

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Romance to Revolution: Exploring Socio-Political Commentary in the Works of Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the works of two celebrated Urdu poets, Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869) and Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984), focusing on their contributions as writers who not only delved into the realm of love and romance but also addressed socio-political issues of their respective times. Both Ghalib and Faiz possessed a keen awareness of the socio-political climate and employed their poetic voices to highlight injustices, inequalities, and social struggles. The objective of this study is to analyze how these poets used literary expression as a medium for socio-political critique alongside romantic themes. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach through close textual analysis and historical contextualization, comparing selected poems from each poet. Sampling includes key works such as Ghalib's *Diwan-e-Ghalib* and Faiz's collections *Naqsh-e-Faryadi* and *Dast-e-Saba*, chosen for their thematic richness and socio-political resonance. The findings suggest that both poets, while stylistically distinct, share a deep engagement with the issues of their times—Ghalib reflecting the disillusionment of a crumbling empire, and Faiz voicing resistance against colonial and postcolonial injustices. This research underscores how their poetry serves as a timeless medium of resistance, reflection, and hope, giving voice to the aspirations and grievances of society.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: June, 2025

1st Revision: August, 2025

2nd Revision: October, 2025

3rd Revision: November, 2025

Accepted: December, 2025

Online Publication: January, 2026

KEYWORDS

Mirza Ghalib, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Socio-political commentary, Love and romance, Mughal Empire, British Rule, Colonialism, Post Colonialism, Post-independence Pakistan and India, Prison Poetry, South Asian Politics, Urdu Poetry, Resistance poetry, Poetry and social change

1. Introduction

Urdu poetry has been of much interest to literary scholars for a long time. With its rich linguistic elegance and cultural depth, it has long served as a powerful medium of personal expression and collective consciousness. Despite the passage of time, these poems continue to captivate readers in contemporary

society through their timeless themes. They remain widely celebrated not only in literary circles but also in popular culture through music, film, and digital media. Contemporary poets and readers alike draw upon the classical tradition to engage with present-day issues, demonstrating how Urdu poetry remains a vibrant and evolving form of cultural expression.

The purpose of this study is to examine how Urdu poetry—particularly the works of Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz—functions as a medium for socio-political critique, moving beyond the confines of romantic expression. This research seeks to understand how both poets articulated resistance, disillusionment, and collective consciousness through their verse, reflecting the historical and political crises of their times.

This research article examines the works of two iconic Urdu poets, Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869) and Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984), with a particular focus on their roles as socio-political commentators in addition to their celebrated contributions to the themes of love and romance. While both poets are widely known for the lyrical beauty of their verse, their poetry also reflects a profound engagement with the socio-political realities of their respective eras. Ghalib, writing during the decline of the Mughal Empire, articulated a sense of disillusionment and existential crisis that mirrored the broader turmoil of 19th-century India. His verses subtly questioned prevailing social norms and expressed deep anxieties about political instability and cultural disintegration.

In contrast, Faiz emerged as a powerful voice in the mid-20th century, navigating the complexities of postcolonial South Asia. His poetry captured the collective anguish of a society grappling with the aftermath of colonial rule, partition, and continued injustice. Blending romanticism with revolutionary fervor, Faiz gave poetic expression to resistance, solidarity, and hope, making his works enduring symbols of protest and social consciousness. By exploring the socio-political dimensions of Ghalib and Faiz's poetry, this article highlights how both poets used the medium of verse to critique injustice and articulate the aspirations of their people. Their legacy underscores the transformative potential of literature

to not only reflect personal emotions but also engage with broader societal concerns.

2. Literature Review

A foundational perspective is provided by Aijaz Ahmad et al. (1969), who offer a nuanced literary analysis of Ghalib's poetics, recognizing the socio-political backdrop of his verse without reducing its metaphysical depth. Datta (2003) and Narang (1972) further situate Ghalib within the ruptured landscape of post-1857 Delhi, highlighting how his letters and poetry indirectly comment on colonial violence and cultural fragmentation. The *Letters of Ghalib* (1862), as discussed by Parekh (2021), reveal his ironic and layered reaction to British rule and social decay—one that combines aesthetic distance with moral concern.

