrashkhana And
Mashalkhana



Palkikhana,
Pheelkhana



Baggikhana,
Shutarkhana,
Rathkhana



Tabela And
Aatish



Gwalera Or
Gokhana

36 kharkhanas



Shikaarkhana



Rasoda Or
Rasowara



Modikhana



Tambolkhana,
Aukhadkhana



Tatterkhana



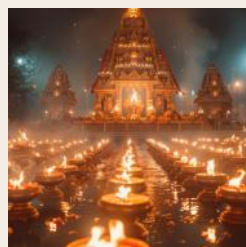
Imaratkhana And
Mistrikhana



Naqqarkhana Or
Naubatkhana



Gunijankhana



Karkhana Punya

36 kharkhanas



Bagaayat



Khabar



Tarkashi



Khusbookhana Or
Itra Ki Ori



Nakkhas



Patangkhana And
Paatarkhana



Rangkhana



Roshan Chauki
Khana



Tannery Or
Pakherkhana



Crafts of Jaipur

Jaipur, a city steeped in tradition, has been a vibrant center of crafts since its foundation. Recognized as a City of Crafts and Folk Art by UNESCO's Creative Cities Network since 2015, Jaipur has maintained and passed down its rich artistic heritage through generations.

Rajasthani Puppets

Rajasthan's puppet shows are iconic, and these captivating puppets are a charming and inexpensive souvenir. Each puppet is crafted with a painted wooden head and dressed in traditional Rajasthani attire made from sequined fabrics and rags.



Jaipur Carpets

The city's hand-knitted woolen durries are celebrated for their innovative designs, often bearing a striking resemblance to Persian carpets. The tradition of carpet weaving in Jaipur dates back to the Mughal era, and over the centuries, this craft has evolved to include a wide variety of multi-hued carpets, mats and rugs.





Rajasthani Jewelry

The craft of jewelry making, especially the art of Meenakari, has flourished in Jaipur over the centuries. Meenakari jewelry, characterized by its vibrant colors.



Jaipur Razai

These quilts, despite their feather-light feel, are incredibly warm and ideal for cold climates. Available materials such as cotton, silk, and velvet,



Embroidered Umbrella

Jaipur's embroidered umbrellas are truly unique, adding a vibrant touch to any setting. These are adorned with mirror work and intricate embroidery.



Blue Pottery

This distinctive form of pottery, which originated from Turko-Persian traditions, is known for its stunning blue, green, and yellow hues.



Marble Sculpture

Rajsthani artisans are skilled at creating beautifully carved marble items, from decorative plates with Kundan work to religious idols, statues, and other stone artifacts.



Leather works

The city offers a wide variety of high-quality leather products, including bags, belts, diaries, wallets, and handbags. These leather goods are known for their durability.



Metal Crafts

The metal crafts of Jaipur, often enameled in silver, are celebrated for their intricate designs and fine craftsmanship. These metal items are not just functional objects.



Mojaris Juttis

These traditional leather shoes, embellished with intricate embroidery, beads, and zardozi, are an essential part of Indian ethnic attire.



Block Printing

Sanganer and Bagru print are famous traditional rich textiles. The artisans make use of Rajasthani Fabrics and decorate them with wonderful vibrant colors.



Gem Cutting

Jaipur is the world's largest gem cutting center. Jaipur is famous for a gem dealing center that it has a wing entirely devoted to cutting and polishing precious stones.



Lac Bangles

Being one of the best handicraft items of Jaipur, it draws the attention of many. It is said that the bare wrists are considered inauspicious.



Miniature Paintings

Miniature Paintings are synonymous with Rajasthan. Jaipur paintings has a unique place in the best handicrafts items of Jaipur.

Thathera

The word Thathera translates in English to Coppersmith & Brass smith, this metal beaten craft is locally called 'Thathera or Metal Beaton Work'.



Freshly beaten brass utensil- Sourced from D-source

The community is mainly divided into 47 clans, and are found across the country. Apart from Rajasthan, you'll find Thathera communities working in state of Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh & Bihar.

