

The Story of Dambobugo, Appellation of Savelugu-naa Bukali Kantamparum

Told by Abubakari Lunna, June 23, 1993

Edited by David Locke

DL

Here we are again, Abubakari and me. It is Wednesday, June 23, 1993. The topic of conversation this morning is another one of the praise names. Abubakari, can you tell me about Dambobugo?

AL

Yes. Dambobugo is an appellation for one of our big chiefs, Savelugu-naa Bukali Kantamparum. If you don't write "Kantamparum" and you just write "Savelugu-naa Bukali" people won't know which Bukali it is. We have about five Bukalis in the Savelugu chieftaincy. Kantamparum is a son of Naa Yakubu. When I am going to play Dambobugo you will hear me say, "Nin yi ɲɔ baya ni namɔ dapala, kɔnkushema siyri kulga ka kɔnsi zori balibali." Can you write that?

DL

Yes, if you give it to me slowly.

AL

"Nin yi ηɔ" or you can say, "Nim vulu yi ηɔ." "Nin yi ηɔ" is short. I play the drum,

""Nin yi ηɔ." I don't play, "Nim vul yi ηɔ."

[DL and AL work out Dagbani slowly]

AL

I will say it slowly so you can hear if what you wrote is correct. "Nin yi ηɔ baya ni namo

dapala, kɔnkushema siyri kulga, ka kɔnsi zori balibali."

DL

I have written it as best I can.

AL

Good. This is the way we start. Then, the answers drummers say, "Dambobugo din tayi." No. You have to say, "Ka," before you bring "Dambobugo," "Ka Dambobugo din tayi." Then, you have to say "to, to, ka Dambobugo din tayi." The answer is, "Ka Dambobugo din tayi, to, to, ka Dambobugo din tayi." You have to write, "Ka Dambobugo din tayi" twice. You get that one?

DL

Yes sir.

AL

Then, the second lead drum has to say, [speaking] "Alibarika samiya ka ban koli konga pa 'wuni." Then, they answer, [singing] "Alibarika samiya ka ban koli konga pa 'wuni, Ka dambobugo din tayi, Bukali, to, Bukali, to, Bukali, ka dambobugo din tayi." The answer comes and the leading luṅa will call the name Bukali twice.

DL [writes]

Right.

AL

Then, the other leading luja will say, [speaks] "Kulkulchibo layim kɔbiga de kul' sul' dɔmu ŋɔ," [sings] "Kulchibo kulkulchibo layim kɔbiga de kul' sul' dɔmu ŋɔ."

DL [writes]

OK.

AL

Then, the answer comes again. Then, the leading luja will say something again, "Nyema nyema niri da niya din viɛla."

DL [writes]

Got it. In fact, Abubakari, I am not here to learn all the talks that you play on luja. We have some very good ones here.

AL

It is only three I have given you.

DL

Right, but any one of the praise names has so many talks. These are nice. Can you help me to know what these mean? Then, we can also talk about the story of this man.

AL

Yes--the story--the background of Dambobugo.

DL

We have the one that the leading luṅa plays to call the rhythm and then there are three leading luṅa talks.

AL

That is four, eh? "Nin yi ṅɔ baya ni namɔ dapala" is for his father. Do you remember that whenever you play for a chief, you have to play for his father, his uncle, or his

grandfather? This is for his own father, Naa Yakubu. Let us get the meaning of, "Nin yi
ḡɔ̄ baya ni namɔ̄."

DL

Fine. Yes.

AL

"Namɔ̄" is something like "poor"--you don't have things--you are not rich. How do you
say that?

DL

Yes, you have the word, "poor."

AL

Uh huh! He is alone so he is not thinking for many things. If you are just one person,
even one thing is enough for you. At the time Naa Yakubu got his chieftaincy, he said,
"For me, now I have got what I want. I am not thinking for other things anymore." Uh

huh! That is the meaning. You play, "Nin yi ηᵔ baᵔa ni namᵔ," and add, "dapala."

"Dapala" means "son," the son of the person for whom you played the proverb.

DL

Correct.