Talking about Faiz, scholars such as Rahman & Faiz (1999) underline how his poetry harnesses romantic tropes to articulate rage against imperialism and authoritarian rule. The role of musical performance, especially Iqbal Bano's iconic rendition of *Hum Dekhenge*, is analyzed by Grewal (2020), showing how Faiz's verse was not only literary but performative, evolving into anthem-like expressions of protest. Faruqi (2005) offers a broader critical framework to understand how ideological perspectives are encoded in poetic form across Urdu's classical and modern traditions. Recent debates on language hegemony, such as by Zeng and Yang (2024), contextualize the resistance of poets like Faiz and Ghalib to the cultural imperialism embedded in colonial and post-colonial structures.

3. Methodology

This study will employ a comparative literary analysis of selected works by Ghalib and Faiz, using close reading to identify recurring motifs, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies. Historical-contextual analysis will frame the poetry within the socio-political milieu of 19th-century Mughal decline and 20th-century post-colonial South Asia. A thematic approach will be adopted to examine how motifs of longing, exile, memory, and revolution operate across different historical contexts. Translations will be used cautiously, acknowledging the

interpretive losses and political re-framings that often accompany transliteration. Supplementary materials such as letters, essays, and critical commentaries will also be incorporated to trace shifts in authorial intention and reader reception.

4. Mirza Ghalib and the language of poetry

Almost 150 years after his passing, Mirza Ghalib remains one of the most widely read Urdu poets ever. Ghalib was famous among the Urdu-speaking audience since his emergence as a poet, but his global recognition came not before 2009. That year, the first English translation of his ghazals was published in *Love Sonnets of Ghalib*, translated by Sarfaraz K. Niazi. So, it would not be an overstatement if we say that the world got to know Ghalib through his musings about love, both spiritual and ethereal. Shamsur Rahaman Faruqi, in his famous book *How to Read Iqbal*, said, “For better or for worse, Iqbal is essentially a poet of hope: Ghalib is not. Ghalib is a poet of Romantic revelation: Iqbal is not” (Faruqi).

Ghalib’s works have a significant impact if we want to discuss the literary tradition of South Asia. Urdu, being a representative of the largest continuous modern tradition of West Pakistan and Northern India, holds a special place as it is a product of the Mughal rule. It has both been the language of sophisticated speech and everyday vernacular. Thus it can be said that Urdu was the language of India during the latter centuries of Muslim rule. As the language was mostly spoken by the aristocrats, literature produced in this language was often allegedly perceived as lacking in the voice of the masses.

5. Revelations on the Mughal Rule

Ghalib was one of the most prolific artists active during the latter part of the Mughal rule. Born as Mirza Asad Ullah Khan, he was born at Agra, on December 27th, 1797. The coincidence is remarkable here since the English Romantic age began just a few days after his birth in 1798. He spent almost 13 years there and married into a moderately aristocratic family which had ties to the Mughal court. The last Mughal king of Delhi, Bahadur Shah thought highly

of Ghalib as he was often invited to the court for poetry recitations. During the revolts of 1857, Ghalib was in Delhi regularly writing poems about the then tumultuous situations. However, due to the British influence, the native literary tradition suffered a great deal. Most of the translations were done by non poets who had a bias towards the British empire. Moreover, due to the British take over of the educational system, natives were alienated from their own culture which moved them away from reading Ghalib closely. Thus his thoughts and visions about India were muffled. According to Jie Zeng and Jianbu Yang,

“Several countries in Asia and Africa, having experienced British and American colonial dominion, encountered the dual-edged sword of English hegemony—both facilitating and eroding indigenous languages, leaving an indelible imprint on their societies, economies, and cultures.” (Zeng, Yang 2024).

This effect was strongly felt by Ghalib as he belonged to a time of the insurgence of British rule. However, he defied the existing trend by focusing on producing literature in Persian and Urdu, the former being his preferred language.

Ghalib lived at a time when civilization was going through a transitional period. Throughout his life, he had a longing for the old ways which the East India Company traders had disbanded, which was only possible by being active within the human community. But all of Ghalib’s thoughts were not as immediate. Aijaz Ahmed, in his article titled “The Poetry of Ghalib” said,

“Everything that happens to the poet, either personally or to the times in which he lives is deeply related to his poetry, but the immediate event is kept scrupulously out of that poetry.” (Ahmed, 612)

Contrary to this, we often find Ghalib presenting his immediate responses through his letters. Ghalib had married at an early age of thirteen to a devout muslim woman who never came into terms with Ghalib’s extravagant lifestyle

and non-conformist world views. Through one of his letters to Munshi Har Gopal Tafta he gave notions of his unhappy married life,

