

Treachery in Poetry

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt has been made to study treachery in its various forms, and its portrayal in some select verses from the *Ghazals* of the Urdu poet Ahmed Faraz. These verses exhibit the betrayal of trust and allegiance by relatives and friends. They are chosen for discussion and analysis because they succinctly unveil the intensity and depth of human relations and the complexity of the concept of treachery.

Keywords: Treachery, betrayal, treason, Ghazal, friendship, relationship, enemy, opportunism

Introduction

Treachery as a theme can be found in all forms of literature and all types of literature in the world. When we trace the history of friendship or companionship or acquaintanceship, along with it, we get for free, the history of treachery. It is the state of betrayal of trust, unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and deception. It is a state when the trust is violated and faith is demolished. Its causes are often opportunism and promotion of self-interest. The term treachery is always associated with friends and companions, seldom with foes or enemies.

The tool of treachery is often hypocrisy, its agent is friend or companion or a person who receives the favour (from the victim). The motive of treachery may be promotion of self-interest, accessing of comforts and luxury, or jealousy or envy and so on. The treacherous person often appears as an opportunist.

The use of treachery is always hidden or concealed; when it is exposed, the treacherous person who is also grievously called a traitor or betrayer often justifies his stand. The justification mostly comes from the traitor in the form of 'welfare' of the victim of his treachery.

Treachery is that state of mind which all opportunists possess. One can understand the state of the mind of foes or enemies. Hence if one has an enemy, he can match his expectation with that of the enemy and prepare accordingly to retaliate or defend the attack. But the mind of the friend or companion who is treacherous cannot be easily discovered, mostly, the victim is caught unawares.

When one knows the degree of injury one can prepare for its prevention or healing, but when one does not know the nature or degree and time of injury, often, one can never prepare for it nor can prevent it. Worse still, if the injury comes as treatment, how can one handle it? Treachery is this injury, which catches its victim unexpectedly.

The Polemics of Treachery and Few Verses

Though treachery, betrayal, and treason are synonymous of one another, the words 'treachery' and 'betrayal' are used interchangeably to subtly suggest that they are employed for breaching the trust of human relationship, whereas 'treason', is treated as a law term, which may be used for the disloyalty towards, community, state, and nation.

Michael Walzer explains what it constitutes to be an act of treason and treachery in the words:

'We have a number of words in the English Language that describe the act of breaking faith with our fellow men: treason, treachery, betrayal. But we have only one word, or only one in common use, that describes the man who breaks faith: we call him a traitor. Traitor has both a general and specific meaning; it names the faithless man but also and more particularly the faithless citizen. We single out no other kind of treason, treachery, or betrayal except that directed against the state. We have, no word, for example, that refers specifically to the faithless son, friend, lover, political ally, or comrade in arms. All these we name with a word that always calls to mind the "crime against allegiance" (p. 203).

The expressions 'crime against allegiance' or 'breaking faith with our fellow men' are very crucial to the discussion of treachery and betrayal. When an allegiance is due to blood, it is an allegiance to the interest of relatives, whether one is benefitted anything from them or not, it does not matter; because of the blood relation one is expected to be loyal to one's relatives, which by extension means not only one's own brother, sister or cousin, it may be the entire extended family, clan and tribe.

If this allegiance is due to one's love for some person, it is a romantic allegiance. The crime against romantic allegiance is betrayal of love. The crime against one's spouse may get somebody the title of unfaithful, disloyal, and cheat etc.

The allegiance that emerges because somebody does some favour to somebody else is purely an allegiance due to favour; and deceiving the one who is the benefactor, is a crime against ethics and grace, and principles of moral obligations. The criminal is considered to be an ungrateful, unthankful being. The act is considered to be 'ingratitude', and the person is the betrayer of gratitude.

The crime against religious allegiance may bring the title of apostate; the crime against allegiance to the country, may draw the title of traitor and the act itself is called treason.

The crime against one's group whether social or political or economic or regional or communal, brings the committer the label of renegade or turncoat. These concepts have been discussed by Walzer quite succinctly. The terms defector and deserter are also used for those who leave the interests of their political or social group and join the opposite faction or remain uncommitted etc.

Friendship is that state that binds people to a trust of welfare and sacrifice. It is based on the expectation that the friends can think of nothing save each other's welfare, and are ready to sacrifice their own welfare for that of their friend. The crime against the interests of friends is that betrayal of trust and that crime against allegiance which is portrayed as unpardonable in very many literatures of the world.

However, there are occasions when somebody is in a completely terrible situation. At one hand, he has a friend who is extremely loyal, he has done lots of favours, his sincerity of actions, makes one feel completely obliged to him. But what if this friend in a given context is wrong, and if one supports him, it would be against truth and justice; and if one opposes him, he is vulnerable to be labeled as traitor, betrayer etc. In truth, one is required to do the duty of friendship, in a sense that one is required to make his friend realize the wrong position that his friend holds, the unjust attitude he bears etc. And if the friend realizes, it is well and good and if he does not realize (which often is the case), then in principle, one is free from being labeled as betrayer, for one is sincere in one's attempt, and one has stood in support of justice and truth; and those who stand for justice, mercy and truth are the most honest truthful people, no matter what the world calls them.