Craftsman hammering brass plate to give it a shape- captured by Gokulkrishnan

Thatheras are basically a community of artisans who've traditionally worked with metals like brass, bronze, aluminium, copper, etc. They mainly fabricate beautiful utensils and tools, while also, undertaking repair and maintenance of the same. Members of community may also cultivate land.





Brass kalash made for temple - captured by Gokulkrishnan

The brassware industry in Jaipur evolved uniquely, with craftsmen bonded by strong family ties and apprenticeship traditions. Each family within the Thathera community often specializes in making specific objects or offering particular services.

The design techniques and material choices of Jaipur's Thatheras were influenced by the preferences of the city's Hindu, Jain, and Muslim populations. While Muslims favored tin-plated (Kalai) copper utensils, Hindus traditionally preferred brass vessels.

Craftsman marking shapes on the brass sheet- captured by Shruti Tiwari

In Odisha, they are called 'Kansari' & the main clans of this community are Maharana & the Mahapatra. In Uttar Pradesh, the communities are based out of cities of Moradabad, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Banda, Lucknow, Mirzapur & Kanpur. Thathera community from Bihar is divided into a number of exogamous clans with Thathera caste surnames such as the Chandrahar, Chaswar, Mirdang & Amarpallo. Bihar based communities also work as jewellers.





Craftsman marking for the *shivling's* outer frame - captured by Shruti Tiwari

Myths

Our secondary research, drawing from various online sources and books, reveals that the Thatera community traces its lineage to the Chandravanshi, Suryavanshi, Agnivanshi, and Rajput clans. They claim descent from Sahastrabhu, who was slain by Parsuram, and from the Haihay kings, a medieval Hindu dynasty.

Historically, it was believed that food stored in copper or brass vessels remained fresher and was better preserved than when stored in aluminum or steel. These metals were favored for their mineral content, which was considered beneficial to health.

Consequently, copper and brass utensils became essential household items, used for storing water, kneading dough, and other daily tasks. Even today, despite the prevalence of steel and aluminum, the belief persists that food and beverages kept in copper and brass containers not only stay preserved longer but also impart health benefits due to the minerals in the metal.

Raw Materials

17

The main raw materials used in Thathera metal craft are outlined below:

Pattar (Metal Sheet)- Metals like copper, brass, iron etc. are used to make utensils of different shapes and sizes.

Suhaga- A powder used for welding.

Metal rod- Thin brass rods are used to join two metals while welding.

Lac- It is sometime used to fill the hollow metal and then carving is done on the metal.

Tools

Tools used in Thathera metal craft are as follows:

Hatodi (Hammer)- Different sizes of hammers are used to shape the metal.

Wooden Mallet- Big size wooden mallets are used for initial shaping of big products.

Bangad- These are solid metal ring or blocks of iron on which the metal sheet is placed and beaten with the hammer along with simultaneously rotating it.

Thiya (solid metal stand)- Different shape and size of solid iron blocks are used for shaping the utensils. These act as a support while hammering the sheet.



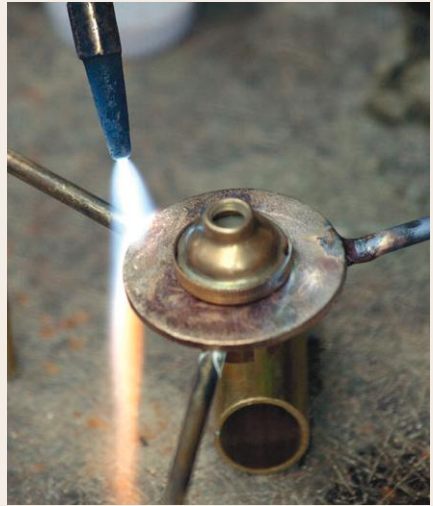
Cheni (Chisel)- Different size and shapes of chisels are used to cut and shape the product.

Metal Scissors- Small and big metal scissors are required to cut the sheet.

