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## Position of Woman in Dak's Sayings of Assam, India

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### **Abstract:**

*Though it is not known for sure whether he existed or not, and if existed, where and when did he live, a large number of pithy sayings in Assamese are attributed to Dak or Dakpurus. The Dak's sayings in verse are indispensable part of Assamese folk culture and they cover almost all aspects of Assamese life. Dak is called the Veda Vyasa of Assam, and Assamese folk people seek answers to many complex questions of life in Dak's sayings.*

*Dak has made many remarks on women and many of his sayings are still used as the standard for judging women's nature and character. Apart from commenting on the symptoms of good woman and bad woman, Dak also comments on the symptoms of an ideal wife. Dak makes his value judgment on woman basically on the basis of her physical beauty and noble birth, and her loyalty to her husband. To Dak, an ideal woman worships her husband all day and night-*

→ *swaamik puje godholi raati,*

→ *sehise naari laksmi jaati.*

*(Who worships her husband all day and night/ She is the woman of Lakshmi's class)*

*She is expected to be extremely tolerant, who never opposes her husband-*

→ *swaami jadi khange kare dhikkaar,*

→ *suniyaa tathaapi nede uttar.*

*(If husband scolds her/ She will not even give any answer)*

*She has to be confined within the four boundaries of her house-*

→ *jito naari fure haate ghaate,*

→ *taako eriu kahilo Dake.*

*(The woman who goes to market/ Should be avoided, says Dak)*

*Under any circumstance, the ideal woman is as humble as a slave-*

→ *namra vaabe thaake jehen daasi,*

→ *sajal nayan naahishe haasi.*

*(She is as humble as a slave/ Wet eyes with no smile)*

*But do these sayings hold impartial view on women as a whole, or do they justify the freedom that Assamese women enjoy in their day-to-day life? Did Dak say something which is not relevant to Assamese women? Do Dak's sayings encourage subjugation of women by men? Was he an advocate of patriarchy? The paper will focus on all these issues.*

**Keywords:** *bad women, good women, folk culture, subjugation, patriarchy*

### **1. Introduction**

Though it is not known for sure whether he existed or not, and if existed, where and when did he live, a large number of pithy sayings in Assamese are attributed to Dak or Dakpurus. The Dak's sayings in verse are indispensable part of Assamese folk culture and they cover almost all aspects of Assamese life. Dak is called the Veda Vyasa of Assam, and Assamese folk people seek answers to many complex questions of their day-to-day life in Dak's sayings. Similar types of sayings are also found in Bengali, Maitheli and in some other languages of northern India. A large number of such sayings in Bengali are attributed to both Dak and Khana, and though some of them are of general interest, most of them are related to agriculture. But in case of Assam, all those sayings are attributed to Dak alone. According to D. C. Sarcar, "Khana is derived from Sanskrit 'Ksanada'- Prakrit 'Khana', meaning an astrologer, while Dak may be taken to mean 'A proclamation' and Dakpurush 'an announcer of proclamations'." (Dutta, 2013:154)

There is a good deal of controversies regarding whether Dak and Khana are personal names or not. Some people think that it was a name applied to a class of tantric Buddhist teachers. It is however difficult to accept the suggestion, since Dak's sayings are popular even in areas where tantric Buddhist influence never spread. A similar type of tradition is also found in Uttar Pradesh, which is attributed not to Dak but to Ghagh. "Ghagh" means "a clever old or wise man."

In Bengal and Bihar, Dak is considered to belong to milkman community. In Assam, Dak was considered to belong to a potter family and born at Lehidangra, now named as Lauhagaon, situated almost seven miles to the south of Barpeta. D. C. Sarcar says- "It is said that the potter girl, who was barren, received a boon from Mihira, an astronomer of Ujjain and gave birth of Dak. But one of the Assamese aphorisms represents Dak as a member of Brahmana community. Such disparity no doubt goes against the genuineness of the legends. Moreover, if Dak was a historical personage, then his sayings must have been composed in a single regional language of India." (Sarcar, 2013: 156)