“On the plight of Umrao Singh, I felt pity for him an
 envy for myself. Good God, there are those whose
 chains have been cut twice and here am I, hanging by this
 noose around my neck for over fifty years. Neither do I die
 nor does the rope break” (Wig, 1968)

6. The Love Song of Mirza Ghalib

Writing verses was considered fashionable for the Mughal leisured class, and that is perhaps why Ghalib was inclined to it. A lot of people give credit to Ghalib’s luxurious ways of living behind his poetry, which is a clear notion of stereotyping. N.N. WIG said,

“The revival of that lost childhood- for him, a golden age-remained his favorite dream, which was reflected in his poetry. This is also what probably made him an incurable optimist.” (Wig, 1968) Similarities from William Blake, an English romantic poet, can be traced as he too, through his collection of illustrated poems *Songs of Innocence and Experience* lamented the lost childhood in his poems. Perhaps that is why Ghalib was mostly celebrated as a poet of ethereal and divine love. In one of his timeless shers (couplets) he said,

“One has no power over Love, it is that flame, to wit,
 Which neither can be set alight, nor extinguished once lit”
 [ishq par zor nahīn hai ye vo ātish 'ghālib'
 ki lagā.e na lage aur bujhā.e na bane]. (Ghalib, trans.1869)

It is remarkable that much of Ghalib’s popularity rests on one slender volume of 185 Ghazals, *Diwan-i-Ghalib*. It is often stated that work like this is very rare in the realm of world literature as it contains human emotions from utter despair to the height of ecstasy, wit, humor, wisdom and insight. The plethora

of emotions people felt at the transition of civilization was recorded aptly through the works of Ghalib. Some critics have commented on the portrayal of human suffering in his poems. In one of his Ghazals, named “Koi Umeed bar nahi aati” he talked about the depth of personal misery, which, according to psychiatrists, can be subjected to depressive illness,

“What face you will show in Kaaba with all your sinful past?

Don't you feel ashamed, oh Ghalib, to even think such things.”

(Ghalib, lines 17-18)

7. Memories of the Revolt of 1857 and Others

Moving on to the topic of Ghalib's socio-political awareness, there are contradictory views as he was a poet during a time when the Mughal empire was deteriorating, and the British empire was on the rise. Ghalib's financial situation largely depended on the regime in power, as he was originally granted a pension by the Mughal court. He inherited the pension from his uncle, who was in service in the Mughal court. But after the Indian rebellion of 1857, the British took full control and Ghalib's pension, the sole source of his income, was threatened. His pension was continued by the British government after some time in a reduced amount, which led him to writing several letters to the authority. Some of these letters, filled with satire, are subject to literary genius. The deterioration of the cultural scene, most of it due to lack of patronage from the Mughal nobility, displeased Ghalib which he expressed through his letters. Rauf Parekh said,

“Aside from being in Urdu, Ghalib's letters are spontaneous, candid and in a language that is chaste and literary. He bade farewell to the formal style of letter-writing that was in vogue in those days and began writing letters in quite an informal way.”-(Parekh)

Some of Ghalib's letters are an invaluable source of contemporary historical events, especially the 1857 war of freedom and its aftermath. Some letters

reflect his anguish over the demolition of some of Delhi's buildings at the hands of the triumphant British forces. In one of his letters addressed to Mir Mehdi Majrooh he announces the death of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar with these words:

“On Friday, November 7, this year, Abu Zafar Sirajuddin Bahadur Shah's soul was freed from the British prison as well as from the bodily prison” (Parekh, 2013)

Ghalib felt very deeply the terrible cruelties imposed on Indians by the British after the Mutiny, and his descriptions of the ruin, both of his class and of the city, are very painful. While he did not, like some other Delhi poets, compose any *Shahr Ashob* on the city's troubles, his letters provide such vivid accounts of the devastation in Delhi and its people that no historian of the Mutiny can overlook them. Following the British recapture of Delhi, public criticism of their actions was impossible, yet Ghalib, in his letters, subtly highlights the brutalities and excesses committed by the British. Despite his cautious writing, the grim realities of life in Delhi during that time are clearly conveyed. A few quotations will suffice:

“You must have heard of the conditions here. If we are still alive and can meet again, the story will be told. Otherwise the story is over. I am afraid to write.”