AL

Then, you say, "Kᵔnkushema siᵔri kulga, ka kᵔnsi zori balibali." That is for him, Bukali

Kantamparam. It is one of his appellations. He made up that proverb about a fish in the

river that we call "kᵔnkushema." "Kulga" means "river." How do you call a person

whose hands are like this [mimes hands paralyzed in curled position]? Someone who

gets a sickness that makes his fingers spoil. "Kᵔᵔa," we call him "kᵔᵔa."

DL

A person whose hands are crippled? Leper?

AL

Uh huh! Leper! He is saying, "Can a leper catch a fish?" He is calling himself the kɔnkushɛma and saying, "Lepers cannot catch and roast me." If a leper cannot catch that fish how can he roast it? "Ka kɔnsi zori balibali," means, "the lepers are running." ["Balibali" means "helter-skelter."] You know our chiefs give their proverbs for a reason.

They mean something.

DL

Yes, I am sure.

AL

He is saying, "Even though now I am chief, I am sure of myself. No one can kill me."

That is what he means by, "Kɔnkushɛma siyri kulga." The fish, kɔnkushɛma, is becoming plenty in the river and the lepers are running because they cannot catch them.

Are you getting me clearly?

DL

Yes, I get you. So, you have the part for Naa Yakubu, one thing is enough for one person--

AL

--and when you say, "son," you bring "kɔnkushema," Savelugu-naa Bukali's appellation.

DL

You begin with the father and then you bring the son.

AL

Then, drummers will answer you, "Ka dambobugo din tayi, to, to, ka dambobugo din tayi." "Dambobugo" means "big family," and "din tayi " means "eat and satisfy." "Big family eats and is satisfied."

Next you say, {Dagbani needs to be checked} "Alibarika saamiya ka baŋ koli kon pa 'wuni." "The good rain has rained, farmers have farmed and thank God." This means

they got plenty of crops and thanked God for the rain. Then, they answer you again, "Ka dambobugo din ta yi."

The third one is, "Kulkulchibo layim kɔbiga de kul' sul' dɔmu ŋɔ." During the olden days, when we didn't yet know Europeans, we had our own soap called "kulkulchibo." The drum says, "If you gather a hundred pieces of soap, you can't wash your family away." "You can't take soap and wash your family away."

The fourth one, "Nyema nyema nir' da niya din viela." "Look, look, a person who is thinking good can only be good."

DL [writes]

OK, I got it.

AL

This morning's lead luŋa talks are not plenty, you see.

Nin yi ŋɔ baɣa ni namɔ dapala, kɔnkushema siɣri kulga ka kɔnsi zori balibali

Dambobugo din tayi, Bukali, to, Bukali, to, Bukali, dambobugo din tayi

Kulkulchibo layim kobiga de kul' sul' domu no

Dambobugo din tayi, Bukali, to, Bukali, to, Bukali dambobugo din tayi

Nyema nyema nir' da niya din viera

Dambobugo din tayi Bukali to Bukali to Bukali dambobugo din tayi

When we play Dambobugo in Dagbon, we would continue with his appellations and bring in appellations of his brothers or uncles. For Savelugu-naa Bukali Kantamparum I know about seven talks.

DL

So, now tell me why they are saying these things. What is the story of this man?

AL

This man was a chief of Kpatenga. The chief of Savelugu was pushing him, pushing him. It came to a time when they had a dry season. In the whole area of Savelugu, every time they farmed, they could not get good harvest. For about three years before the chief

of Savelugu died they had drought. When that chief died, they made his funeral, and this Bukali became Savelugu-naa. When Kantamparum came to Savelugu, the people of Savelugu didn't love him too much because of the former chief. Farming time started three months after he became chief. The rains started heavy, heavy. In that year they got proper rain. They farmed nicely. They got their crops nicely. Kantamparum wanted the people of Savelugu to think better of him. One day, he came out of the palace and told his drummers, "Allah bakara samiya ka baŋ koli kon pa 'wuni." "Anybody who has a big family, you can feed your family nicely."

He said again, "Nyema nir' da niya din viɛla." "Somebody who is thinking good, he can always be good." He explained that the late chief had been thinking badly towards him; the people of Savelugu also had been thinking badly about him. But he wasn't thinking badly for the chief who died and he wasn't thinking badly for the people of Savelugu. He was thinking well towards Savelugu people. He had known he would become Savelugu chief. He said, "Now my thinking has come back to me. I am chief of Savelugu and look at this year! Every farmer is rich. Everybody is going to feed his family nicely." Then, the drummers composed on what he said, "Allah baraka samiya." Within a few days,

when he came out of the palace, the drummers said [sings], "Allah bakara samiya ka ban koli kon pa 'wuni, Dambobugo din tayi." When the drummers say, "Bukali, to," they mean the town of Bukali, Savelugu.