Since, the discussion of treachery and betrayal involves the breach of trust by friend, does it mean that the 'foe' or enemy is absent in the discussion of treachery? Contrarily, enemy or foe is never absent from the polemics of betrayal and treachery. In fact if one's friend sides with one's enemy, one is bound to feel betrayed.

Few verses with explanation are given below which exhibit the intensity and depth of human relations and complexity of treachery. These verses are from the *Ghazals* of the Urdu poet Ahmed Faraz. They are transcribed and translated in English, for appropriate appreciation.

Jaise Tajdeede Ta'alluq Ki Bhi Ruth Ho Koi

Zakhm Bhar Jaate Hein To Ahbaab Bhi Aa Jaate Hein

As if there is even a season of renewal of relationship,

When the wounds are healed, the relatives also come back. (*Nabeena*, 18)

One's relatives are expected to be with one, when one is in endangerment. Their desertion at the face of danger and injury makes one feel absolutely disillusioned of the very concept of relationship and kinship. This desertion in reality suggests that nobody wants to court any trouble for others. When things settle down because either one gets out of trouble or one has faced it successfully, the relatives return. Faraz beautifully presents the idea that it appears as if there is a season of renewal of relationship also.

Jaan Ki Parwah Phir Kis Ko Ho Jab Khatil Ho Yaroun Sa

Batein Ho Dildaroun Jaise, Lehja Ho Gham Kharaon Sa

Who will bother about the safety of life, when the killer is like friend,

Whose talks are sweetheart like, and whose tone is sympathizing like. (*Nabeena*, 22)

These verses reveal some weapons of betrayal that friends employ: these weapons are the talk and tone. That is, the friend's talk is like sweetheart's talk, or it is like that talk which is heart-aboding, and the tone is like comforting or grief-assuaging. When somebody's friend has these weapons, he is sure to be careless, which makes him absolutely vulnerable to treachery and betrayal.

Waqt Aya To Mein Maqtale Shab Mein Tha Akela

Yaroun Ki Girah Mein Faqath Aqwaal Bandhe The

When the time came, I was alone in the nightly slaughter house,

Only the sayings were tied up in the pockets of friends. (*Nabeena*, 63)

One has to face all troubles for oneself in life. If one is part of any mission, one is required to assess beforehand what is going to be the end of it. Since most of the people desert and disappear when the real trouble or problem surfaces. One's stand may take one to a real terrible situation, and at that time one may realize the big talk of one's friends which remains folded or knotted in words, it never sees the heat of the action. When the truth dawns upon one, one will realize the betrayal of those who claim to be friends.

Kisi Dushman Ka Koi Teer Na Pohncha Mujh Tak

Dekhna Ab Ke Mera Dost Kamaan Kheencha Hai

Never any arrow of my foe reached me,

See, now my friend is pulling the bow. (*Ghazal*, 17)

This is also a fact of life that the arrow that the enemy shoots never hurts so much as the arrows of one's friends. For, the arrows of enemy may hurt physically, but the arrows of friends injure mentally and cause people to lose hope in the dignity of trust and help. The above verses do not give the complete meaning, whether the pulling of the bow by the friend releases the arrow and what is the extent of the injury that it causes, as it stops at 'see now my friend is pulling the bow'. Probably, the target and the degree of the injury that it causes are left by the poet at the guess or conjecture of the reader or listener.

Chaoon Mein Baithne Wale He To Sab Se Pehle
Ped Girta Hai To Aajate Hein Aare Lekar
Those who sit in the shade, come first,
With saws when the tree falls. (*Ghazal*, 43)

These two lines seemed to convey the attitude of people who help destroy their own benefactors, or try to get some benefit from the ruination of their own benefactors. Who can exemplify what treachery is, better than them. They are the most terrible kind of betrayers: the opportunists who can go to any extent to meet their desires.

Sulooko Yaar Se Dil Dobne Laga He Faraaz
Magar Ye Mehfile Aad'a Hai Kya Kiya Jaae
The treatment of friend is drowning the heart Faraz
But this is a gathering of foes, what shall be done. (*Ghazal*, 34)

Often the treatment that one gets from one's friend (probably of negligence, ignoring or deceiving) not only dampens the very spirit of one's mental state, but also makes it very difficult to work out whether the gathering is of friend or foes.

Conclusion

Almost all the genres of literature, all across the literatures of the world deal with the themes of trust and allegiance directly or indirectly through the acts of treachery; or the themes of treachery, directly or indirectly through the states of trust and allegiance. The acts of treachery or treason and their consequences are exhibited differently in different literatures. However, the assorted samples of few Urdu verses discussed above, present the conflict of emotions that accompanies the acts of treachery committed by the most trusted ones. These verses also manifest some situations where treachery or betrayal is realized.

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