CHAPTER IV

THE ASSAMESE EDITIONS OF THE ǮĀK-VACANAS

I. General Remarks on Different ṇāk-vacanas Edited by the Assamese Scholars.

Ǯāk-vacanas have been drawing the attention not only of the illiterate or uneducated folk, but of the scholars as well in the Assamese society. As the number of sāncipāt or tulāpāt manuscripts of the Ǯāk-vacanas both complete and incomplete reveal the width and intensity of the interest of the folk to it, so the number of edited (printed) versions of them reveal the same thing from the end of the learneds or scholars. N.C. Sarma in the preface of his book (Ǯāk-Pravacan) has mentioned that he came across seven copies of manuscripts of Ǯāk-vacanas in different institutions of Guwahati itself although there are records of few more copies. We believe that throughout Assam there are still many more copies of manuscripts containing Ǯāk-vacanas yet to come to light. However, our concern is about the edited versions of the Ǯāk-vacanas. Till now we have the record of six edited versions of Ǯāk-vacanas in Assamese, but we could come across four of them only barring two which could not be collected owing to their inavailability. A general remark on each of the versions are given below.

(1) From the view point of antiquity of publication, the sayings of Ǯāk incorporated in the Asamiyā Sāhityar Cāneki (Vol. I) compiled and edited by Pandit Hem Chandra Goswami and published in between 1923 - 29 A.D.¹ is the first one as per the information of published

editions available to us. But owing to inavailability of the book, a thorough study of the text and of the opinion of the editor if there was any, could not be possible. However some thirty two sayings from this book are found quoted as footnotes to show the variations of text in the book entitled *Sampūrṇa Ḍākar Vacan* edited by Hemarath Barman. The text of this edition seems to be comparatively modern and the style of orthography used in this text is based on the modern orthography of the Assamese language. Moreover this is the first text of the sayings of Ḍāk in Assamese which puts Ḍāk in the milkman community\(^2\). This representation also is against the popular belief that Ḍāk belonged to the potter community. It is difficult to accept. Because unlike in Northern India milkman was never a professional community in Assam. Therefore, this change of the community of Ḍāk might occur in some of the Assamese manuscripts by interpolation inspired by the tradition of Ḍāk prevalent in other provinces, e.g., Bengal, Bihar etc. Then it might so happen that the editor without going to careful scrutiny of the text, just have incorporated the text of one manuscript whatever he got. Therefore, mainly for these two reasons, i.e., the mordernity or reformation of the orthography and contradiction of a popular belief, the authenticity of the text of the said edition is questionable.

(2) The collection of Ḍāk-vacanas entitled Ḍāk-Carit bā Ḍāk-Bhanitā edited by Shivanath Bhattacharyya is the second in chronological order. It was published by Bhattacharyya Agency, Dibrugarh (Assam) in 1931 A.D.

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2. Barman, 11.: *Sampūrṇa Ḍākar Vacan*, P. 50 (Kindly see the foot note.)
Before the beginning of the text there is a Sanskrit hymn (śloka) praying Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The text begins with paying regards to god Jagannatha and goddess Saraswati as well as respect to his (i.e., of the copyist) guru.

Although it is claimed that the book is edited, in fact in the text, there is no mark of editing whatsoever. Of course, in the introduction the editor confesses that notwithstanding his utmost endeavour by comparing one old sāncipāt manuscript and two Assamese and Bengali books, the faults could not be removed for none of these materials being authentic for the purpose. The editor does not give any further detailed account about the manuscript or the two books he consulted. The text has been accepted as per the editor's own consideration.

The book comprises of only thirteen chapters, and therefore appears to be the smallest edition so far published and available. The style of arranging the text is not the common one generally used in writing verse. What we mean is that the style of arranging the text is horizontal (like prose writing) against the common practice of vertical arrangement although the composition is obviously versified. Of course, this style was in vogue in the days of writing in sāncipāt.

While the mode of expression of the language bears some traces of folk-speech, the orthography is comparatively modern which is traditional Sanskrit grammar oriented. śatru (enemy), praśanīsā (praise),
āśā (hope ), brṣṭi (rain,shower ), randhansāl (kitchen ), sītkāl (winter season ), nīrdhanī (poor), nārī (woman ) are some of the words used in the book which show the orthography as Sanskrit grammar oriented.

Moreover, the chapters in the book are not very orderly arranged. Some sayings included in another chapter in other books have been included in another different chapter here. As for example, a separate chapter called Nyāya prakaraṇa has been included in other books. But in this book the chapter has been omitted and the sayings have been added to the chapter Dharma prakaraṇa. While in other books there is only one chapter on Nīti prakaraṇa (i.e., ethical sayings or moral sayings), in this book there are two chapters on the same subject - matter, namely Nīti prakaraṇa and Nīti kathā. In the latter chapter, i.e., Nīti kathā, some such sayings are there which are not found in any other version of Ṇak-vacanas. As for example,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kaḥ pātra bhagā bhāl bajālaj cini } & \\
\text{sākṣi kale cinibā kimānar jñāni } & / \text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

—Bell - metal pot is known by sound whether good or bad, people are known how much wise when as witness stand;—

