

**Original Article**

# **Major Factors Behind the Decline of Traditional Farasi: Case of Bagheli Village District Badin, Sindh**

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## **Abstract**

The culture of Sindh is known worldwide for its traditional textiles, which are integral of its identity. However, many of these crafts, including the traditional farasi craft of Bagheli village in Badin, are disappearing. While scholars have taken an interest in the unique character of the farasi craft in Bagheli, their analysis has often overlooked the decline of the craft and focused only on the materials and techniques of this craft. Therefore, this case study aims to examine in detail the challenges faced by traditional farasi makers in Bagheli village, Badin, and to identify appropriate solutions to their rejuvenation. The findings show that, in addition to common issues such as high prices and the labor-intensive production of these textiles, a significant challenge is the gap between product design and the design required by the international market. Due to a lack of access to larger markets, artisans are further struggling with a lack of modern equipment and an unawareness of contemporary design trends.

**Keywords:** Farasi, Bagheli Badin, Sindh, weaving, animal hair.

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## Introduction

A carpet or rug made of animal hair, commonly known as Farasi or Farashi, is a traditional textile in Sindh (Duarte, 1982; Rashid, 2020). The term "Farsh," which means "floor" in Persian, is the origin of the name for this type of rug, which typically features fine stripes or geometric patterns (Duarte, 1982; Rashid, 2020; Yacopino, 1977). It is believed that the Baluchi tribes, who migrated from Iran and Syria (where the rug-making was an established craft) to Sindh and Baluchistan in the 3rd century A.D., initiated the tradition of farasi-making (Yacopino, 1977).

Several regions in Sindh produce diverse styles of farasi, including Guni, Karryo Ganwhar, Golarchi district in Badin, Kohistan, Tharparkar, and the surrounding area of Ghotki (Askari & Crill, 1998). Bagheli village, one of the prominent farasi centers for over a century, is known for producing a distinct form of farasis in vibrant colors (Askari & Crill, 1998; Bilgirami, 2006; Khan, 2011; Rashid, 2020). This unique farasi is made from natural wool, hand-spun into yarn and woven on a traditional form of horizontal ground loom. It was once in high demand in international markets, particularly in the United States of America, Japan, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and other European countries (Maheri, 1990). Unfortunately, recent studies indicate that the craft is facing significant challenges (Rashid, 2020; Yacopino, 1977). Although scholars have examined the production process of this unique craft, none have effectively addressed the factors contributing to its decline. A concise description of high prices and a lack of institutional support, as noted in one recent study, is insufficient to identify appropriate solutions for the craft's revival (Rashid, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the various challenges faced by farasi makers in Bagheli village, Badin, and to identify feasible solutions to prevent the decline of this unique craft of Sindh.

## Literature Review

The farasi carpet, a traditional craft of Sindh, has a rich history that dates back to ancient times (Maheri, 2021). While some scholars attribute the introduction of hand-woven carpets in the sub-continent to Turk-Arab and Persian migrations, archaeological evidence shows that the craft was already established during the ancient Indus Valley Civilization (Khan, 2011). Farasi is typically made from animal hair such as goat hair, wool, and camel hair, as well as cotton yarn (Khan, 2011; Maheri, 2021; Yacopino, 1977). Scholar

Maheri (2021) has, however, provided a detailed account of the entire farasi-making process, from yarn spinning to finishing. He explains the process of making sut, dyeing the yarn with natural dyes, and setting up the ground loom and weaving. Farasi patterns consist of colored stripes with fine geometric alternating patterns, and some patterns have indigenous names such as *gulmor* (the flower of royal poinciana), *ajab* (wonderful), *dodo* (eyeball), *haran* (deer), *wal* (vine) and *akhu* (eye) (Askari & Crill, 1998; Maheri, 2021; Maheri M., 2021; Yacopino, 1977).

The craft of farasi uses animal hair and wool in natural and dyed colors, including white, grey, black, brown, blue, and deep red, with green highlights. Traditionally, madder and indigo were used for dyeing the weft thread. Still, *chun*—limestone powder, produced by burning limestone and grinding it into a powder—is now used for the pretreatment of yarns/*sut* before dyeing. Dried leaves of *the Babur* (*Acacia Nilotica*) tree and *laakha* (shellac) are also used to produce black and red dyes (Maheri, 2021). But unfortunately, the synthetic dyes have replaced natural dyes in recent times, and the colors used now mainly include red, black, white, maroon, gold, blue, purple, and green with highlights of orange, red, and silver threads (Askari & Crill, 1998; Bilgirami, 2006; Yacopino, 1977). The horizontal ground loom is used with a fixed cotton warp and animal hair/wool weft, and men prepare the raw materials, while women dye the thread and weave (Rashid, 2020). The farasi is produced in various sizes, and Baluch origin and Mahars, in particular, produce this craft in Sindh (Askari & Crill, 1998; Khan, 2011).

