

Urdu Ghazal and Mental Health: A Psychological View Through the Verses of Ghalib, Iqbal, Faiz, and Mir Taqi Mir

Dr. Mohammad Younis Dar

DNB Resident

Abstract: *The Urdu ghazal, a classic form of poetry from the Indian subcontinent, is not only about beauty and emotion but also a deep look into the human mind. It expresses people's inner struggles, desires, and ways of coping with pain. This paper studies how the ghazal tradition—through poets like Mir Taqi Mir, Mirza Ghalib, Allama Iqbal, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz—shows emotional experiences connected to mental health. Using simple ideas from psychoanalysis, especially Freud's concept of defence mechanisms, it explains how poetry becomes a healthy outlet for hidden feelings. Each verse works like therapy, helping both the poet and the listener to heal. In this way, the Urdu ghazal becomes a timeless expression of emotional strength and survival.*

Keywords: Urdu ghazal, emotional expression, psychoanalysis, mental health, poetic healing

1. Introduction

The Urdu ghazal, which has existed for centuries, gives voice to the silent struggles of the heart and mind. Rooted in Sufi thought but connected to everyday pain and love, it is both a mirror of suffering and a way to heal. From Mir's deep sadness to Ghalib's questioning of life, Iqbal's call for self-awareness, and Faiz's mix of love and revolution, the ghazal explores human feelings in all their depth.

From a psychological view, such poetry shows how the mind tries to deal with sadness, conflict, and anxiety. Poets, knowingly or unknowingly, use different defence mechanisms—mental ways of handling emotions. Thus, the ghazal becomes both a picture of mental pain and a form of self-healing.

1) The Ghazal as a Mirror of the Mind

The ghazal often moves between opposites—love and loss, hope and despair, pride and surrender. Its structure (each couplet complete in itself but linked emotionally) reflects how human thoughts often come in fragments, especially in times of sadness or confusion.

As Mirza Ghalib wrote:

“Dil hi to hai na sang-o-khisht, dard se bhar na aaye kyun,
Royenge hum hazaar baar, koi hamein sataaye kyun.”

(“It is only a heart, not stone or brick — why should it not overflow with pain?

We shall weep a thousand times, why should anyone torment us?”)

Here, the heart becomes a symbol of the mind—soft, feeling, and full of pain. Ghalib turns sadness into graceful poetry. This is sublimation—changing painful feelings into something beautiful and meaningful. His grief becomes art, and art becomes healing.

2) Repression and Hidden Feelings in Mir Taqi Mir

Mir Taqi Mir, known for his sadness, expressed deep emotional wounds and loneliness with moving simplicity.

His ghazals speak of loss, longing, and emotional pain that is often unspoken.

“Mir ke deen-o-mazhab ko ab poochhte kya ho, un ne to,
Kashka khaincha dair mein baitha, kab ka tark Islam kiya.”

(“Why ask of Mir's religion or faith?

He drew the sacred mark on his forehead and sat in a temple—long ago he left Islam.”)

This verse is not rebellion against religion—it is a symbolic expression of emotional hurt and distance from the divine. Mir's sadness toward God and society is shown through imagery, a process called displacement—shifting emotional pain to another object or idea. His poetry becomes his therapy, helping him release feelings he cannot speak openly.

3) Projection and Inner Conflict in Ghalib

Ghalib's verses are full of contrasts—faith and doubt, pride and helplessness, love and detachment. He often reflects his inner confusion through the voice of the beloved or God, a process called projection—putting one's own hidden feelings onto another person.

“Har ek baat pe kehte ho tum ke tu kya hai,
Tumhi kaho ke yeh andaaz-e-guftagoo kya hai?”

(“You question me on everything—‘Who are you?’ you say; Tell me then, what kind of conversation is this?”)

Here, Ghalib's self-doubt becomes a dialogue with the beloved, who represents the inner voice of judgment and guilt. By writing, Ghalib turns his anxiety into poetry, changing emotional pain into thoughtful beauty. The ghazal becomes a safe space for emotional release and self-understanding.

4) Reason and Hope in Iqbal

Allama Iqbal gave new direction to the ghazal. Instead of expressing sorrow, he used it to inspire strength and purpose. He changed inner pain into wisdom and faith in

Volume 14 Issue 11, November 2025

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

www.ijsr.net

human potential. This is like rationalization—explaining suffering in a way that gives it meaning and direction.

“Khudi ko kar buland itna ke har taqdeer se pehle,
Khuda bande se khud pooche, bata teri raza kya hai.”

(“Raise thyself to such heights, that before destiny is written,
God Himself asks thee: what is it that thou desirest?”)

For Iqbal, “Khudi” (selfhood) is the power of the human spirit. In modern terms, it means resilience and self-belief. His verses turn helplessness into motivation and despair into strength. This is poetry that uplifts the depressed mind, giving hope and purpose.

5) Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Turning Pain into Strength

Faiz Ahmad Faiz joined personal sorrow with the pain of society. He turned despair into resistance and love into courage. This is known as reaction formation—when a person expresses the opposite of what they feel to protect themselves from pain.

“Bol ke lab azaad hain tere, bol zubaan ab tak teri hai.”

(“Speak, for your lips are free; speak, your tongue is still your own.”)

Behind Faiz’s call for freedom lies deep emotional hurt—the pain of oppression and loss. By expressing hope, he heals his own sadness. His poetry shows how art can become a powerful act of healing.

Another touching verse:

“Raat yun dil mein teri khoi hui yaad aayi,
Jaise veerane mein chupke se bahaar aa jaaye.”

(“Last night, your lost memory came to heart,
Like spring arriving quietly in a barren land.”)

This shows repressed memory returning as a sweet remembrance. The beloved here stands for lost happiness, lost peace, or lost ideals. Faiz turns pain into tenderness—sadness into beauty.

6) Urdu Ghazal as a Form of Therapy

Over time, the ghazal has acted like a form of group therapy. Listening to or writing ghazals helps people release emotions safely. It makes sorrow, heartbreak, and longing feel normal and shared. This emotional sharing brings comfort and healing.

Modern science also supports this. The sound, rhythm, and imagery in poetry affect the emotional parts of the brain, helping balance feelings—much like music therapy or storytelling therapy.

For people who suffer from depression, anxiety, or loss, Urdu ghazals can help them open up, understand their feelings, and find peace—just as talking does in psychotherapy.

2. Conclusion

The Urdu ghazal is more than poetry—it is the soul of a culture. Its verses carry the emotions, struggles, and dreams of generations. Through Ghalib’s questioning, Mir’s sorrow, Iqbal’s courage, and Faiz’s compassion, the ghazal shows how human beings protect their minds from pain and transform it into art.

What psychology describes in theories, Urdu poetry expresses with grace and feeling. Thus, the ghazal is both a diagnosis and a cure—a melody where sadness becomes song, pain finds purpose, and the soul learns to heal.

References

- [1] Freud, S. (1936). The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence.
- [2] Kaplan & Sadock’s Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry – Section on Defence Mechanisms.
- [3] Mir, Ghalib, Iqbal, Faiz – Selected Works and Diwans.
- [4] Rizvi, A. A. (2010). Psychological Dimensions of Urdu Poetry.
- [5] Bano, R. (2020). Sufism, Poetics, and Mental Health in South Asian Literature.
- [6] Fromm, E. (1947). Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics.