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'Khoon' in Bengali Literature

by

Professor Rafiqul Islam*

Ever since Nazrul married Promila, a section of Hindu and Brahma poets and writers were up in arms against him and they became even more aggressive in the days of Bangladesh's communal riots. Certain remarks of Rabindranath were quite instigative too. In his speech at a reception hosted by the Presidency College Rabindra Council, Rabindranath's comment on the use of the word '*khoon*' [Urdu word for 'blood' commonly used by Muslim Bengalis] in Bengali literature created quite a misunderstanding. Various papers reported differently on Rabindranath's comments made during that speech at Presidency College on the 13th of December 1927 [27th of Agrahayan 1334]. Quite sometime later a report appeared in the Falgun issue of *Probashi*, of "Chancellor Rabindranath's speech delivered in reply to the reception hosted by the President of the Presidency College Rabindra Parishad, Professor Surendranath Dasgupta, as recorded by the students". According to this report, at one point of the speech Rabindranath said:

> When there is paucity in creative powers, then some persons brag about innovation. They do not have the ability to serve the elixir of youth in old vessels. In order to prove their power, they search for something shocking rather than creative. The other day I saw in a certain Hindu Bengali poet's poem, the use of the word '*khoon*' rather than '*rakta*' [the common Bengali word for blood]. If the old word '*rakta*' cannot convey the colour of blood in his poem appropriately, I would say that this is to his discredit. Since he cannot evoke feelings, he resorts to sensationalism. I will call those persons young, who do not have to order for '*khoon*' at New Market to usher in their dawn.

In the paper *Banglar Kotha*, the poet's comments on the use of the word '*khoon*' were reported slightly differently. The *Banglar Kotha* report implied that the poet whose use of the word '*khoon*' to which Rabindranath took objection, was actually Nazrul Islam. And according to Sajanikanta Das' account in *Shanibarer Chithi*, Rabindranath has said:

> The other day I saw that a certain Bengali poet had used the word '*khoon*' instead of '*rakta*'.

Probashi reported that he said 'a Bengali Hindu poet' and other papers quoted him as saying 'a Bengali poet'. Naturally this raised Nazrul's hackles. On the 22nd of May 1926 [beginning of the Bengali year 1333], Nazrul had written *Kandari Hushiar* and had even sung it for Rabindranath. Shortly after that it appeared in the papers too. In the song it is written: