

A STUDY OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN KHASI RIDDLES

ABSTRACT

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BY

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Chapter I

Introduction

Riddles constitute a very important genre of folk literature. They have occupied an important position in folklore in so far as expression and articulation of folk wisdom is concerned. They have well-designed structures. The riddle is one of the best- attested ancient folklore genres with numerous examples in Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Sanskrit traditions.

The *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* states that ‘riddles rank with myths, fables, folktales and proverbs as one of the earliest and most widespread types of formulated thought. A good case could be probably made for their priorities to all other forms of literature or even to all other oral lore, for riddles are essentially metaphors, and metaphors are the result of the primary mental processes of association, comparison and the perception of likenesses and differences.’(Leach 1950: 938). Botkin’s *Folsay* states “riddles perhaps even more than most types of traditional lore have a way of staying put. Their vigorous compactness of forms seems to give them a peculiar hold on the popular imagination and in many cases to ensure their preservation for centuries.”(Leach 1950: 939).

The riddle has been defined differently by many folklorists. Archer Taylor, one of the greatest riddle scholars of modern times, has struggled to define analytically

the structure of the riddle in terms of the ambiguity which seems to be the most common characteristic of the true riddle. He defines "the true riddle or the riddle in the strict sense compares an object to another entirely different object" (Taylor 1951:1). Later he improved his definition by saying that the essential structure of the riddle consists of two descriptive elements, one positive and one negative. Here the positive one is metaphorical and the negative one is literal.

The concept of the riddle is universal. Aristotle was probably one of the earliest thinkers to give attention to the riddle by associating it with metaphor. Riddles are an ancient and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. This could be seen in Sphinx riddles where Oedipus killed the Sphinx by grasping the answer to the riddle it posed. Samson outwitted the Philistine by posing a riddle about the lion and the beehive. In both cases, riddles, far from being mere child's play, are made to decide matters of life and death. The practice of riddling can be traced back to the dawn of literary expression.

All folklorists agreed that the riddle as a genre of folklore is a proper subject to be studied and analyzed. Scholars and folklorists from Aristotle to the present days have considered the riddle as an expression of traditional wit and wisdom. The form and contents of the riddle have been of special importance to the scholars from ancient times. The riddle usually has two aspects, the ritualistic and recreational. Perhaps James George Frazer was one of the first to study it

scientifically. The usage of the riddle on divergent occasions among the different races, both savage and civilized, seemed a mystery to him (Frazer 1906: 194).

Riddles are very closely related to jokes. Much that can be said of jokes can be said of riddles too. This is not because riddles are necessarily jokes. In modern culture, riddles tend to be jokes, but this congruence of the two *genres* is ethnographically the exception rather than the rule. It is not because riddles are a sub-class of jokes that some of the same concepts become relevant to both, but because both riddles and jokes frequently share the same tendency to depend upon some ambiguity or ambivalence, though the ways in which they exploit this differ.

The uses and functions of the riddle vary from one culture to another. But one of the common shared functions of the riddle is for entertainment and recreation. Riddles are also used to sharpen the mind, to test the knowledge and wit of the person. So they act as educational devices to exercise and train the intellect, to instill cultural values and attitudes to the participants. Riddles are also believed to develop or strengthen the ego of the riddler, the riddlee(s) and the audience present in any riddle contest. In certain cultures, however, riddling has various religious connotations as an activity during rituals. Other functions of riddles are also cited as verbal outlet for aggressive feelings and sexual desires. Riddles are used as devices for mediating conceptual ambiguity and stimulating cognitive re-examination.

In India, the tradition of riddles can be traced back to an age earlier than the Vedas (Bhagwat 1965: 3). Riddles in ancient India were used in the sacrificial rites, in marriage and death ceremonies. The ritualistic riddle is primarily religious, theological or speculative while the non-ritualistic is chiefly literary or at times, didactic.

Demographic and Cultural Profile of the Khasis

Meghalaya is a hilly region and is well-known for its picturesque landscapes and natural beauty. The Khasis inhabit the eastern part of Meghalaya which is generally known as Khasi and Jaintia hills. The area is bounded by Assam on the North and the East, on the West by Garo hills and on the south by Bangladesh.