Next three consecutive sayings alongwith this one are found to be the text of an Assamese poem 'Ketiyā kāk cini' written by Baladeva Mahanta. This proves that even some writings of modern writers also have crept

3. Bhattacharyya, S.: Ṇak-carit, P. 27
into the sayings of Dāk particularly in this edition.

One of the most notable point is that the chapter on astrological sayings (Jyotiṣa prakaraṇa) is comparatively shorter in this edition than in other editions and the astrological sayings are in fact very few in number. Moreover, among the astrological sayings there is a riddle found only in this edition and as per our assessment that too with no astrological bearing. The text is as follows:

 hari hari dajtale bai yai nai /
aṁār kapâle yi bhajî si bhajî pakṣīgaṁ thâkiba kai //
dāl bhâṅgilo phal bhakṣilo lâde putilo kāyâ /
subṛkṣak āśray karîlo maroteo nerâilo dāyā //
reba candana, nakara krandana, baḍate seo pāi /
āsila nagâre, paśila sāgare, ebe bhajîla yuvatî sahāî.

Another notable feature in this edition is that the book has been edited in the style of Vaisnavite books of Assam. It has been said before about the Sanskrit hymn presented before the beginning of the text which bears the Vaisnavite features like prayer to Sri Krishna, salutations to Vaisnavite god and goddess and offering respect to the guru. Moreover seven chapters out of the total thirteen ended with Vaisnavite colophones eulogising the Kṛṣṇanāma or Rāmānāma to evade the effects of sin, reminding the readers to pronounce them.

Considering the points discussed above it can be said that this edition of Dāk-vacanas is not a complete one, full of interpolations.

and comparatively of a much later period and hence devoid of much authenticity or reliability.

(3) *Dāk Carit*, published by Agency Co. Dibrugarh, in 1944 was another publication of the sayings of *Dāk* and from the viewpoint of antiquity of publication it was perhaps the third in order. But because of non-availability of the publication at present, no discussion thereupon could be furnished. But what could be guessed from the record is that since the book had been introduced to the readers with the name of the publishing farm only without the name of an editor, no editing was perhaps done upon. If that be so then the publication was simply a printing affair.

(4) *Dākar Vacan* edited by Dandi Ram Dutta is the fourth edition from the viewpoint of antiquity of publication and was published by Lawyers' Book Stall, Guwahati in 1961 A.D.

The editor has consulted as good as nine versions of the sayings of *Dāk* including both manuscripts and printed materials for editing the text. Therefore, it can be said that the quantum of the sayings included in the book is satisfactory.

In respect of editing style it can be said that there was ample scope for further improvement of the edition. The text edited by the editor is full of repetitions and these repetitions took place not only in respect of certain sayings but in respect of few chapters for the want of a proper editing method. Of the nine versions, the editor consulted
only two versions for fixing the text. In the cases of two varied texts, the editor instead of fixing the text systematically, had resorted to the easiest way of retaining both the texts differentiating as separate chapters marked as 'Ka' and 'Kha' respectively from both the manuscripts under the same caption. Therefore, the total number of chapters have unnecessarily been increased. Infact, fixing one text as per the editor's conviction, the major variations could have been shown basing on different versions and this would have been the accepted method of editing. Moreover, the versions of the texts have not been adequately introduced as to which two of the nine versions the editor has accepted as the manuscripts 'Ka' and 'Kha' respectively.

The editor declares that the orthography and the structure of the sentences have been kept according to those of the manuscripts. Therefore, the language may represent the spoken form of the rural folk. But one saying has become incomprehensible because of being a mixture of Sanskrit śloka and Assamese saying, i.e.,

\[
yiba \ s\text{it } san\text{āsamya } k\text{uja } bhomārkarāndha / \\
i \text{tinit } k\text{ari } lagna \ rāśicakra \ prapātae \ //
\]

The editor should have given the interpretation of the saying since it is incomprehensible in nature for its language-anomaly.

The editor has done a good job by giving notes on the obsolete and most colloquial words used in the sayings. Few of the wordnotes

7. Dutta: Loc-cit
8. Ibid : P. 3
expounded by the editor appears to be wrong and therefore the concerned sayings appear to be unintelligible. One such saying goes thus:

\[
tini \text{ ekādaśī dopakh dine} / \\
śak śagune nākhāi ghine //
\]

— If the eleventh day (ekādaśī tithi) happens to occur thrice within two fortights (i.e., thirty days or one month) such a massacre takes place that even the vultures hate to eat corpses —

Here, the term dopakh dine has been explained as "two fortights or 15 days " But it is a common knowledge that the duration of one fortnight is 15 (fifteen) days. Therefore 'two fortights' comprise of 30 (thirty) days and not of 15 (fifteen ) days as explained.