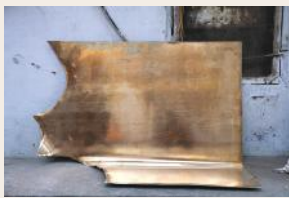
Files- Round, half round, flat and triangular files are used to finish the surface.

Prakaar (Compass)- Used for marking.

Aari (Saw)- For cutting the product or the metal artisans used saw.



Joining metal shapes together by gas welding- sourced from D-source



Grinding machine- Used to clean and finish the surface of the product.

Buffing machine- Used in finishing process to enhance the smoothness of the final product and also to obtain the glossy finish.

Welding Machine- Helps in attaching two pieces of metal.

Pakad (Iron forceps)- Used to handle hot metal while welding.

Tools used by craftsmen in Thathera metal craft- sourced from D-source and Gaatha

Process

This craft is time-consuming, labor-intensive, and rich in technique, involving multiple stages to transform raw metal sheets into finished utensils. Here's a detailed breakdown of the process:

1. Cutting the Metal Sheet

The process begins with preparing the metal sheet, which is usually is of brass, copper, or aluminium. To ensure precision, the sheet is first straightened before marking out the design. Marking is done using simple tools like a scale, marker, sketch pen, and compass. Depending on the design and the product to be made, the markings can outline circular or square shapes. The metal is then cut along these markings. For thicker sheets, artisans use a chisel, while thinner sheets are cut using metal scissors. This stage sets the foundation for the product, determining its size and basic shape.

2. Hammering to Shape

After cutting, the metal sheet undergoes a hammering process to shape it. This is a delicate and essential stage, as the artisan uses specialized tools to bend the metal into the desired concave or convex form. Historically, blacksmiths used a joinery technique that involved creating a ridge to camouflage the welds through further beating and finishing.

The cut metal sheet is placed on a tool called the "Bangad," a solid metal ring anchored in sand, which helps control the bending of the metal. Artisans hammer the sheet using wooden mallets, which are preferred over metal tools because they provide more control and prevent damaging the metal. The metal is continuously rotated to ensure even shaping, with careful control applied to create smooth curves.

Craftsman polishing brass utensil-
captured by Shruti Tiwari





3. Joining the Pieces

Once the different parts of the utensil are shaped, they are joined to form a unified product. Historically, artisans used traditional methods such as heating and interlocking metal pieces. In the past, the Thatheras used a kiln or furnace made of mud (called a "bhatti") to heat the pieces at high temperatures. This softened the metal and allowed the pieces to merge when hammered, making them a single unit.

1st image- Craftman hammering brass plate- captured by Gokulkrishnan
Rest of the images are sourced from D-source

Today, the use of gas welding has become more common due to its speed and efficiency. In this method, both pieces are heated until they turn red-hot. A substance called "suhaga" is applied to the surface, and a thin brass rod is melted between the pieces, filling the gaps and joining them together.

4. Finishing

The final stage of the process focuses on refining and polishing the product. After the welding is complete, the excess metal that accumulates on the surface is smoothed out using grinding machines or files. Once the surface is evened out, the utensil is washed with acid to clean the metal, ensuring that any residue or impurities are removed.

To achieve a polished look, the product is buffed using buffing wheels of different grades, which give the item a smooth and shiny finish. Despite the polishing, the hammered texture remains visible, which adds character to the product. The subtle indentations from the hammer strokes are not flaws but rather enhance the design and texture of the finished utensil.

Significance

This intricate process reflects the craftsmanship of the Thathera community, where each step—from cutting and hammering to welding and finishing—requires precision and patience. The result is beautiful and durable utensils that retain the history and tradition of handmade metalwork, blending ancient methods with modern tools.



Craftsman polishing brass utensil- sourced from D-source

Closeup of metal utensil- sourced from Gaatha

Challenges

The Thathera craft, once the largest market for handmade brass utensils, surpassing even Moradabad, supplied regions like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Despite adapting to the demands of a new market, the number of Thathera artisans has dwindled, with only about 80 remaining from the original 300 families brought to Jaipur by Sawai Man Singh II. While the craft continues to thrive in some aspects, the community faces significant challenges.