The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills are situated on an imposing plateau known as the Shillong Plateau or the Meghalaya plateau. The Khasi and Jaintia hills form the central and eastern parts of the plateau. This plateau is formed of the oldest rock formation, the Achaean system. The land abounds in streams, rivers and waterfalls. The Khasi and Jaintia hills experience a moderate climate. The land is rich in mineral deposits like coal, lime stones, sillimanite and uranium etc. The Khasis mainly live in the four hill districts of the state viz. The East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia Hills Districts. The land receives heavy rainfalls during summer and is cold in winter. Mawsynram and Sohra (Cherreputjee) are known as the wettest places on earth, with a rainfall of about 14,000 mm annually.

Racial Affinity and Origin of the Khasis

The origin of the Khasis is shrouded in mystery. Their folklore and oral traditions tell about their divine origin. The divine origin of the Khasis could be traced back to the popular myth in which *Ki Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* (Seven Huts) came down to the Earth from the Sky through a golden ladder.

It is very difficult to talk about the origin of the Khasis in the absence of any written records. It is generally believed that the Khasis were one of the earliest communities who have migrated from somewhere in the South-East Asia to the Brahmaputra Valley where they resided before coming to their present homeland.

Many researchers have worked on the origin of the Khasis in the last century and almost all of them have different conclusions. According to P.T. Gurdon, “The origin of the Khasis is a vague question. Although it is likely that the Khasis have inhabited their present abode for a considerable period, there seem to be a fairly general belief amongst them that they originated from somewhere...” (Gurdon 1907:10). Gurdon also wrote that the Khasis have a great affinity with the people of the Far East especially the Mon-Anam.

J.R. Logan is of the opinion that the Khasis have a close relationship with the Mons or Talaings of Pegu and Tenasserim, the Khmer of Cambodia and Anams. He also identifies a tribe known as Palaungs who inhabits the Shan state of Myanmar, as the closest kinsmen of the Khasis. Modern scholars like Walter G.

Griffith and others are of the opinion that the Mundas were the ancestors of the Khasis.

Language and Linguistic Affinity

The Khasi language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages, which is branched under the Mon-Khmer. The Khasis adopted the Sohra dialect as the standard language of the community. Linguists like Schmidt (1906), Sebok (1942), Diffloth (1982) and Zide (1992) grouped Khasi language under Mon-Khmer along with Palaungic, Khmuic, Wa, Vietmuong and others as they seem to share many cognate forms with Khasi language.

Traditional Administration

Traditionally, the Khasi hills are divided into thirty *Hima* (traditional states) and the Jaintia hills into twelve administrative units called *Eleka*. The head of the Khasi traditional state is *U Syiem* or the Chief and that of *Eleka* in Jaintia hills is *U Dolo*. Before the coming of the British, Jaintia hills were under a single chieftain known as *Ka Hima Sutnga*. The customary line of succession to the *Syiemship* is through the female side i.e. the brother or maternal nephew of the *Syiem* only can succeed him but not the son.

Religion

The Khasis believe in God the Creator (*U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw*). He is represented by a goddess, *Ka blei Synshar*. The rooster (*U Syiar*) is the sacrificial

animal and stands as the symbol of the Khasi indigenous faith. Khasi religion is based on the ethics of right living and conduct. It is also based on the three commandments i.e. to earn righteousness (*ban kamai ia ka hok*), to know man and to know God (*ban im tipbriew-tipblei*) and to know one's maternal and paternal relations (*tipkur-tipkha*). These are natural laws that had been inculcated in every Khasi's consciousness that regulates his thought, words and actions.

Matrilineal System

The unique institution among the Khasis is the matrilineal system. Mother kinship is dominant. Due to the matrilineal character of the Khasi society, the children adopt the name of the mother's clan. The Khasi community is consisted of many clans who traced their lineage from the ancestral mother (*Ka lawbei*), who was the founder of the clan.

Kinship

The system of kinship amongst the Khasis is based on *ka tipkur-tipkha* (to know one's maternal and paternal relations). It is clan exogamy. Members who belong to the father's side are respected, whether young or old. As the Khasi system of kinship is exogamous, so inter-marriage within clans who claim to originate from a common ancestry is prohibited. Intra-clan sexual relationship is the greatest sin among the Khasis and couples who commit such acts are ostracized from the society.