Dak's origin remains veiled in mystery. It is also assumed that Dak came to be a symbol of wisdom to which many popular sayings and utterances of wit and wisdom were ascribed. At the same time, some of them who consider Dak as an individual, also believe that Dak was named so, because he was able to talk to his mother immediately after his birth-

*upajiwe māwaka dile dāk,  
sehise kārane tāra nāma thoilā Dak.*

(Talked to his mother just after his birth/ Therefore he was called Dak)

## 2. Woman in Dak's Sayings

The Dak's sayings can be considered as one of the earliest collection of folk literature of Assam. Though the date has not yet been finally fixed, it is assumed that Dak's sayings belonged to the sixth century. Scholars however, differ in their opinion about it.

Dak's didactic compositions are mostly in verse forms. Dak's sayings tell folk people how to behave properly, when to do or not to do something; they also give many useful advices relating to agriculture, marriage, social relations, etc. These compositions are significant for the account they give of customs, beliefs and rules of conduct prevailing in the regions concerned from early times.

Dak has made many remarks on women and many of his sayings are still used as the standard for judging women's nature and character. Apart from commenting on the symptoms of good woman and bad woman, Dak also comments on the symptoms of an ideal wife.

### 2.1. Symptoms of Good Woman

Dak views woman basically as a wife and makes his value judgment primarily on the basis of her physical beauty and noble birth. An ideal woman has to be soft spoken and fully obedient not only to her husband, but also to her in-laws. Apart from being beautiful, she must be able to prepare delicious food, observe the rites and rituals properly and serve her husband and guests-

*suddha vāye suddha banse utpatti,  
swāmi bina nāi anyata mati.  
madhura bachana bule sadāi,  
swāmira bākya kichu nepelāi.  
loma saru, danta saru, lābanya māt,  
grihe bāti dei sandhyā belāt.  
randhana karaya byanjana mista,  
sei grihinika bulaya ista.  
sāsurika sudhi kare jata karma,  
sei nārīka nachāre dharma.  
swāmika sewā atithika puje,  
sei nārī sukha bhoga bhunje.*

(Legally born in a good family,/ Not interested in anyone other than her husband.

Always speaks sweetly,/ Never disobeys her husband.

Tiny hair on her body, small teeth, sweet voice, / Lights lamp to pray at dusk.

Cooks delicious dishes,/ She is the wife in real sense.

Takes mother-in-law's permission to do anything,/ Religion never leaves such woman.

Serves her husband, worships guests,/ That woman enjoys pleasure and happiness.)

According to Dak, to a good woman, her husband is her supreme lord, and it is her holy duty to serve him all day and night-

*swāmika puje godholi rāti,  
sehise nārī laksmī jāti.*

(Who worships her husband all day and night,/ She is the woman of Lakshmi's class)

*āpona swāmīta sadāya mana  
swāmika dekhe jena Nārāyana*

(Thinks only of her own husband,/ Considers him to be lord Narayana.)

*nitānta swāmīra sewe charan  
bolaya Dak-e sateera lakshan*

(Always serves at the feet of her husband,/ Dak says it's the symptom of a chaste woman.)

A good woman never expresses her dissatisfaction under any circumstance; contrarily, when her husband becomes angry with her, she remains silent. She is always as humble as slave and tolerates all bad behaviours of her husband with a smiling face. She never reports the cruelties or misdeeds of her husband to anyone, and if she must have to say something, she will hide the faults of her husband-

*khangata swāmiye kare dhikkār*  
*hena dekhi kicho nobole ār.*  
*namra hoiyā thāke jehena dāshi*  
*sajala nayana nāhike hāshi.*

(If husband condemns her in anger, / Looking at this, says nothing.

As humble as a slave, / Wet eyes with no smile)

*jene tene swāmika gochāye rosha,*  
*Dak-e bule tāta moi santosha.*

(By any means persuades her husband to give up anger,/ Dak says, I am satisfied with that.)

*nāhi mātbol nakare dbandba,*  
*khangata tolāleleu nobole manda.*

(Neither speaks nor quarrels, / Does not speak ill even in anger.)