Thus again the note on the word basyakāl is noteworthy in the following saying:

\[
dekhi śūlapāṇi mane ānanda labhilā / \\
paṅcam māsata basyakāl prāpta bhajilā //
\]

—Seeing the progress, Sulapani the Baishya, became happy and he died incidentally in the fifth month.—

Here the spelling of the word basya should have been bajśya as it was so written before to indicate the individual Śūlapāṇi by name belonging

9. Ibid : P. 26
10. Ibid : P.42
to the caste professing on business. If the nominative word baśya is drawn out aside from the noted term (i.e., baśyakāl) and the notable term is accepted as kālprāpta then only the given meaning (i.e., the father has died: of course father of the still unborn son) appears comprehensive. Again, the literal interpretation of the sentence does not any way warrant the use of the term the father to indicate the person concerned as the father of the still unborn son, because the sentence paṇcam māsat baśya kālprāpta bhajā means by itself that the baśya expires in the fifth month. Therefore, it appears that the word baśyakāl and the note given to it as the father has died are not befitting enough to the sense conveyed by the text. In fact, had there not been the distorted composition, no word note would have been necessary to understand the text.

This edition only bears a special feature that by way of illustration of certain saying a story has been told. Notwithstanding having many auspicious omens on most of the limbs, one ominous omen on a certain limb can make them all futile. This has been illustrated by representing the story of the son of someone Sulapani Baśhya11 that despite having all the royal symptoms on his limbs his life became miserable by loosing his father while he was at his mother's womb and being the son of a rich merchant too he had to live on alms for his tongue being charcoal black and a mark like a crow-leg impression on his palate. Since this story is not found in any other available edition whether printed or manuscript, this might be a later interpolation.

11. Ibid: Pp. 41-46
The chapters no 37 & 38 namingly Oparaṇci i.e., Appendix and Prācin saṅkhyā gaṇanār kathā i.e., 'the old method of calculating numbers' should have been authenticated by mentioning the source. Moreover, some of the sayings of the 37th chapter (i.e., Appendix) are found in other chapters sporadically, hence they are repeated. By careful scrutiny the editor could have avoided such repetitions.

The edition has been enriched with a prefatory note. It has been tried in this note to evaluate the efficacy of the sayings of Daśk, their origin and universality. Of course, the editor was under wrong impression that Daśkārṇava, the manuscript found in the royal library of Nepal contained the sayings of Daśk. But this book written in Sanskrit, in fact is a collection of some doctrines of the Sahajayān cult of Buddhism and meaning the omniscients of the same cult by the word Daśk. However, the attempt of enriching the edition has been sincerely substantiated by reproducing the article "The sayings of Daśk" by D.C. Sircar, published in Pragjyotisa, Souvenir, All India Oriental Conference, XXII Session, Gauhati, Assam, January, 1965. Moreover, the edition has been more informative about Daśk, the sayings and the endeavours of different scholars in studying them for appending the list of manuscripts of Daśk-vacanas and different books and articles on Daśk and the sayings.

(5) The book being the collection of the sayings of Daśk named Sampūrṇa Daśkar Vacan compiled and edited by Hemarath Barman and published by Gauhati Book Stall, Gauhati - 3 in 1977 is another available edition at present. The book is introduced as "a selection of literary Review about DAKA" but ' review ' in the sense of 'critical
evaluation' is not done here. Simply a seemingly standard text of the sayings of Śāk had been tried to determine by collating few manuscripts and printed texts.

There is no content index in the book and the text is divided into two parts. In the first part the birth and death of Śāk and the meeting with Varahmihiara have been described. The aphoristic arguments between Varahmihiara and Śāk regarding the former's right over the latter in respect of paternity are very interesting and found so elaborately only in this book. From the description of the chapter it can be understood that the materials, narrated in this chapter appear to be the composition of much later period. The second part contains the text of the sayings and these are divided into 22 (twenty two) chapters, but the last chapter Jyotiṣa prakaraṇā is not numbered. This chapter is again subdivided into 4 (four) sub-titles, such as, (ka) Koṣṭhī i.e., horoscope, (kha) Grahan i.e., eclipse, (ga) Des-kāl-pātra (place-time-people) and (gha) Jīvan-marāṇ. (life & death).

So far the number of the sayings are concerned, this edition appears to be a satisfactory collection although some repetitions are also found there. The major deficiency of the book is the want of an editorial note ('Preface' or 'Introduction' whatever be it called). The editor has not given any idea regarding the style of editing. Hence, it is not known what principle had been adopted in the process of editing. For determining the text, it is seen that the editor has compared six sources, but these sources have not been introduced to the readers. Simply these have been mentioned in footnotes only in abbreviations where the variations of text have to be shown. The name of one of
these six sources is not mentioned even in abbreviations. It can therefore be guessed that this source is not of written form, but the sayings are popularly current in oral transmission in a society the editor is well aware of. Of the rest five sources the one marked with the abbreviation 'ya. da' is incomprehensive and thus unidentifiable at least to us. It has also not been indicated which one of the six source texts was accepted as the exemplar text for determining or restructuring the text. The editor invariably follows modern Assamese grammar in fixing the orthography of the text. It can therefore be said that the orthography of the edition has failed to represent or to indicate the antiquity of the sayings. However, the arrangement of the chapters in the edition are generally satisfactory.

(6) Ḍāk-Pravacan, the compilation and critically edited text of the sayings of Ḍāk by N.C.Sarma is most probably the latest publication on the subject and is published by Bani Prakash, Guwahati, in 1987.