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage among the Khasis has both religious and social aspects. Marriage ceremonies differ from one place to another. One of the most remarkable features of the Khasi marriage is that it is customary for the husband to go and live with his wife in his mother-in-law's place, and not to take his bride home as in the case of other communities. According to Gurdon there are three types of marriage ceremonies prevalent amongst the Khasis. These are 1) *Ka Pynhiar synjat*, 2) *Ka Lam doh* and 3) *Ka Ia dih kyiad* or *Ia suit* (Gurdon 1907:127). Marriage usually takes place at the bride's house. Marriages amongst the Jaintias usually take place after dusk.

Divorce among the Khasis is common and is mostly by mutual consent. When the couple wishes for divorce, a simple ritual is performed in the presence of a witness. After the ritual is done, the village crier will make a public announcement. Remarriage after the divorce is prevalent among both men and women.

Dress and ornaments

The traditional dresses of the Khasi women are different from their neighbouring communities. The Khasi women used *Ka Jainpien* which is wrapped around their waist and loop down to the ankle over which *Ka Jainkyrshah* (a kind of apron) is tied from the left shoulder and looping down below the knees. On festive occasions they also wear their traditional dresses called *Dhara* made of silk. A

kind of shawl called *Ka Tapmoh* which covers the head and upper part of the body is worn by the women. A garment known as *Jainkup* is also worn by them. The Khasi men wear *Ka Jymphong* or a sleeveless coat mostly made of cotton with fringes stitching below the hem. Other items of men's dress consist of a waist girdle, a cap with earflaps and dhotis.

The Khasis are very fond of jewelry especially those made of gold and silver. They also used coral beads locally known as *Paila*, which are worn by both men and women. Earrings are worn by both men and women. Women also used gold bracelets (*Khadu kti*), gold chains (*Kynjri kstar*) and finger rings. During ceremonial dances, women also wear *u Shan ryndang* (a close fitting necklace wearing at the neck) and *ka Pansngiat* (crown) made of silver or gold.

Position of Women in the society

Women enjoy a dignified and respectable position in the society. They are considered to be the custodians of property. Khasi women enjoy more freedom in comparison to other women of other neighbouring communities. A woman is accorded with respect as she is considered to be the one through whom the clan is propagated. But although women occupy an important position in the society, yet they have no rights in traditional political and administrative spheres.

Festivals

The Khasis have their own festivals which are both religious and festive. Some of the most well-known festivals of the Khasis are *Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem*, *Ka Shad Nongkrem* and *Ka Beh Deinkhlam*.

Khasi Riddles

The Khasis of Meghalaya, like other communities all over the world, have a rich tradition of riddles which forms an important component of their verbal arts. The Khasi equivalent for the word riddle is *Ka Jingkyntip*. The word *Jingkyntip* is derived from the word *Jingtip* which means knowledge or information or to know. But it must be said that no attention has been devoted to this oral heritage in term of documentation and analysis. The practice of riddling among the Khasis usually takes place in informal settings, in social gatherings, in family circles, among friends and colleagues.

Statement of the problem

The research work on Khasi riddles is motivated by different factors. It is a historical fact that the other genres of folk literature of the Khasi community such as narratives, folksongs, proverbs, maxims and others have been documented and studied by many collectors and scholars since the nineteenth century (Nongrum Kitbor 2000). The same however cannot be said of riddles. Till date not even a single booklet of riddles is in existence and the scanty mention that riddles received in printed form are part of larger texts such as tales, novels and plays.

There are strong indications that show that the riddle is a fairly dynamic genre capable of being generated and perpetuated through oral transmission but accountably, its diffusion especially, as an item of folk communication, is limited. The endeavour and scope of this research work is to make a study of the riddle as a genre of oral literature. Another point taken up for study is the *Phawar* which is a rhymed couplet and a good example of Khasi folk poetry. It appears that there are riddle elements in the *Phawar* in the versification system which reveals the metaphorical structure of the quintessential riddle. This also brings into focus the existence of the inter-genres such as riddle jokes, riddle poems and riddle games.

Survey of Literature

There are a number of work, writings and composition on Khasi folklore which has been documented and written by many scholars and writers.