The women often fetch water up to twenty times daily, as the hand-pump fails to meet the needs of the 70 family members. Tests have revealed that the water contains fluoride levels far higher than recommended. Additionally, garbage collection is inadequate, leading to waste accumulating in side lanes for a year until the 'annual cleaning day'. The declining living conditions have prompted younger generations to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

Despite centuries of expertise in metal crafting, the Thathera community is now struggling with a competitive market and a lack of support from authorities.

The process of making Thathera products is labor-intensive and poorly paid, leading to its decline over the past few decades. Most craftsmen sell their goods to shopkeepers in Jaipur's Tripolia Bazaar, without direct contact with buyers. However, the craft holds significant potential for development. Some efforts are underway within Jaipur to modernize this craft to meet contemporary demands and appeal to a changing market.

Historically, Thathera craftsmen were often commissioned to create Singhasans (royal seats) for idols, Chatris (umbrellas), and temple bells. Although lightweight and affordable steel and aluminum utensils have largely replaced brass in modern kitchens, a dedicated group of admirers still values brass for its aesthetic qualities and health benefits.

Insights


1. Skill Gap Among Artisans:

The Thathera community consists of artisans with varying levels of skills, and this disparity significantly impacts their earnings and livelihood.

Skill Levels and Earnings: Some artisans are highly skilled and capable of working on intricate designs, such as creating ornamental utensils, complex vessels, or decorative items. These artisans earn more due to the complexity and craftsmanship involved in their work. In contrast, others are only equipped to perform simpler tasks like repairing utensils or making small, straightforward items. This limits their earning potential since repair work generally pays less compared to creating original, high-quality pieces.

Diversity in Material Expertise: The materials used also play a role in the artisans' skills and





earnings. Some artisans are trained to work with materials like aluminum and silver, which are often more valuable and can lead to higher profits. In contrast, many others work only with brass and copper, which traditionally have been the base materials for this craft but may not bring in as much revenue. The ability to work with diverse materials opens up more opportunities for artisans to cater to different markets, thus increasing their income.



Family Dynamics: The scale of production also varies. In some families, multiple members are skilled artisans, forming a small, cohesive unit where different family members might focus on various aspects of the craft. This can help increase the overall output and income of the family. On the other hand, many families have only one or two artisans, which limits both the production capacity and the income. The economic stability of these families depends heavily on the skill and experience of the individual artisans.

Traditional kalash mainly used as temple top- sourced from D-source

2. Lack of Government Support:

Despite the cultural and historical significance of the Thathera craft, many artisans feel neglected by the government.

Craftman hammering brass plate- captured by Gokulkrishnan



The song of thathera



Craftsman hammering brass plate to give it a shape- captured by Gokulkrishnan



No Patronage: In the past, crafts like this were supported through royal patronage or governmental support, ensuring a steady flow of orders and recognition. However, today, there is little to no financial or institutional backing from the government. This lack of support has resulted in artisans struggling to make ends meet. Without subsidies,

grants, or marketing assistance, artisans are left to fend for themselves in a competitive market where handmade goods are often seen as luxuries.

Economic Strain on Artisans: Many artisans are unable to earn enough to secure their future or provide for their families in a sustainable way.



The absence of financial safety nets means that even basic living needs are often difficult to meet. Since they aren't able to save enough for future generations, many artisans express a desire for their children to pursue alternative careers, leading to a decline in the number of skilled artisans within families and threatening the survival of the craft.

3. Lack of Unity Among Artisans:

Another challenge faced by the Thathera community is the absence of collective unity, which weakens their bargaining power and reduces opportunities for mutual growth.

Competition Over Cooperation: The artisans often operate independently, focusing on their individual work rather than collaborating to uplift the community as a whole. Instead of forming cooperatives or unions that could help negotiate better wages, secure government support, or collectively market their products, they remain isolated. This fragmentation makes it difficult for them to influence policies, secure bulk orders, or create a strong market presence.

Impact on Negotiating Power: Without unity, the artisans are unable to demand better prices for their products or work conditions.