Amongst all the published editions of Ḍāk-vacanas in Assamese till now, this one undoubtedly deserves the praise as the most learned work. The book contains a scholarly Introduction wherein besides giving the key-note to the subject as well as the findings of the study, the principle of editing followed has been clearly laid down that in determining the text, the oldest available manuscript has been accepted as the exemplar text and the variations have been shown from the other manuscripts and printed materials as per the method of textual criticism. But quite reasonably and honestly the editor confesses that

12. Barman, H.: Sampūrya Ḍākar Vacan (Kindly see the footnotes in the pages no. 11,12,15,19 etc)
for ḍāk not being a historical figure, for not having any original composition of the sayings written by ḍāk himself and for want of uniformity in subject-matter, division of chapters, language and vocabularies etc. amongst different manuscripts, it is not only difficult but impossible to determine the critically edited text. However the author has fixed for the first time an authentic text of the sayings of ḍāk in Assamese. As on one hand the amount of the sayings is satisfactory in this edition, so on the other hand the orthography is consistent to the language, intellectual standard of the author(s) and time of composition.

Besides determining an authentic text of the sayings of ḍāk, the excellence of the edition lies in the chapters containing critical analysis. While other scholars kept on guessing that ḍāk might not be a historical figure nor an individual author, Sarma for the first time resolving the mystery of the character, has convincingly established in this book that ḍāk is a tradition pervading throughout different regions of India. The book contains in its critical analysis part the resolution derived from sociological angle of study that the sayings on agriculture, astrology etc. are not the composition of any single individual nor of any learned man, but the composition of an agrarian folk society (i.e., of multiple authors) running in oral transmission and ultimately attributed to one fictitious character. Discussing about the different regional traditions of ḍāk and by comparison showing their similarities with the Assamese tradition, the Assamese sayings of ḍāk have been put in an all-India perspective. It is therefore perhaps the only book in any Indian language

till now containing so threadbare discussion about the tradition of Ṛāk with all its regional versions.

As the product of a tradition, the possible origin of the sayings, association of different tales or legends to it, their mode of transmission, function, relevance and popularity and their currency have been discussed at length. The author hinted that the sayings being the product of a tradition pervading in depth in a society cannot remain restricted to a limited number so long the tradition survives, rather new sayings are bound to be composed and in fact are being composed\textsuperscript{14}. Such latter sayings are not yet set on paper. The author records some of such sayings as appendix.

The chapters containing explanation of some sayings and linguistic study on the sayings attach more weightage to the book. It is really a scholarly endeavour to deal with these topics. The list of the informants proves the width of the network the author has worked through and the bibliography proves the patience and desire of the author to delve deep into the matter. For all these qualities the edition earns the distinction of being the best amongst all the editions of Ṛāk-vacanas till now.

However one thing draws the attention in this edition. The chapter number thirteen, namely Jyotiṣa prakaraṇa (i.e., astrology) as arranged in the book is too short and has ended only with defining the eclipses. Of course, there is a sub-title indicating the content being eclipse. But

\textsuperscript{14} Sarma, N.C.: Ṛāk-Pravacan, (Introduction) P. 07 & also at P. 203
astrology is not restricted only to eclipses. On the other hand the chapter number fourteen, namely, यमाग्न्त kathana (description of fatal conjunctions of stars) is too long spanning more than twenty two pages. यमाग्न्त kathana can not be so longer as the subject indicates. From the saying number seven, the chapter contains the tips of horoscope reading. In fact यमाग्न्त kathana ends at the saying number six of the chapter15 and another sub-chapter should have begun thereafter indicating the text as about horoscope reading16. For not being that, it seems from this edition that यमाग्न्त kathana forms the lion's share of astrology barring a little something about grahana (the eclipses) while kṣiṭhi-phala (horoscope reading) is nothing of that (for having no mention of it). But this is in fact not so. Like grahana, यमाग्न्त kathana and kṣiṭhi-phala are also two subjects within the fold of astrology or ज्योतिष prakaraṇa. Therefore, like grahana, यमाग्न्त kathana also should have been presented with the pertinent sayings only as a sub-chapter of astrology arranging the rest of the text in another sub-chapter indicating kṣiṭhi-phala. The present erroneous arrangement has caused omission of no saying, but of a sub-title leading to misintroduction of subject-matter.

Another notable point of this edition is that of the twenty four chapters the titles of the first eighteen are written in Sanskrit and of the rest six are written in Assamese, thus lacking the uniformity of language. This lacking although existed in the manuscripts, could have been very well removed by the expert editing hand of the author.

16. Kindly compare the text with 'Dākar Vacan (D. Dutta) at P. 125 & Sampūrṇa Dākar Vacan (H. Barman) at P. 74

11.i. Theme:

The number of manuscripts as well as of the printed editions of the sayings of Ṭāk may indicate the wide range of popularity of the sayings. The principal reason behind this enormous popularity lies in its theme that the sayings hardly contain any intellectual pursuit or any philosophical doctrine of high order, but it contains the things concerning life and aspirations of the rural folk. The subjects like religion (Dharma prakarana), justice (Nyāya prakarana), ethics or morality (Nīti prakarana), politics (Rājanyādi prakarana or Rājanīti prakarana), astrology (Jyotiṣa prakarana), medicine and regimen (Dravyaguna kathana) are also brought down to the folk level and described as per ordinary observation although these could be and in fact are the pursuits of higher intellectual competence. The astrological part of the sayings and even certain sayings having bearing on agriculture are likely to have had their inspiration in Sanskrit works. The works of Varahmihi and Parasara are strong enough evidences in this respect. But there are every reason to believe that they are neither mere imitations nor translations but subjects moulded to satisfy the taste and interest of the folk society and by itself. It can therefore, precisely be said that the theme of the Ṭāk-vacanas may reflect the aspirations of mundane life as conceived by the folk society in terms of the world as seen.