Ki Jingsneng Tymmen by Radhon Singh Berry is a collection of Khasi maxims.

This can be regarded as proverbs which are obviously didactic.

Rabon Singh's *Ka Kitab Jingphawar* contains phawar, fragmentary, short stories, folktales, maxims and explanations of aspects of religious practice of the Khasi community.

The Khasis by P.T. Gurdon is one of the standard references in respect of the Khasi community.

Ki Dienjat Ki Longshuwa by J. Bacchiarello contains fascinating narratives and Khasi idioms which are imbued with riddle elements.

Primrose Gatphoh's *Ki Khanatang bad U Sier Lapalang* and *Ki Phawar Sara bad Ki Poetry Rit* provide information about some narratives and folk songs that when analyzed are found to have some riddle elements in them.

Hamsaia Ki Por by H. Elias contains traditional utterances of which have found a place in modern usage.

The History and Culture of the Khasi People provides information about the origin of the Khasi chiefs, their political administrations domestic life, religion etc.

Lest We Forget edited by Helen Giri is a collection of articles dealing with wide range of phawar, religious practices, customs and folk belief prevalent among the Khasis.

Ki Matti Byrshem by D.L. Kharmawphlang is very useful for it lays down theoretical precepts of Khasi folklore studies.

D. T. Laloo's *Ka Rongbiria U Hynniew Trep* contains archery phawar which when analyzed are found to contain riddle elements in them.

In the books, *Ka Pariah ka Kot Jingphawar* and *Ka Kot Mei Pa*, Dhonsing Lyngdoh Nongbri talks about the different types of Khasi *Phawar*. The author gives a brief description of the *phawar* which are imbued with riddle elements

To the best of her knowledge, the scholar has not come across any reference or book that devotes to Khasi riddles.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to document riddles that are in circulation among the Khasis. After a complete documentation, they will be classified according to the accepted typology followed by different folklorists. A special category is made for those riddles that do not fit in the accepted typology. Literary genres have significant bearings on the community they spring from, and this aspect is analyzed in respect of Khasi riddles. The study of the traditional and evolving traditions of Khasi riddles is the first of its kind and this will contribute, in a big measure, towards the professional study of verbal arts of the Khasi community.

Methodology

The methodology applied in carrying out this research involves collection of data through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources have been generated from written documents, field work and *Phawar* compositions. This scholar has also employed direct interview method and non-participant observation method to

elicit the required data. Data has also been collected from among youth, children and students. The scholar has visited villages and has been able to unearth valuable information through interactions with informants belonging to different age groups from Sohka, Nongtalang, Dawki, Nongbareh Jowai, Rymbai, Umtra, Mawryngkang, Thadnongjau, Pynursla, Smit, and Mairang villages. Data has also been collected from Mawlai, Laitumkrah, Jaiaw, Nongthymmai and Mawkhar localities of Shillong.

Another method of data collection involved the use of modern communication system i.e. the internet and mobile phones. The cell phones and the internet contain vast stores of riddles and these are studied and analyzed accordingly. A database of internet and SMS riddles has been created by the scholar and an SMS riddle group was formed for the compilation of the data. The members of the internet and SMS group circulated among themselves all the data they have received and passed them on to this scholar.

The scholar also gathered information and data from secondary sources. Published books, articles, printed and online journals, newspapers, magazines, seminar papers, visuals and websites serve as the main sources for secondary data.

Regarding library works, the scholar has visited and collected material for her research from NEHU Central Library, North Eastern Council Library, State Central Library, Shillong, Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Culture Library,

Indian council of Social Sciences, Shillong, Indian Council for Historical
Research Library, Guahati and Sahitya Akademi Library Kolkata.



CHAPTER II

Folklore and Verbal Art

This chapter deals with the emergence, the growth and development of Folklore as an academic discipline and the riddle as a genre of verbal art.

The term Folklore was first coined by William J. Thoms in 1846. In his letter published in the *Athenaeum* he suggested the use of a good Saxon compound Folk-Lore ... “the Lore of the people” to replace all other somewhat cumbersome and even slightly misleading terms. William Thoms further urges readers of the *Athenaeum* to collect examples of those “manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs etc.” many of which “assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them.” (*Athenaeum*. No. 982 (August, 22, 1846): 862- 863).