In a letter of 26 December, 1857, he wrote to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

“Think of my situation. I am writing, but what can I write? Can I really write anything, and is it proper to write? This much is true: You and I are still alive. Neither of us should say any more than that.” (Ghalib, 1862)

To Mir Mehdi Majruh, he wrote,

The city I am in is still called Delhi and this section is still called Balli maran, yet, of all my former friends, I can't find anyone. I'm not exaggerating when I say that rich and poor, all have left, and those

that remained have been driven away. . . Many houses are without lamps.
(Ghalib, 1862)

In another letter Ghalib clearly depicts what difficulties the people of Delhi had to endure, and in one part, in which he speaks of the cruelties of the British, we see clearly the intensity and boldness with which he describes the realities of the situation,

This city has sustained five attacks. The first was that of the army of native sepoy, who robbed the confidence of the people of the city. The second was that of the army of the British who destroyed life, wealth, honor, property, indeed, all the signs of our life. (Ghalib, 1862)

To Mir Mehdi Majruh, he wrote again :

Brother, what are you asking? What can I write? Life here depended on five things: the Red Fort, Chandni Chowk, the assembly at the Jama Masjid, the weekly stroll along the bridge, and the annual gathering of the flower-sellers. Not a lot of these things to be seen in Delhi... Tell me how can there be Delhi without them. . .Yes, once in India there used to be a city called Delhi. (Ghalib, qtd. in Sahapedia).

Historians, British administrators, travelers, military officers, missionaries, all have their versions of the events of the revolution of 1857. Apart from writings of Mainoodin Hasan and Jeevan Lal, a police officer and a British informer respectively, very few contemporary views are available. In this case, Ghalib presents us with a unique point of view from the vantage point of a poet. Being a gifted poet with outstanding intellectual gifts and powerful imagination, he was able to aptly use his poetic sensibility. The impact of the events during the revolt quickened his perceptions and stirred his imagination. His perceptions of the 1857 Revolt and its impact on Delhi are more decisively presented in the diary *Dastambu* (nosegay or a posy of flowers) and in his large collection of letters he wrote to his friends and admirers on the basis of what he had witnessed and heard.

Ghalib was one of the very few who had given an equal account of the two opposing forces, the rebels and the British in power. He was not a mere observer of the events as he lost a few family members, including his brother who was allegedly shot dead by the British. During the days of the uprising, Ghalib stayed at home with his family. In a letter he wrote: 'Here in this city with my wife and sons, I am swimming in a sea of blood. I haven't stepped over my threshold. Neither have I been caught, thrown out, imprisoned, nor killed.' After the British takeover, he started living in Hakim Mahmood Hassan Khan's house and through them he was able to save his house from being looted, but only for a while. The disappearance of the Mughal court had cost him his fortune and also some manuscripts of his literary works. He was also under the suspicion of the British as he had allegedly written in favor of Emperor Bahadur Shah and had received rewards for it. Although he denied the allegations stating that this is a lesser crime in comparison to the people creating weapons of destruction. He writes in another letter:

Don't think that my grief is only for myself. Of many British whom these filthy natives have murdered, some were my benefactors, some my patrons, others my close comrades, and still others my students. Even among Indians I have lost relatives, friends, students and lovers. Now every one of them is gone. It is so terribly difficult to mourn for a single relative or friend. Think of me who has to mourn for so many. My God! So many of my friends and relatives have died that if now I were to die, not a single soul would be left to mourn for me. (Ghalib, 1968)

He was dissatisfied by the carnage wrought by the rebels. He did not spare the British forces either for committing atrocities. To him the rebels were agents of redundant violence which disturbed order in the city. He condemned the Indian rebellion as a thoughtless and useless venture. Valuing the social sanctity of order and peace in civil society, Ghalib, an urban aristocrat, had utter contempt for any defiance against an established authority and conventions. For Ghalib,

the presence of British rule was an undeniable reality. There was no opposing force strong enough to challenge it. Consequently, he saw no reason to confuse appearance with reality. The Mughal Empire had ceased to be a governing authority, and like other wealthy and landed individuals, Ghalib had no choice but to align himself with the British. In his *Dastambu*, he begins with the notion that Fortune inevitably influences human experiences. He wrote, "Whatever comes along the path of the traveler is for the best."