In respect of formulation of chapters there is no uniformity among the different manuscripts and hence among the printed editions also. Even three or four chapters in one edition are found comprised in one single chapter in another edition. Again in the chapters having one single title in some editions are quite often found to be different in respect of the content, also varying both in number and texts of the sayings in some other editions. Moreover in some editions some chapters are obviously omitted. Therefore in different editions of Ḍāk-vacanas the number of chapters are found from thirteen to thirty seven. While the edition edited by Shivanath Bhattacharyya contains thirteen chapteres, the edition edited by Dandiram Dutta contains thirty seven chapters. Similarly the edition edited by N.C. Sarma contains twenty four chapters which may be mentioned as followed (in translated terms): (1) birth, (2) religion, (3) justice, (4) ethics and morality, (5) politics (6) cooking and culinary (7) characteristics of good house - wife (8) avoidables (9) portents of rain (10) characteristics of bullocks (11) order of ploughing (12) portents of rice (agriculture ), (13) astrology (14) description of fatal conjunctions (of stars ), (15) portents of a move (16) ideal setting of home (17) medicine and regimen, (18) portents of the serpents (Nāgalakṣana), (19) omens of gifted persons, (21) omens of women (22) stick and handles (of different implements) etc. (23) uses of a stick (24) appendix: birth and death of Ḍāk.

Whatever disuniformity be there in the formulation of chapters among different editions of Ḍāk-vacanas, there is one uniformity in all of them that the texts begin with the chapter on birth (i.e., Janma prakarana). In some editions it is prolonged combining with the birth story of Ḍāk and in others it is in the nature of generalised sayings
stating advices for nursing both the baby and the mother in childbirth.

The mundane interest of life wants prosperity of life and wealth and the Dak-vacanas lay the principles for achievement of them as envisaged by the folk society concerned. For gaining prosperity in terms of life the sayings contained in the chapters like Janma prakaraṇa, Gṛhinī lakṣāṇa, Nārīr lakṣāṇa, Supuruṣa lakṣāṇa are believed to have directed the ways and means. For gaining prosperity in terms of wealth, the same purpose was believed to have served by the sayings contained in the chapters like Barśādi lakṣāṇa, Brśa lakṣāṇa, Halabāhana krama, Anna (kṛṣi) lakṣāṇa, etc., because the main stress was laid upon agriculture as the backbone of economy. But it is also believed that peace and happiness, progress and prosperity do not rely only on human endeavour. Fatalistic outlook led to believe that fate, luck, fortune or destiny plays a great role behind human endeavour. Thus comes the dependence on astrology as an effective tool to resolve the mystery of future and this is revealed in the chapters like Jyotiṣa- prakaraṇa, Yamaghaṇṭa kathana, Yātrā lakṣāṇa, Gṛha lakṣāṇa. Nāga lakṣāṇa etc. The chapters like Randhana prakaraṇa, Parityāga kathana, Tōkan, Nāl ādi, Tōkanar gun etc. are the statement of things derived from the day-to-day experiences of life. The chapters Dharma prakaraṇa, Nyāya prakaraṇa, Nīti prakaraṇa and Rājanyādi prakaraṇa are somewhat superficial as per the titles, rather they may be called some mere code of conduct for working in the concerned fields. However, these sayings reveal the standard of intellectual attainment of the concerned society that it was not so high a level to grapple the things in minute detail and depth in terms of present-day standard.
II.ii Nature:

The nature of the *Dāk-vacanas* is a worth discussing point. They are obviously versified descriptions but not poetry in the true sense.

Defining 'aphorism' in the words of John Morley that the essence of an aphorism is the compression of a mass of thought into a single saying, the sayings of *Dāk* have been adequately assessed as of an aphoristic character. Morley further says that—*an aphorism is good sense brought to a point*; and thus the sayings of *Dāk* are a stock of good senses articulated in points. This is of course a convincing analysis of the character or nature of the sayings of *Dāk*. Goswami further observes:

*Some of the sayings are of the nature of maxims, in that they enjoin rules of conduct.*

Although from the viewpoint of nature or character, aphorisms and maxims apparently differ a little, still they bear uniformity in one respect. This is that they are usually an expression of cultural sanctions. Therefore, the sayings of *Dāk* are the revelations of cultural sanctions of the society to the matters they relate. Hence the sayings, even if conceived and composed by some individuals they do not remain individualistic outlook, but entirely social.