*dāngara khangato hānhi thākaya,*  
*alpa kari sāhu-sahurata kaya.*

(Keeps smiling even at great fury,/ Reveals less to the parents in-law.)

## 2.2. Symptoms of Bad Woman

Dak believes that a woman should not cross the four boundaries of her house and never looks at anyone's face other than her husband's. She should not go to market, and if she goes somewhere, she should be hurry to return. Woman, who does not care these restrictions, can be considered as bad woman and must be avoided at any cost, Dak advises-

*olāi jāi nāhe sonkāle,*  
*sei dustā stree bule sakale.*  
*jito streera sadāya āula bāula kesa,*  
*sadāya kandala kare nisesa.*

(Goes out and does not return soon, / She is called bad woman by all.

Woman with untidy hair, / Destroys everything by always quarrelling.)

*bhāl krisi nasta haye māje haya bāt,*  
*bhāl tiri nasta haye nite kare hāt*

(Good crops are spoiled if people pass through it, / Good woman is spoiled, by going to market regularly.)

*jito nāri fure hāte ghāte,*  
*tāko eriu kahilo Dak-e.*

(The woman who goes to market/ Should be avoided, says Dak)

*ghare dharafara bāhire jāi,*  
*para purusara phure mukha sāi.*

(Restless at home, goes out, / Shows interest in other man.)

Again, Dak does not permit any entertainment for woman. If a woman sings even in isolation, Dak calls her ugly-

*mānuh nahale gāwaya geet,*  
*sei nāri jānā kutchit.*

(Sings song when alone, / That woman is ugly one.)

Dak says that a woman should keep smiling when her husband scolds her; but if she keeps smiling otherwise, she should be considered as a bad woman and must be avoided-

*sadāya hāsi mukhata nere,*  
*Dak-e bole tāika nathoibā ghare.*

(Who always keeps smiling, / Dak says, she should not be kept at home.)

Dak admires woman who can cook well, but her duty is only to cook for her family. She should be satisfied with whatever she gets to eat, if a woman asks for more, she should be sold out, Dak advises-

*gharata bastu khāi khujiyā,*  
*Dak-e bole tāika phelo bechiyā.*

(Asks for more food at home, / Dak says, she should be sold out.)

### 3. Conclusion

Dak's sayings are important part of Assamese folk literature, and part and parcel of Assamese folk life. Though stated long ago, some of them are still found to relevant and considered as guiding lines in Assamese folk life. But unfortunately, most of the Dak's sayings in relation to woman are found to be gender-bias. Dak's sayings seem to advocate in favour of patriarchy, which believes that woman is basically meant for man's pleasure and she should be evaluated on the basis of her physical beauty-

*kshurak chinibā sānat,*

*streek chinibā snānat.*

(Recognize a knife, when it is sharpened, / Recognize a woman at her bath.)

*bikata badana dekhi kubesh,*

*tāka kakhano nakarāās.*

(Ugly face with unpleasant look, / Never expect her.)

A woman should charm man with her physical beauty, cook delicious food for him, and in return, she has to be satisfied with whatever she gets. She does not have any right to live a life of her own. A woman should be perfectly obedient not only to her husband, but also to her in-laws. She should be extremely tolerant and must not react to any injustice done to her. Even if her husband treats her badly, she should bear it with smile. She has no right even to express her joys, as she should neither sing, nor smile. A woman, who behaves herself like a slave, is considered as an ideal woman in Dak's sayings.

All we know that unlike many parts of India, in the north-east India, women have been enjoying great freedom from ancient times. Here, women are usually not subjugated but treated with equal dignity with that of men. In Assam as well as in entire north-east India, both men and women cultivate their fields, collect fire-woods from forest and run their households together. There are comparatively fewer cases of female feticide, domestic violence and dowry in this corner of India. In such situations, Dak's sayings may not justify the freedom that Assamese women have been enjoying in their day-to-day life. This type of irrelevance may highlight the question of the origin of Dak, was he an Assamese? Further study requires.

### 4. References

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