Regarding the upheavals of 1857-58, Ghalib, much like Erasmus—a global thinker—embraced a humanist stance that rejected violence and advocated for moderation and tolerance. Though internally distressed and detached, he maintained a friendly exterior and adopted a dual attitude. Despite his strong individuality and tendency to forge his own path, he, like many of his peers, was caught up in the chaotic currents of the time, uncertain of his direction. Nonetheless, his writings during the days of the revolt still remain as some of the very few unbiased records in history.

8. The Poet of the East

Similar to Ghalib, there was another poet who was celebrated as well as questioned for his activity or inactivity in certain historically important situations. Born in 1911, Faiz Ahmed Faiz was a Pakistani Poet who primarily wrote in Punjabi and Urdu. Arguably one of the most notable poets of the last 50 years, he was often compared to the great revolutionary poet Pablo Neruda. Although gaining prominence as a romantic poet in his initial years, he later became known as the voice of social justice. Faiz's early poems had been conventional, light-hearted treatises on love and beauty. For many years, his poetry was kept away from the media in Pakistan. The condition was so intense that he was forced into exile at one point. His first collection of verse, 'Imprints' (*Naqsh-i-Fariyadi*) was published in 1941, when he was an officer of the Indian Army during the Second World War. The Urdu-speaking youth highly accepted the newness of his works. Because of his interest in English Literature, he was able to rapidly assimilate the European influence in his mind. His directness and personal apprehension of

reality was new in Urdu Poetry. Moreover, the blending of European and Persian/Urdu surrealism in his poems is also praiseworthy. Later on, he used the classical traditions to explore his socio-political aspirations. The gradual change in his style and subject matter are evident in his early poem “Don’t ask me now beloved” (1941). Here he talks about his internal turmoil rising from the harsh realities he discovered due to his newfound Marxism. Here he says,

“Dark fearful talisman come down the centuries
 Woven in Silk and Damask an cloth of gold,
 Bodies that everywhere in silk are sold
 Covered with dust, all their wounds bleeding,
 Bodies that have passed through the furnace of ills
 with putrid ulcers which their humors spill.
 How can I but turn my eyes sometimes that way;
 You beauty is still ravishing, what can I say

Other pains exist than those that love brings
 Other joys than those of lover’s mingling.
 Don’t ask me, now, Beloved, for that love of other days.” (Faiz, 1941)

From the innermost faculty of his poetic feeling, imbued with the Sufi ideals of Hafiz and Rumi and all the great Urdu poets, comes the awareness that his previous quest of his beloved and the later one for social justice and humanity are of the same nature. In his poem “We who were killed in obscure pathways” (1953), he was inspired by the letters of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were sentenced to death for their political views in the same year. They were charged with espionage against the U.S government and were the first American civilians to be executed during peacetime. Here he says,

“Far from our desires as we hung upon the cross
 The redness of your lips went on throbbing
 Headiness from your tresses went on streaming
 The silver of your hands went on gleaming” (Faiz, 1953)

9. Earlier works of Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Faiz’s early poems had been conventional, light-hearted treatises on love and beauty. One of his earliest poems, named “*Raqib Se*” (*To the One Who Loved Her as Well*) has an interesting background story. While he was residing in Sialkot,

Faiz fell in love with a neighbour. But one day, upon his return from college, he came to know about her sudden departure. Years later, after becoming famous, he coincidentally met the same girl who was also visiting the city at that time. Interestingly, her husband was also keen on meeting Faiz, and this incident eventually became the inspiration for the poem. There, he says, "What did we lose in love? What have been our gains? None but you comprehend the ruminations I recount' (Faiz, trans. 1940). The tone of his poems started changing when he moved to Lahore and started expanding his topics to politics and community. This shift of tone itself is evident in the poem discussed in this paragraph.

One of his poems, titled 'Be with me' can be subjected to dual interpretation, both as a romantic poem as well as a revolutionary one. It can be perceived as personal love that sustains the life of the poet or his political faith as he faces the rising storm of the night of political oppression and thinks of the irresistible purling of the wine of revolt in his country under the heel of Martial law.

The lack of progress in democracy and social justice in Pakistan disenchanted Faiz, and he overtly and covertly expressed his disgust for the oppressors through his works. In his later works, he was hopeful not only for Pakistan but also for the whole of the suffering humanity, wherever it might be, regardless of caste, color and creed.