From the style of composition it is obvious that the sayings are not the composition of highly talented persons, but of those who are simply literate. The sayings of *Dāk* are mainly current in the folk society. Someone of the society records them in writing and adds some

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18. Goswami, P.: Folk Literature of Assam. P. 76.
19. Goswami: Loc-cit
20. Goswami: loc-cit
21. Sarma, N. C: op-cit: P. 07
more sayings. Again, the tendency to compose some other sayings on the basis of a particular aspect is also there. As for example in some manuscripts a sayings is found: \( \text{lājukā bāmun kāhuā cor.} \) (i.e., a bashful Brahmin and a cough - caught thief). But in \( \text{ojāpāli} \) singing, particularly in the brand of \( \text{biyāh - gowā ojāpāli} \) current in the district of Darang, this sayings is current as \( \text{lājukā : ojā kāhuā cor} \) (i.e., a bashful \( qā. \) and a cough - caught thief ). Thus a sayings current in the tradition of \( \text{Dāk} \) has been changed slightly in respect of \( \text{ojāpāli} \) context. Thus, this \( \text{ojāpāli} \) art - form has contributed this sayings to the stock of Assamese oral literature inspired by the concerned \( \text{Dāk-vacana}. \) The important point is that, for the striking similarity of both the sayings, the latter one (i.e., the \( \text{ojāpāli} \) sayings.) also quite reasonably bears the possibility of being regarded as a \( \text{Dak-vacana}. \) There is no dearth of such sayings.

Although the sayings attributed to \( \text{Dāk} \) are not pure poetic creation, nevertheless they contain some poetic elements or rhetorics like simile, metaphor, allegory etc. The sayings reveal the oratorical nature of the folk society that it has a characteristic penchant for these literary or poetic elements alongwith parabolic and proverbial sayings to make the contentions convincing. The following sayings may reveal the particular spicy taste.

(a) **Allegory and also parabolic saying:**

\[
\text{kesari naṣṭa gel źipacik pusi}//^{23}
\]

—A lion meets its peril on the advice of a tipaci
i.e., a small bird.—

The morale conveyed by this allegory or parabolic saying is not
to rely on the inferior ones. Here the allegory is drawn from a parable
and therefore this kind of sayings may be called parabolic sayings.

(b) Simile:

āhine kāti rākhība pāni /
 jehen rākhe rājār rāni // 24

—In the field of rice cultivation water be kept
in the months of āhin and kāti in the manner a
king maintains his queen, i.e., with utmost care.—

(c) Metaphor:

lehir tiri pañca rāga buje /
bhaídār dāmrai binā singe yuje // 25

—The women - folk of the village Lehi (i.e.,
Lehidangarā) know the five kinds of love-
making art. A naive man (more specifically
speaking, an impotent ) needs to struggle for

24.Ibid : P.50
25.Ibid : P.94
having no adequate acumen against them.—

This interpretation of the saying may of course seem controversial. Because, this had been interpreted earlier as a saying indicating the intensity of the culture of music in the rural folk society of Assam that even the women-folk of Lehidangarā knew five rāgas i.e., five primary modes of music. But this interpretation appears to be a mistaken one since the context of the saying, the number-indicating word pañca associated to rāga as well as the metaphors like dāmrā and binā-sīnge have not been taken into consideration while interpreting the saying. Taking all these things into consideration we have thus interpreted the saying in the fullest possible perspective in a subsequent chapter while highlighting the men-women relationship as a pointer of the social situation.

It is undeniable that the concerned saying is highly metaphorical and the metaphors have been applied in the second line, i.e., bhaidār dāmrāi binā sīnge yuje. But the admissible fact is that such metaphorical sayings are not profusely found in the body of the Dak-vacanas.

Apart from allegory, parabolic sayings, simile and metaphor mythological examples are also used to make the sayings convincing eg.,

(a) bhādat kariyā kalā ropan / sabaiñse maril lainkār rāvana //

27. Infra : Chapter VII : 'Men and Women As Reflected in the Dāk-vacanas.'
—Planting plantain in the month of Bhāda, Ravana the king of Lanka, died with all his kith and kin.—

(b)

\[ bāme prṣṭi juguni pāi / \\
lanīkā jini rām ajodhyāk jāi \]  

—Getting the yogini (i.e., a female attendant of the goddess Durga, an ominous portent in astrology) on the left or behind ensures for one a great victory like Ramachandra's return to Ayodhya after conquering Lanka.—

Thus the examples drawn from the mythological references like 'Ravana's death' and 'Ramachandra's victory' as shown above have made the sayings more convincing and acceptable at least to the rural folk.

In discussing the nature of ḍāk-vacanas it may be a worthdiscussing point whether they may be called proverbs or not. The principal characteristic of a proverb is that it bears a hidden meaning quite different from the literal one. The meaning of a proverb is not said by the words but connoted and this connotation can be perceived totally only in respect of its context. Alan Dundes states:

—With regard to a proverb, one can see quite easily that what is unsaid is much more important

29. Ibid : P. 76
than what is said. In fact the text alone is almost meaningless to members of another culture. The nature of a proverb is further explained in the following words:

Most of the commonly used proverbs are metaphors drawn from daily life or the observation of nature or are terse summaries of experience.