Folklorists have made attempts to define the term folklore. Their attempts to define folklore have contributed a lot to the domain of Folkloristics. It should be noted that the materials of folklore had been collected and studied with scholarly interest long before Thoms coined the term. The Grimm brothers published the first volume of their famous *Kinder und Housmarchen* in 1812 which was recognized by Thoms himself and which is very often used as evidence by Western scholars to trace the growth of folkloristic studies. Scholarly collections of folklore materials were also done in Asia, particularly in India where works

such as the *Kathāsaritsāgar*, *Pañcatantra* or *Jātaka* (Handoo 2000: 6) are believed to be much older than many folklore collections in the west.

Definitions of folklore are many and varied. According to the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, there are twenty one definitions of folklore offered by different folklorists. The difficulties experienced in defining folklore are real and legitimate. This is because folklore as a new field of inquiry straddles between the Humanities and Social Sciences.

But most are in agreement that the term folk can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. As Alan Dundes contends: “it could be a common occupation, language or religion - but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own” (Dundes 1980: 7). ‘Lore’ refers to wisdom, teaching, education and knowledge.

The contribution of Thoms through his coinage of the term folklore had two important consequences all over the world. Firstly it led to the founding of an academic discipline known as Folklore. And secondly it generated a long and unending controversy about the definition and about what should or should not be included in the discipline of Folklore.

Since the beginning of the scholarly studies of folklore in the early nineteenth century, folklorists have been aware that the phenomena they study are integral

parts of culture. Folklore has been conceived as cultural phenomena long before Edward B. Tylor's definition of the word culture in 1871. Throughout the history of folklore as a discipline, it has been observed that those were the pioneers in the documentation and study of folklore then were also pioneering students of culture. Folklorists have also so been aware that folklore is related to other aspects of culture of which they are part. Therefore folklore serves as an important source of cultural knowledge and understanding.

The revolution that occurred in Folkloristics in the 1970s was unprecedented. It involved radical redefining the academic discipline and a change in the perception of folklore. Many folklorists started advocated that folklore is not only about the past. It is about the now and the happening. This in turn led to the emergence of new genres of folklore such as urban folklore e.g. urban legends, jokes, place names, playing the dozen, yo'mama jokes and rap, occupational lore etc. and modern technology lore.

Richard M. Dorson has outlined four broad sectors of Folklore and Folk life studies. These are:

- 1) Oral literature
- 2) Material culture
- 3) Social folk customs
- 4) Performing arts.

Oral literature: Oral literature is also called verbal art or expressive literature. They are spoken, sung and voiced of traditional utterances. Traditionally this sector is known as Folk literature.

Material culture: Material culture which is also known as Physical folklore concerns with the study of techniques, skills of the folk in building their homes, making clothes, preparing food, tools and implements etc. This aspect of folklore is visible rather than aural.

Social folk customs: This is another branch of folklore which is very close to Material culture. It studies the festivals and celebrations involving the participation of the folk in large numbers. Folk religion and folk medicine also fall under social folk customs.

Performing folk art: This last sector of folklore and folk life concerns itself primarily with traditional music, dance and drama.

Khasi Folklore Studies

The growth and development of Khasi folklore studies can be roughly divided into four periods: the Missionary Period, the Seng Khasi Period, the Modern Period and the Post-Modern Period.

The Missionary Period (1841-1894)

The collection and documentation of Khasi folklore material could be traced back to the time when Thomas Jones, a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary reduced the Khasi language to Roman orthography. Among many of the collectors during this period, the name of John Roberts deserved to be mentioned here. Unlike the other missionaries, he published not only religious texts but also included other texts that had no Christian content. This eminent scholar-missionary had collected and documented many Khasi folk tales which was published posthumously by his wife in 1914 in Wales. His attempt to compile Khasi idiom and *Phawar* in their pure and natural forms contains the seeds for evolution of folklore material. In 1891, Morkha Joseph wrote a poem based on the oral narrative of *U Sier Lapalang*.

Even though it is a well known fact that the Christian missionaries came to these hills with the primary purpose to proselytize yet most of the folklore material collected during this period was the result of the efforts of missionaries and colonial civil servants who collected and recorded the habits, customs, manners, oral tradition and rituals of the Khasi people.