10. Adaptations and Translations

Faiz's poetry has been translated into numerous languages. The best known English translation is that of Victor Kiernan, published in 1971. There are other American Translations available, but they lack sufficient grounding on the original tongue. It is true that the translation of his ghazals has rarely been attempted, but his ghazals gained prominence from behind prison walls through word of mouth. Celebrated singers also heartily accepted them and performed them which made him immensely popular in the sub continent. Prominent Pakistani Singer Iqbal Bano performed Faiz's iconic poem "Wa yabka wajh-o-rabbika" more popularly known as "Hum Dekhenge" in front of 50000 people on February 13, 1986. The significant impact of this performance, better described

as a protest against the government of Zia-Ul-Haq, was hardly felt by the artist then. Bano performed the song clad in a Black sari, the color of protest. The impact was such that it prompted Zia Ul Haq, the then president of Pakistan, to ban the attire.

11. Political Activism and Incarceration

In 1947, following the partition, Faiz took on the influential role of editor for the liberal English-language newspaper, *The Pakistan Times*, and became the managing editor of the Urdu daily *Imroze* (Today). During his tenure, Faiz openly criticized the government policies of Liaqat Ali Khan, particularly in relation to Pakistan's alignment with the British Commonwealth and its pro-American stance during the Cold War, which was in opposition to the Soviet Union. As repression against leftist groups intensified under the Muslim League-led government, authorities targeted organizations like the All Pakistan Progressive Writers' Association and the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation, where Faiz served as vice-president.

In response to these suppressive actions, progressive groups united and established the All-Pakistan Union for the Defence of Civil Liberties on December 10, 1950, with Faiz being one of its seventeen executive committee members. That same year, Faiz was elected General Secretary of the Pakistan Committee for the Defence of Peace and became actively involved with the Pakistan Journalists' Union, as well as serving as Pakistan's representative to the World Peace Council. His involvement in these movements eventually led to his arrest on March 9, 1951. The case was later known as the "Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case" where a total of 14 people were tried on charges of treason and conspiracy against the Government of Pakistan. The lengthy trial of the accused individuals was conducted behind closed doors, with special legislation passed in the Pakistani parliament to address the specifics of each case. Ultimately, the defendants received varying sentences, with Faiz being handed a four-year prison term in 1953. However, due to the weak evidence presented by the authorities, all the accused were quietly released. The entire situation was mishandled, both by

the alleged conspirators—if any conspiracy had occurred—and by the Pakistani government, which faced significant backlash and lost credibility. This was particularly evident as the constitutional legitimacy of the statutes used in the case was challenged and questioned during other proceedings.

Faiz was prolific even while he was incarcerated. About his prison poetry, he said,

[My] two books subsequent to *Image of Complaint* -i. e., *Hand of the Wind* [Dast-e sabā, 1952] and *Prison Narrative* [Zindān nāma, 1956] -are souvenirs of this [four-year] stay in prison. Although basically these writings are related to the mental impressions and thought processes which started with "My Beloved, Do Not Ask Me for My former Kind of Love" [Mujh se pahlī sī muhabbat merī mahbūb na mañg], one of the most famous poems in his first collection], prison itself is, nevertheless, a fundamental experience in which a new window of thought and vision opens itself. Thus prison is first like another adolescence when all sensations again become sharp and one experiences once again that same original astonishment at feeling the dawn breeze, at seeing the shadows of evening, the blue of the sky, and feeling the passing breeze.”

Despite the upheaval that imprisonment caused in his life, including the intense anxiety from being under a death sentence for part of the time, Faiz utilized prison time to create some of his finest poetry. It can be said that prison had enabled a ‘second adolescence’ in Faiz, a period in which his sensitivities and sensibilities were sharpened similar to those of an adolescent. The confining environment of the prison could not prevent him from coming into terms with his own political ideologies. According to Faiz, prison provided him with tranquility, for which he was able to write a good number of poems within a short time. Faiz was arrested and held in protective detention several more times. Later in 1978, he went into voluntary exile in Lebanon where he continued producing poems of varying genres.