"Konkushema" was his appellation before he became Savelugu chief. "Konkushema siyri kulga ka konsi zori balibali." When he gave this proverb, the drummers said, "Oh, if we put this talk into drumming, it will be good for when our chief is riding or when he is walking." The drummers composed a rhythm for that talk. Before he got "Dambobugo din tayi," it was the rhythm the lunyi played for him. It is not a dance rhythm.

DL

Why is he talking about lepers and fish?

AL

Many people did test him, many princes. You know, if you are a son of a Yaa Naa, you become a target for some sub-chiefs. Princes who are not in the paramount line will start to push you. They know you have started into chieftaincy and you are coming towards

the big thing. This man was a son of Naa Yakubu. He started chieftaincy in Yorligo-- from Yorligo to Kpatenga--and from Kpatenga to Savelugu. He was not able to get to Iyani. "Iyani" means "the ending." "Naya Iyani," "He couldn't get to the ending." In Dagbani we say "Iyani," but the English people changed it to "Yendi." So, when people started testing him, testing him, he said, "I am kɔnkushema. No leper can catch me." As for that, he didn't fight directly with anybody, but he knew about the princes of Dagbon.

DL

Yes, they are always challenging, testing each other.

AL

People started testing his protection medicine, so he brought that talk. True, he was trouble for everybody who tried his power against him. At that chief's time, my father wasn't yet a drummer--he was still young. But my father said that his father told him that that chief was a killer. Kantamparum didn't kill like his father, Naa Yakubu. For him, whenever a prince put medicine against him, he would never wait. He would tell the fellow, "Please. You have tried me. I am coming." That is why he gave that proverb, "I

am a kɔnkushɛma. If you are a leper--don't try me, but if you have hands--come and try."

He is telling those who have hands to think, " Oh, this man also has hands. Let me go and try him. We will see who is stronger." You see? If you don't try him, you are a leper. You don't have hands to catch him, so he will never bother you. That was the story my father told me about him.

DL

Well--that is good talk. I didn't know the meaning of Iyani before today.

AL

Oh, sorry. The name of the Iyani skin is "boluŋ." When we took it from those people, we changed its name to gbewaa, after one of our greatest chief, Naa Gbewaa.

DL

Can you sing how the drum sounds for these talks?

AL

Yes, I can do that for all of them. I will make the talk plain and then sing them.

Dambobugo is the title of this appellation, but to make drummers aware that you know the person for whom we play Dambobugo you should say, "Please, play Kantamparum." They will know you want Dambobugo because Savelugu-naa Bukali is the only chief in all Dagbon called Kantamparum.

DL

Does that have a meaning?

AL

Yes. Kantamparum means a person who doesn't slap twice, who doesn't beat twice, who doesn't help twice. He acts immediately and does things once and for all.

Kantamparum or Dambobugo starts like this [sings], "Nin yi ɲɔ baya ni namɔ dapala, kɔnkushema siyri kulga ka kɔnsi zori balibali." Then, the drummers answer, "Ka dambobugo din tayi, to, to, ka dambobugo din tayi." Lead luɲa continues, "Allah baraka samiya ka baɲ koli kon pa wuni." Drummers answer, "Ka dambobugo din tayi Bukali to

Bukali to Bukali dambobugo din tayi." Lead luja says, "Kulkulchibo layim kobiga de kul' sul' domu ɲɔ." Drummers answer, "Dambobugo din tayi Bukali to Bukali to Bukali dambobugo din tayi." Lead luja says, "Nyema nyema nir' da niya din viela." Drummers answer, "Dambobugo din tayi Bukali to Bukali to Bukali dambobugo din tayi." You see? If it you are going to drum these talks on luja you have to say, "[vocables]".