The Seng Khasi Period (1895-1920)

The work of the missionaries led to the creation of the sense of identity among the Khasis. This period saw the emergence of writings by a host of Khasi writers like Jeebon Roy Mairom, Rabon Singh Kharsuka and Radhon Singh Kharwanlang

who had not dispensed with their traditional narratives and folklore many of which are connected with traditional belief and rituals of the Khasis. These stalwarts founded the Seng Khasi Movement, a socio-cultural organization of the Khasis who adhered to the traditional Khasi religion in 1899. These Khasi scholars were firstly prompted by a genuine apprehension created by Christianity influence into Khasi traditional life and its culture. Secondly they reacted to the missionary as well as colonial portraiture of Khasi culture which regard the religious practices of the Khasis as demonic. The first generation of Khasi literary writers challenged and sought to correct this false presentation.

The Modern Period (1921-1970)

The turn of the century saw the emergence of folklore material through the writing of eminent personalities like Homiwell Lyngdoh, H. Elias Sohliya, Soso Tham, Primrose Gathphoh and others. These writers contributed a lot to the growth of Khasi folklore studies by documenting many folktales, customs, habit and other aspects of Khasi culture.

The Post Modern Period (1970s onwards)

The Post Modern period witnessed the growth of folklore studies through the writings and compilation done by college and university educated writers such as Donbok T. Laloo, M.P.R. Lyngdoh, D.L. Kharmawphlang, K.S. Nongkynrih etc. Laloo, a self taught folklorist, had greatly contributed to the enormous growth of folklore studies in Khasi and Jaintia hills. He had done an extensive work in

collecting folklore materials in the Bhoi area. His works give us an insight into the rich folklore heritage of the Khasis. Another noted Khasi folklorist who has raised the status of Khasi folklore studies to its present height is D.L. Kharmawphlang, the first trained folklorist among the Khasis whose name deserved to be mentioned here. He has collected and recorded many folktales especially those existed in the northern part of Khasi hills. He has also written books and articles on Khasi folklore and produced fascinating documentary films on the traditional customs, practices, and life of the Khasis.

The Riddle as a Verbal Art

As an oral communication system, riddles have their origin in the psyche of the people and they involve close observation of nature and things around it. Oral literature is also called Verbal art or Expressive Literature. So, the riddle as a genre of oral literature is also known as verbal art. Oral literature or verbal art includes all the spoken, sung and vocal forms of traditional utterances which include the folk narratives or tales and songs which circulate by word of mouth. It also includes proverbs, riddles and charms. These are forms of aesthetic expressions. In verbal art a significant characteristic is the artistic use of words. It is this characteristic that is responsible for creating space for this form of verbal art to exist and interface with each other.

Chapter III

Types of Traditional Khasi Riddles

This chapter is devoted to traditional Khasi riddles and their classification into different types.

Definitions of the riddle in oral tradition have been based primarily on studies of two types: those concerned with the structure of the riddle, either grammatically or in terms of thematic units, and those concerned with cognitive aspects of the riddle, i.e., its functions psychologically, sociologically, and intellectually, as performed in context. Scholarly study of riddles dated back to the eighteenth century when scholars such as Karl Mullenhoff and Gatson Paris in 1855 and 1877 respectively encouraged the comparative investigation of riddles. But comparative studies may have reached their high point with Antti Aarne's comparative study of individual riddles (1918-20). Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, an Argentinean folklorist had made an innovation in riddle classification, who in his 1911 collection, *Adivinanzas Rioplatenses*, made the nature of comparison (comparison to plants, animals etc.) on the basis of the classification rather than the nature of solution or answer. Lehmann Nitsche's method was followed by the Swedish folklorist Carl Von Sydow in 1915 and later by Archer Taylor in his superb collection *English Riddles from Oral Tradition* (1951). Claude Lévi-Strauss has devoted a major modern work to the topic of classification of riddles (1962; 1966). In England, E. R. Leach (1964a; 1964b) and Mary Douglas (1966)

have brought classification into the foreground of their attention and have aroused an awareness of related problems concerning the mechanisms where by conceptual categories are set up, preserved and mediated.