Although the Dak-vacanas are the terse summaries of experience gathered from daily life or observation of nature, these are rather directly and clearly expressed. A hidden meaning is not generally injected to them with the help of metaphor. They are meant for and fully expressive with the literal meanings and hardly wait for any metaphorical or strictly contextual meaning. For this plainspeaking nature, the Dak-vacanas as a whole cannot be called proverbs. However, it is not entirely true that there is no saying of proverbial nature at all. The following few sayings can be cited as examples of sayings with proverbial nature:

(a) kesi naśta gel tipacik pusi / 32
(b) bhaidār daṁrāi bīnā siṅge yujel / 33
(c) gachat kathāl oṭhat tel /
   nāpāote ċelbel // 34

30. Essays in Folkloristics (Meerut, 1978), P. 38
32. The meaning explained in the text indicated by the foot note No. 23
33. The meaning explained in the text indicated by the foot note no. 25
34. & 35 Sarma, N.C. : op-cit (Introduction) P. 07
The jack-fruit is on the tree and oil massaged on the lips. One is harassed even not getting it, ie., to get fade-up with much expectations—

(d)  
ācei garu nābāwei hāl /  
thākātke bole nāthākāi bḥāl //

—There are bullocks but not ploughed, they are better not to have, ie., to express disgust or bitterness in respect of an useless burden—

Il.iii. Structure of the Ṛāk-vacanas:

The Ṛāk-vacanas are written in verse. The style presents a metre of two lines rhyming at the end. But this rhyming at the end is not an unavoidable necessity from the viewpoint of content, but only a style of expression and this style forms the basic structure of the Ṛāk-vacanas.

From the viewpoint of structure a Ṛāk-vacan is apparently completed in two sentences. But from the viewpoint of the completeness of sense, it is obvious that generally one vacan is completed in one sentence comprised of two lines. At the end of the first line the punctuation mark used is a single-stop (./) indicating a half-pause, for, the sentence is not completed there. The sentence gets completed at the end of the second line marked by double-stop indicating a full-pause.

The first line contains the introduction or condition leaving its resolution or instruction to the second line. Hence the saying gets completed in the second line with the fullest sense, eg.,

\[
\text{upajiyā ḍāke bolanta bāka /} \\
\text{powāti rākhi cāw putāk //}^{36}
\]

-Ḍāk tells immediately after his birth to look after the new born leaving the mother.—

It is noteworthy that the punctuation marks used in the ḍāk-vacanas are only of two kinds and these are single-stop and double-stop. The single-stop mark indicates the breath pause and the double-stop should indicate sense-pause. These are used at the end of a line and a sentence respectively and nowhere else in between. Of-course this is the usual characteristic of using punctuation marks in all old verse-texts.

But apart from the apparent characteristic of completion of one vacan or saying in one sentence of two lines, there are also enough examples of the vacanas being completed in four lines or more. In such cases it seems that one vacan gets completed in four lines or more but being one sentence only, eg.,

—about heating the navel of a new born :

\[
\text{eke kāṭhe lāri cāri /} \\
\text{dui kāṭhe phuk pāri //}
\]

36. Ibid : P.2
—Rolling round a single piece of wood (in fire), blowing the wind by mouth on two, taking three pieces together, get the fire caught and heat the navel as it needs.—

In this example, the sense is not completed at the end of the second line even though there is the double - stop mark. The verb *phuk pari*, i.e., 'blowing the wind by mouth' being in infinite form, the sense got completed in the fourth line and therefore the sentence as well as the *vacana* got extended to the fourth line for its completion. Then it appears that sometimes the double - stop punctuation mark also does not mean the completion of a sentence as well as of a *vacana*. Likewise, sometimes it is also seen that even a single - stop mark also indicates the completion of a *vacana* in one line from the viewpoint of completeness of sense conveyed although the rhyming sound warrants the subsequent or preceding line only for the interest of alliteration. But both the lines have their independent meanings, eg.,

(a)  

*parihara sukaṭi mācar jhol /*  
*parihara asati nārir kol*  

—Avoid dry-fish soup, avoid the company of an unchaste woman.—

37. Sarma : Loc-cit  
38. Ibid : P. 41
There is obviously no relation between dry-fish soup and the company of an unchaste woman. But both the things are avoidable for being tasteless and harmful. Of course there are plenty of such avoidable things and said as well in the concerned chapter. But it is seen that only for the interest of alliteration, two or more such explicitly unrelated statements are put together in the vacanas to achieve the structural completeness where as, only one such statement alone can be regarded as one complete vacan from the viewpoint of the sense conveyed in spite of the structural incompleteness. If much weightage is not given to the aspect of rhetoric, by breaking the alliteration every single statement of such a vacan can easily be converted to the prosaic form of an imperative sentence with all structural completeness requiring no re-arrangement of the words, eg.,

(i) \[ \text{parihara sukaṭi mācār jhol} \]  
——Avoid dry-fish soup.—

(ii) \[ \text{parihara asati nārir kol.} \]  
——Avoid the company of an unchaste woman etc.—

There is no uniformity in the number of letters in the lines. Although in most of the lines ten or eleven letters are found, there are also lines containing eight to fourteen letters. The metre of the vacanas are syllabic verse with a rhyme at the end.