The farasi produced in Bagheli village, Badin, has caught the attention of several scholars who have analyzed the manufacturing process of farasi and revealed that the craft is facing challenges such as limited sales in the local market, high production costs, and the lack of potential for design modifications as per the international market's demand (Bilgirami, 2006; Khan, 2011; Rashid, 2020; Yacopino, 1977, 112). Although some initiatives have been taken by AHAN—*Aik Hunar Aik Nagr* (one village one product), to uplift the craft, there is a need to identify long-term solutions to revive it (Khan, 2011). Furthermore, one scholar noted that, once long-term initiatives were undertaken, they were not implemented in a results-oriented manner due to political changes; as a result, the craft has begun to vanish (Maheri M., 2021). In another study, Rashid (2020) found no institutional support for the Farasi carpet in Badin, and, at times, politicians' and bureaucrats' infatuation leads to the purchase of a single piece. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the challenges faced by farasi makers, the reasons for its decline, and propose

practical solutions by focusing on Badin, one of the major farasi-producing regions.

### **Methodology**

This research followed a case-study approach, with primary data collected from a site visit to Bhageli village, Taluka Golarchi, District Badin, Sindh. To gather demographic information about farasi makers, a questionnaire was created and administered in the target village. To address the research question in depth, 18 experienced artisans were interviewed, and focus group discussions were conducted to further elucidate the complexity of the situation and explore potential solutions. Since understanding the farasi-making process was challenging through textual and verbal data alone, the photography was used to document the procedure. Demographic data was initially analyzed using the percentage method, while the thematic analysis method was used to analyze the in-depth data gathered from the interviews and focus-group discussions. Themes from various responses were developed and assigned specific codes based on their nature. The coded responses were then evaluated using the percentage method to identify the most and least common factors.

The village of Bagheli is located 10 kilometers north of the Union Council Headquarters, Kario Ganhwar, Taluka Golarchi, District Badin. Currently, ten highly experienced artisans are capable of creating almost every type of farasi design, provided they are briefed effectively. These artisans shared a detailed explanation of the process of creating farasi, including the materials required for its production. Additionally, the artisans provided insights into the differences between the past and present markets for the product.

### **Process in Making**

Based on the survey, it has been concluded that both men and women participate in making traditional farasi in Bagheli village. The men are responsible for preparing the basic raw materials, while the women solely perform the weaving process. The farasi makers use animal hair from goats, sheep, and camels for their product. The artisans explained that the first step involves taking the hair from the animal with scissors, washing it, and soaking it in sunlight. The next step is beating the wool with a thin wooden stick to soften the fibres, after which the softened wool is spun into yarn using a wooden clip. It takes about a week to prepare the thread for a 4-by-8-foot farasi. Sometimes, the prepared animal hair/wool is dyed using natural or synthetic dyes. Respondents mentioned that traditionally, natural dyes were

used, which were later replaced by synthetic dyes in the 1860s. However, it was noted that synthetic dyes easily fade away from the cloth. Chrome dyes were developed and marketed after 1918. But it was mentioned by the respondents that, as compared to synthetic dyes, the traditional farasi (made with natural dyes) was found to have faster colors than artificial dyes. Fortunately, some artisans reported that some weaving centers have resumed producing farasi with traditional designs and natural dyes after abandoning this practice for over 100 years.

During the survey, it was found that Farasi/rugs made on horizontal looms and using natural dyes are usually more expensive due to their time-consuming production process. The artisans explained that on one unit of Khaddi, which is a horizontal ground loom, two women work together, one as the expert craftswoman and the other as the helper. It was observed that only a limited number of women are involved in this craft, while the majority of women can only execute simple farasi in general. A high-quality farasi of 8 by 4 feet in size takes three months to complete, while a simple design farasi can be done within fifteen days (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Farasi Rug with close-up detail, from Bagheli village Badin in the permanent collection of the Sindh Museum, Hyderabad, Sindh (Taken by author).

## The Demographic Survey of Farasi Makers

The demographic data of various respondents is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistics of working experience for specific age groups of farasi makers, in the Bagheli Village District, Badin.

S.No.	Age	Male%	Female	Experience Years	Population %	Skill Learnt from
1	10-25	00	10	10	13	Parents
2	26-50	20	40	30	37	Parents
3	51-75	00	30	40	50	Parents

Table 1 depicts that the male artisans targeted in this research were between the ages of 26 and 50, indicating a significant absence of young individuals in this occupation for various reasons. On the other hand, 30% of the female artisans surveyed were aged between 51 and 75, suggesting the involvement of older generations in this field, with little interest shown by the new generation. Regarding the working experience of female artisans, half of them had extensive experience of over 40 years, while the remaining respondents with less than 30 years of experience could be the potential group for policymakers to train and educate in modern trends and designs. It is noteworthy that all participants inherited this craft from their parents.

## The Marketing Approach of Farasi

The income-based analysis of artisans, along with the target market, is given in Table 2.

Table 2. The average monthly income and target market of farasi makers, Bagheli Village District, Badin.