Traditional kalash mainly used as temple top- sourced from D-source

Larger corporations or middlemen often take advantage of this disorganization, offering lower prices for their work or pocketing a bigger share of profits. Collective bargaining could help ensure fairer wages, access to resources, and shared knowledge, but the lack of organization among artisans prevents this.

4. Decreasing Demand for Traditional, Handmade Products:

One of the biggest challenges is the decline in demand for handmade products, which has resulted in fewer opportunities for artisans to earn a sustainable income.

Handmade vs. Machine-Made: Traditional handmade goods, such as those produced by the Thathera artisans, tend to be

more expensive due to the labor-intensive process and the skill required.

In contrast, machine-made products, which are mass-produced, are significantly cheaper and more accessible to the average consumer. With the rise of industrialization and factory-made utensils, the demand for these traditional, handmade items has plummeted.

Perceived Value: Although handmade products often have superior craftsmanship and aesthetic value, they are increasingly seen as luxury items rather than necessities. Many consumers are not willing to pay a premium for handmade goods when cheaper alternatives are available, despite the cultural significance and quality of the handmade items. This shift in consumer preference has made it harder for artisans to sell their products at competitive prices.

Economic Strain on Artisans: The higher price of handmade goods means they are often beyond the

reach of many consumers. This leads to fewer sales, reduced income for artisans, and difficulty sustaining the craft. The artisans are caught between maintaining the integrity of their traditional processes and trying to compete with the low-cost, mass-produced goods that dominate the market.

Traditional kalash mainly used as temple top-
sourced from D-source



Acknowledgement

When we first started our journey to explore the crafts of Jaipur, we had no idea how deeply we'd connect with them. What began as a project quickly turned into something much more personal. Along the way, we met numerous artisans, each with their own unique story, and gained a profound understanding of their craft. The learning experience went far beyond just techniques—it was about the culture, history, and heart behind the art.

One craft that particularly stood out was the Thathera craft, which has been passed down through generations. However, this beautiful and ancient practice is at a turning point. The challenges it faces are far from simple. Many artisans are struggling with gaps in skills, and there isn't much government support to help them thrive in today's world. Without proper intervention, this craft is slowly fading.

This is where designers can step in, helping to breathe new life into the craft by bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

Designers play a crucial role in uplifting these artisans. By providing them with modern designs that align with current trends and making them understand the needs of the contemporary market, designers can help make the craft more relevant in today's world. This collaboration not only ensures the survival of the craft but also allows the artisans to explore new possibilities and create products that appeal to a wider audience. With thoughtful design interventions, the heritage of Thathera could adapt and thrive rather than diminish.

Craftsman polishing brass utensil-
sourced from Gaatha



If nothing changes soon—whether through government initiatives, increased cooperation among artisans, or the creative input of designers—many of these skilled individuals may have to leave their craft behind. It's heartbreaking to think that this heritage, which holds so much

cultural significance, could be lost forever. Designers, with their fresh perspectives and understanding of global trends, could be the key to saving these crafts from disappearing, ensuring they remain a vibrant part of our cultural identity.

Traditional kalash mainly used as temple top-
sourced from D-source



References

<https://dsource.in/resource/thathera-jaipur>

<https://gaatha.com/thatheron-ka-rasta/>

<https://gaatha.org/Craft-of-India/study-traditional-metal-utensils-craft-jaipur/>

<https://www.iicd.ac.in/tha-se-thathera/>

https://ptal.in/blogs/ayurvedic-metals/th-se-thathera-revival-of-india-s-only-unesco-listed-craftform?srsltid=AfmBOos_ISV_OQQ2bQmgdfhl4PfTtISP75MtP8WVj_MLybiCzhKiKyS

<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/th-se-thathera-punjabi-thathera-art-legacy/1gWRZhWB7lxlQ?hl=en>



The song of Thathera

Step into the streets of Jaipur and art is all around you. From block printing to marble carving, For the real taste of city's spirit, there is no better introduction than it's craft scene.

Proposed by

Fanindra Maharana
Gokulkrishnan K
Shruti Tiwari

Guided by

Amitanshu Shrivastava