If a drummer wants to show his "sweet hand" he can leave out, "kul' sul' domu," and say, "Kulkulchibo, kulkulchibo layim kobiga," "[vocables]." It means the same thing. We lunsu call this "proper gɔlsigu." Instead of "Kul'kul'chibo layim kobiga kul sul' wu domu ɲɔ," you say, "Kulkulchibo, kulkulchibo layim kobiga," and then they answer you. Then, if you like, you say again, "Kulkulchibo layim kobiga kul sul' wu domu ɲɔ." You have played both so that people will know you have a nice hand and can make the talk any way you like.

DL

It goes according to the rhythm correctly either way?

AL

Yes, if you start it the right place. But if you don't take it from the right place, you will be off.

This rhythm doesn't want to be rushed. Dambobugo doesn't want too much rushing and it doesn't want to be too slow. It is in a medium speed. If you play "[sings vocables slowly]," it is too low. You should play, "[sings vocables faster]." You have to know the words of the leading luḡa. If the answer drummers play too fast, the leading drummer can't catch up because the talk has so many words, "Allah baraka samiya ka baḡ koli kon pa wuni." On luḡa, you have to make some of the proverbs short, "[vocables]." You can't say every word, "baḡ koli kon pa wuni." You have to cut some away, "[vocables]."

Ah hah. It is the same thing with "Kulkulchibo laḡim kɔbiga kul sul' wu dɔmu ŋɔ,"

"[vocables]."

DL

I get what you mean. When you say the proverb, there are more words than when you play it on luja. You take some out or use one hit on the drum to stand for several sounds of speech.

AL

Yes, you get it. You change the talk so it fits the drumming, but the meaning is the same.

DL

How does the guŋ-gɔŋ sound for Dambobugo?

AL

The guŋ-gɔŋ says, "ka ka ka ki ka, kaka, kaka, ka ka ka ki ka." Then, you will go to the top [chahira], "ka ka ka ki ka, zizizi kaka, didigi kaka, didigi ka ka kara ka ki ka." "Ka ka kara ka ki ka," is "Ka dambobugo din taŋi." You have to toss the stick to make "kara."

DL

Yes. I know what you are saying.

AL

Answer luṅa says, "to," but the guṅ-gṅ says, "toto," "kaka." If guṅ-gṅ said "to" it would be too loud, "kaaw," so you say, "kaka kaka."

DL

The guṅ-gṅ doesn't make much improvisation on this rhythm. Or can the guṅ-gṅ player make styles?

AL

Guṅ-gṅ can make styles; our players make styles.

DL

Could you sing some of the styles the guṅ-gṅ player makes?

AL

You have to collect my guṅ-gṅ styles when I am drumming. If the drummers are not together, I can't fix them properly. As for what we call gṅsigu, you won't be able to recollect guṅ-gṅ styles unless many drummers are playing. If you are sitting alone, you can't just remember them. Even you can't know the way to put them into the music.

DL

Right. You don't feel it.

AL

The answer luṅas have to make the proper sound, "dan deyan dan den deyan deng deng tu dan deyan dan den deyan." For the "to" in the proverb, you don't have to hit the stick too loud. You have to be soft so the leading luṅa also can talk. "Dambobugo din taṅi" is strong, but "to to" is soft. It is the same for guṅ-gṅ, "[softly] kaka kaka, [loudly] ka kakakaka ki ka." The "kaka" is soft.

DL

Right. Like Zim Taai Kulga.

AL

Good! When a good guṅ-gṅ drummer plays Dambobugo, if you don't listen properly, you will think it is Zim Taai Kulga. Both rhythms start the same way. Zim Taai Kulga goes, "kakaka ki ki ka," and Dambobugo says, "ka kaka ka ki ka." You see? Only the dampening is different. Dambobugo has one "ki," but the Zim Taai Kulga has two.

DL

That part is very similar in both.

AL

In Dambobugo you play gṅsigu the way you do in Naybiɛyɛ or Zim Taai Kulga. These appellations have similar guṅ-gṅ styles. Even the leading luṅa talks can go together. Sometimes I do play Savelugu-naa Bukali's appellations in Zim Taai Kulga. He is one of Naa Yakubu's children. Kantamparum and Naa Abudu have one father and Naa Alaasani

is Naa Abudu's son. I do play his appellation in Zim Taai Kulga, "[vocables showing how Dambobugo lead luṅa fits into rhythmic framework of Zim Taai Kulga]." You see?

DL

Yes, I see. Thank you for this session.

AL

Your welcome.

END