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III. दिक-वाचनास and Oral Literature :

Oral literature is that part of literature which cares no way the novelty of writing, the prime attribute of so-called civilization but also does not oppose it. It has its own life-line and therefore survives simultaneously to the written literature with all its necessity and utility. In a seemingly wider perspective of 'Oral tradition' which is in fact almost synonymous to oral literature, John Vansina says that it (oral tradition) is a socially sanctioned reported statement or a heresay account of a testimony of the past.\(^{40}\)

About the Indian perspective observes S.L. Srivastava. :

\begin{quote}
In the context of countries like India, oral tradition is not only a testimony of the past, but also of contemporary life. Tradition has depth of generations and is delimited to the social system and the area of its existence. It is transmitted spontaneously thorough word of mouth from one person to another or from one generation to the next.\(^{41}\)
\end{quote}

About the ingredients of a tradition it is further said :

Oral tradition includes portrayals of the details.


\(^{41}\) Srivastava, S.L.: op-cit, P. 3
of ceremonies, institutions and technology as well as expressions of beliefs and attitudes. In addition to depicting the life of a people, it also reveals much about their aspirations, values and goals.

In view of these ingredients and characteristics it can be summerised that oral literature is the manifestion or testimony of oral tradition. Hence, in most cases both the terms are synonymous and their feature or characteristics are also similar.

Oral literature as a category of folklore bears four characteristics. These are respectively:-

(i) **Multiple Versions or Variations**: Like any other folklore item oral literature also must have multiple versions, each of them being shared or accepted by a group. Oral literature because of being literature or text, its acceptance or sharing is more likely to be region-based. This multiple version phenomenon offers changes or variations of text and therefore it survives as oral literature.

(2) **Orality**: Orality means the mode of transmission alongwith the mode of composition through oral process. In modern times many of the oral literatures have been reduced to writing and published. But simply putting to writing and publication do not discredit any oral literature to remain as oral literature unless the form dies out.

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42. Srivastava: loc-cit.
(3) **Anonymity** : One of the general characteristics of oral literature like any other folklore item is its anonymity. Because neither oral literature is so consciously composed to claim authority over these, nor copyright interest is a coveted asset for the authors. Moreover, literary works composed orally, also running in oral transmission and that too in multiple versions are most likely to be anonymous. But there are exceptions also. As for instance, the name of the authors are found in some Chinese folksongs, Mizo folksongs and Bengali Bāramāsī songs etc. Therefore, it can be said that the availability of the name of author alone does not discredit a piece of oral literature if it can stand the test of other characteristics.

(4) **Traditionality** : Any folklore item and therefore, oral literature also must have to be traditional. Traditionality exactly literally means handing down from generation to generation through oral transmission. Therefore oral literature for surviving through generations is obviously traditional. Tradition does not necessarily mean something that belongs to past alone. As it carries the past with it, so also reflects the present and thus certainly marches to the future. Tradition, as it pervades through generations, offer the scope of changes to occur in it and this may be called dynamism in tradition. Traditionality therefore, is not past-orientedness alone. What it means in wider sense is 'belonging to the mankind' and passing through the generations.

If *Dāk-vacanas* are put to test of these characteristics it appears obviously that this is a characteristic stock of oral literature. Dissimilarity in the amount of *vacanas* and the number of chapters, chapter
formulation, variation of text amongst different printed editions and manuscripts etc. prove the multiplicity of versions. Although ķāk seemed to be the author of the vacanas now it is sure that ķāk is not the name of any individual, rather it is an adjective term. Hence, the vacanas are not the product of a writing endeavour of any individual author, although some of the vacanas are now found in writing in śāncipāta or even in print. The multiplicity of versions and currency of some vacanas still in the oral transmission along with the process of new vacanas still being created in the folk society prove that the vacanas are basically running in oral transmission from the days of their creation. ķāk as the name of an individual author of the vacanas being reasonably discarded, the vacanas stand obviously as anonymous composition. The ķāk-vacanas being as old as the beginning of the plainland settled cultivation, not being composed by any single individual author, not transmitted by written process and still running in circulation prove that these are but traditional sayings or vacanas. The society might have witnessed and met with various progressive changes, still the ķāk-vacanas have not become obsolete, for these have coped up with the changes in requisite terms. This is the quality of traditionality.

Withstanding the test of folklore characteristics as analysed above, ķāk-vacanas being text-based item are obviously oral literature although most of the popular vacanas are now available in written form.

Oral literature has many synonyms. 'unwritten literature', 'popular literature', 'folk literature', 'primitive literature', 'expressive literature' etc.
are some of the names offered for oral literature by different scholars. But W.R. Bascom argues that since literature depends on sound and writing, the term 'oral literature' may contain some incongruities. Therefore he pleads for the term 'verbal art' as an appropriate nomenclature 43 and the term gains popularity thereafter. Therefore in respect of putting into a class or category, the धाक-वाचनas may also be called 'verbal art'. But apart from naming, considering the nature of the वाचनas it must have to be said that these are less artistic, but more useful for their knowledge imparting nature.

43. Contributions to Folkloristics, (Meerut, 1981), P. 67