12. Prison Poems

Struggle against tyranny of all kinds, especially that of a political nature, are some of the dominant themes of his earlier prison poems. They are imbued with a general sense of indomitable optimism and unfaltering confidence. In the introduction of his poetry book, “Dast-e-Saba, Faiz states that one must be able to abstract from the particulars of one’s own life situation to the generalities and universal aspects of the human condition as it affects all people. For one having such an ability to perceive the ocean in a drop of water also comes with the serious responsibility of setting the pace for and giving direction to the ebb and flow of the ocean. In other words, the poet must not be a mere observer and record what he sees, he must also involve himself and struggle fully with the stuff of life and living. He says,

“Success or failure in this struggle depends upon the relative prowess of the artist, but most important for him is that he remains tolling in his struggle, untired, undefeated, endlessly, eternally.” (Faiz, 1952) One of his most moving and powerful poems is titled “There is no salvation of crystals”- (Sison Ka Masiha Koi Nahin), where the phenomenon of post-partition disillusionment is highly visible. The crystal, in the title of the poem, can be a metaphor for the hopes and aspirations Indians had for their country before independence. Partition was a by-product of independence which was followed by communal riots and manslaughter of innocent people in both India and Pakistan. Both the nations had to strive for their respective nation-building, with the memories of riots still fresh in their minds. Soon, intellectuals and the common person found that opportunism, wealth and nepotism were the necessary prerequisites for advancing in the new country rather than ability, dedication and personal worth. In the poem, at first we see him as a pessimist, who tells the people of his country not to cry over shattered crystals. He moves on to identify the people who have failed the dream of independence, but later acknowledges a second group for their efforts in saving the nation. In the poem he says,

“who fight in order to rent those drapes,
to confuse every ploy of the thieves of life’s wealth” (Faiz)

He draws upon the notion of a Messiah and assumes a realist’s point of view and says that in order to bring about change, people cannot afford to wait for the coming of the messiah, but must act on their own to fulfill their dreams.

13. Discussion of the Findings

The analyses of Ghalib and Faiz reveal a complex evolution in Urdu poetry from subtle critiques of imperial collapse to overt discussion of political resistance. Several key findings emerge from this comparative reading.

Firstly, both poets demonstrate how personal themes of love and longing become vehicles for social and political expression. In Ghalib’s case, the metaphors of love, distance, and absence often mask a deeper disillusionment with imperial decline and the traumas of 1857. Faiz, by contrast, makes this process explicit, as his love poetry deliberately fuses romance with collective suffering, turning the beloved into a symbol of the oppressed nation.

Secondly, the study finds a shift in rhetorical strategies across the two poets. Ghalib’s voice remains skeptical, ironic, and self-reflective—engaging with historical crises obliquely. Faiz, however, mobilizes poetry as a conscious tool of solidarity, protest, and hope, thus transforming ghazal conventions into revolutionary idioms. This suggests that Urdu poetry’s capacity for socio-political critique intensified as it moved into the 20th century and absorbed global ideologies of socialism, anti-colonialism, and resistance literature.

Thirdly, the findings highlight the continuity of Urdu poetry as a space of negotiation between individual experience and collective history. Despite differences in tone and method, both Ghalib and Faiz anchor their poetry in the lived realities of violence, exile, and marginalization. Their works demonstrate

that poetry in the Urdu tradition cannot be neatly separated into “romantic” or “political” categories; rather, it functions dynamically across these boundaries.

Finally, the comparison underscores the enduring relevance of these poets. Ghalib’s subtle meditations on decline resonate with contemporary anxieties about cultural dislocation, while Faiz’s verses continue to be invoked in protests, movements for justice, and artistic reinterpretations across South Asia and beyond. Together, they show how Urdu poetry sustains a tradition of resistance that is both historically grounded and perpetually renewed.

14. Conclusion

In conclusion, the poetic legacies of Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz transcend the realms of love and romance, marking them as vital commentators on the socio-political climates of their respective eras. Both poets employed their art to reflect the turbulence of their times—Ghalib through his profound exploration of societal disillusionment during the decline of the Mughal Empire, and Faiz by giving voice to the struggles of the oppressed in post-independence India and Pakistan. While both poets acted on their beliefs to different extents, their verses not only immortalize the emotions of their age but also serve as enduring beacons of resistance and hope. Their work reminds us of the transformative power of poetry to challenge injustice and inspire collective action. Moreover, their writings continue to resonate with those who seek justice, equality, and the reaffirmation of human dignity, offering fresh insights to those willing to explore perspectives beyond dominant and popular narratives.

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Declaration of Interests: *I, the author of this research manuscript, declare that I have no financial interest. I have provided written consent to publish the paper in this journal.*