The riddle, as a genre of folk literature, has fascinated many folklorists who have found immense scope in subjecting it to structural analysis. Scholars such as Alan Dundes, Brian Sutton-Smith and Robert and Forman have done excellent work on riddles. Perhaps the earliest structural analysis in terms of basic units is that of Robert Petsch in his 1899 dissertation, *Neue Beitrage Zur Kenntnis des Volstratsel kernel*. He sees five basic elements in the riddle form: an introductory frame, a denominative kernel, a descriptive kernel, a block element and a concluding frame. But Petsch was aware that all the five elements were rarely found in all the riddles. William R. Bascom expands this framework in his attempt to define and explain the actual syntactic patterns of riddles as well as variations on basic patterns of riddling, both in grammar and culture (1949: 1-16) Charles Scott makes two attempts at classifying riddle structure. In his earlier work, he seeks to define, isolate and classify stylistic devices in the riddle from a linguistic base (1965). Later he seeks to treat the riddle structure in terms of immediate constituent and topic-comment analyses (1969).

The structural aspect of riddles have been competently dealt by Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes in their article entitled *Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle*, in which they distinguished categories of riddles on the basis of

whether the riddles are metaphorical or literal, oppositional or non-oppositional. Roger D. Abrahams (1968) and Abrahams and Dundes (1972) have pointed out techniques of confusion besides opposition and metaphor by which 'the image' (or *Gestalt*) presented in the riddle-question is impaired and therefore is, in most cases, undecipherable. In addition to opposition, they discuss incomplete detail, too much detail and false Gestalt in which the detail in the riddle image suggest an answer, often embarrassingly obscene, which is not the "right answer".

Riddles are classified according to specific structures and functions and these are diversified in different social setting. This researcher found out that the Khasis have a very good repertoire of riddles. The samples of riddles collected are fitted into the following categories viz. oppositional and non-oppositional, metaphorical, riddle parodies and conundrum.

Oppositional Riddles

In oppositional riddles, the first and the second descriptive elements do not appear to form an integral whole or unit. Only upon formal enunciation of answers, the two separate elements can be properly and logically joined. In this category, the riddle will always deny the main function of a common object. It is in this sense that riddles play cognitive boundaries, creating tension by denying the familiar function of a familiar object (Lieber 1976: 258)

Ka khlaw khlem mrad,

Ka bneng khlem khlur,

Ka pung khlem dohkha.

Riddle referent: *U soh snepkor.*

Translation

A jungle without wild animals,

A sky without stars,

A pond without fish.

Riddle referent: The coconut.

In this riddle we see there is a contradiction between three pairs of descriptive elements. In the first pair, the descriptive element *jungle* denied the descriptive element *without wild animals*. In the second one, *sky* contradicts with the descriptive element *without stars*. And in the third, *pond* is contradictory to the descriptive element *without fish*. The coconut is covered on the outer part by some fibers in green colour when it is fresh or brown when it is dried. The water and the white portion which is edible are inside. Here, *a jungle without animals* refers to the outer most part of the coconut, *a sky without stars*, to the white and edible portion of the coconut and a *pond without fish* to the coconut milk.

Non-oppositional Riddles

In non-oppositional riddles, the descriptive elements are not contradictory. The following sample of non-oppositional riddles is given and analyze below.

U shoh beit ia la ka kmie.

Riddle referent: *U maw tylliat.*

Translation

He always beat his mother.

Riddle referent: The grinding stone.

A grinding stone consists of two stones. One is a flat board which is known as *u maw kmie* (a mother stone), and a small round / elongated shape stone known as *u maw khun* (a child). Traditionally, the Khasis used grinding stones to grind spices, herbs, etc. for cooking and medicinal purposes. So a grinding stone can be found in every Khasi household especially in the villages. When spices or herbs are to be grinded, they will be kept on the surface of the flat stone and the smaller stone is used for pounding/grinding purpose. That is why the smaller stone is referred to as a wicked son who always beat his mother.

Metaphorical Riddles

In this category, the riddle referent and the topic of description are different. Many Khasi riddles consist of an elaborate metaphorical question and answers that are very short. These riddles pose questions to the riddlee and ask them to see the literal base for the metaphor.

Tang shu kha ka kmie ia ka, ka lah pynkyrshah ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka siej.*

Translation

As soon as her mother gives birth to her, she wraps her with a Khasi traditional apron.