The Income per month (in PKR)			Target Market	
<1000	1000-5000	6000	National	International
10%	70%	20%	100%	0%

According to Table 2, a significant portion (70%) of artisans earn a monthly income ranging from 1000 to 5000 Rs. The survey identified marketing as a crucial factor affecting the profession, as it directly impacts the artisans' income. The study found that farasi and its by-products from Bagheli village are only sold in the vicinity within the province, through local markets and brokers. While the artisans further mentioned that a few foreign business personnel have also visited the village and bought a limited quantity of the product, despite there being no efforts to promote it internationally yet.

### **Issues and Challenges Faced by Farasi Makers**

In light of the collected data, the issues faced by the traditional farasi makers in the target village are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The problems faced by the farasi weavers in the Bagheli Village district of Badin.

<b>TYPE OF PROBLEM</b>	<b>Market no accessible</b>	<b>The high price of raw materials and low product price</b>	<b>More time-consuming business</b>	<b>Lack of resources (knowledge of current market's demand and equipment)</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>12%</b>

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that a majority of farasi producers face restricted market access. Moreover, the cost of raw material for farasi is significantly higher than the selling price of the product in the market.

### ***The Existing Farasi-Making Approach***

As per the respondents, the process of making farasi is extremely time-consuming, involving several steps from preparing raw materials to the final weaving. The study revealed that farasi makers tend to work on specific designs and sizes, primarily catering to the local market. However, due to their limited expertise in contemporary styles and the unavailability of advanced equipment, there exists a significant disparity between the international market demand and their production designs. This is particularly evident in the colors and sizes offered, which fail to meet international market standards.

### ***Existing Marketing System for Farasi***

When asked about the requirements for the sustainable growth of the farasi business, the majority of artisans expressed a need for assistance in developing market linkages and acquiring entrepreneurial skills. They also suggested that modern machines and access to soft loans could further enhance the business. According to the survey, the biggest hurdle in promoting farasi is its limited marketing, which has restricted its sales to the local market only. Interestingly, the survey revealed that orders have been received from Japan in the past, which were fulfilled promptly. However, there have been no long-term initiatives to promote this craft internationally. Hence, it is imperative to develop an effective marketing strategy to enhance the visibility of this craft at both the national and international levels. The survey also found that the efforts made by various organizations in the past decade, such as SMEDA, AHAN, Centre of Excellence in Arts & Design, MUET Jamshoro (Now SABS University Jamshoro), and DevCon, were short-term and activity-based. Currently, farasi production in Badin is solely for the local market, with an average sale of 5 to 20 pieces per month. Male artisans are responsible for acquiring orders and making agreements, while other male team members handle the tasks of purchasing raw materials and selling products.

### **Farasi: A Vanishing Beauty**

During the survey, it was found that there is no formal method of transmitting the knowledge of farasi-making from craftswomen to the younger generation. The auspicious craft's lexicon preserved in minds can only be observed through their active hands at the loom. The respondents noted a lower level of interest among the younger generation in this craft due to lower returns. Therefore, it was noticed that only a few designs of farasi are learned by women; however, they can prepare other designs only if a proper color sketch is provided to them. The brilliant craft with a rich historical background is, unfortunately, now struggling for survival. Several craftswomen indicated that traditional farasi makers are now abandoning the craft for other, more lucrative businesses. The investigation leads toward the identification of two major factors for its decline: no access to larger markets and fewer skills to meet current market demand.

### **Conclusion**

An eminent aspect of the cultural heritage of Sindh, the farasi is sadly disappearing, despite its rich history. The study found that the use of synthetic



dyes, which save time but produce low-quality results, caused the craft to lose potential clients. Additionally, many younger people are uninterested in the craft, while short-term projects by organizations show a lack of long-term promotion. However, the fact that traditional farasi has been purchased by clients from abroad, particularly Japan, indicates strong global demand. Unfortunately, local brokers currently sell farasis, limiting artisans' access to the international market and knowledge of stylistic changes required. A proper marketing mechanism is needed to promote farasi nationally and internationally, as sustainable products made from natural resources are currently in high demand. The artisans can be further assisted by increasing their knowledge of international portals that promote traditional crafts. By taking such measures, this dying craft can be revived and benefit the lives of skilled artisans.

Expanding the market of farasi to international clientele is an effective way to address the high cost of production, while the training of artisans in contemporary stylistic approaches can be facilitated by various international organizations collaborating with the government of Pakistan. To explore new possibilities and research-based approaches, textile institutes in Pakistan can organize workshops on farasi-making from time to time. Many fashion brands in Pakistan are currently focusing on the traditional textiles of the country and catering to a significant number of international clients. Through these brands, the introduction of by-products, such as bags made from farasi, can sustain local artisans' livelihoods. Such positive approaches can rejuvenate the evanescent craft and improve the lives of experienced artisans. This study is an attempt to deeply identify the factors behind the decline of the traditional farasi and also presents long-term solutions to the challenges faced by farasi makers. However, these aspects can be further enhanced through audio-visual forms in future research projects. Moreover, future works can explore the farasi crafts from other regions of Sindh.

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