Riddle referent: The bamboo.

This is an example of metaphorical riddle. In the spring season, tender bamboo shoots sprouted from the earth around the bamboo groove. These tender shoots are covered by some kind of brown covers, which usually fall off when the bamboo shoots become bigger and taller. Here a bamboo shoot is a metaphor which refers to a young daughter wrapped in a Khasi traditional apron. Traditionally, *Jainkyrshah* (a traditional Khasi apron), which is a checked cloth (one and half meter in length and one meter in breadth) is used by Khasi women and grown up girls as an apron. Bamboo grooves are found in abundance in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Hence this riddle derived from close observation of nature. The above riddle is collected from the War-Jaintia area, where the bamboo is given a feminine gender (*ka*). So the cover of the tender shoots is referred to as an apron used by Khasi women.

Mama bajrong ba pei jingshong.

Riddle referent: *U Thyrnia*.

Translation

Tall uncle, with a hole on the seat of his pants.

Riddle referent: The needle.

This is a metaphorical riddle. In this riddle, tall uncle refers to the needle. The hole on the seat of uncle's pant refers to the eye of the needle which is use for threading. It is to be noted here that a tall uncle refers to a non-tribal person or those from the plains of India. The Khasis used to fondly call all non-tribal males as mama (uncle). It has also been observed that the Khasis are shorter in stature compared to plainspeople. So the long needle using for stitching and mending clothes is compared to non-tribals who are usually taller compared to the Khasis.

Conundrum

A conundrum is something that is mysterious and puzzling. It also used to explain riddles that are known as riddles of multiple classifications. These types of riddles also play on or manipulate words.

Ka khoh te ka khoh, tangba ym lah ban kit ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka Khohsiew*.

Translation

It is a basket, but nobody can carry it.

Riddle referent: The knee.

This is an example of a conundrum. In Khasi language *ka khoh*, the first part of the word *khohsiew* means a conical basket which the people used for carrying things on their backs along with a traditional strap.

Riddle parodies

Riddle parodies are a sub-genre that tries to make fun of riddles. The riddle referent in a riddle parody always upsets the expectation because the answer is straight forward and aims at making fun of the riddle and the riddlee.

Ki shait kyrteng kumno ia ki bie j tasngeng?

Riddle referent: *U sniang*.

Translation

What do they name the fools?

Riddle referent: The pig.

In this riddle parody, a fool or a naive person is always called a pig. This is because in Khasi culture a pig is considered to be the dullest and the most foolish among all the animals. This riddle is believed to have originated from a folk tale about the pig and the dog. The story says that in the olden days the pig and dog offered their services to man in return for shelter in his home. Both the dog and the pig wanted to stay inside his house and to eat the same food that he took. One day, man took both the pig and the dog to the field and asked them to plough the field. He also told them that the one who did most of the work would be allowed to live in the house while the one who worked less would be put outside. After the master left, the pig ploughed the land the whole day while the dog did nothing but slept. In the evening, when the dog woke up, he saw that the whole field was ploughed by the pig. The dog went to the ploughed field and danced on it till only

his foot prints could be seen. When the master came, the pig complained that the dog did nothing the whole day and he alone ploughed the field. But when the master inspected the field he found only the footprints of the dog. He chided the pig and called him a liar. The pig tried to tell the truth but man would not believe him. In the end, the pig was asked to live outside the house and the dog with man. But it has been observed that even in Western culture too, the pig is always considered not to be an intelligent animal. This can be seen even in English phrase like the one which goes, ‘to throw precious stones in front of swine’.

Balei u ngaptung u rwai eh?

Riddle referent: *Ban pynbiej ia ki kynthei ba dang samla.*

Translation

Why does a drone sing so loud?

Riddle referent: To fool the young female bees.

The above riddle is an example of riddle parody. It has been observed that a drone hums louder than any other bees in the beehive. He is also a lazy one because he never does any useful work like collecting nectar from flowers. In many cases also, it is found that lazy and worthless fellows always tried to talk big in order to impress others, especially girls in the hope of winning their heart. So those who observe this behavior of a drone create this kind of a riddle.

CHAPTER IV

Riddle Elements in Folk Poetry, Jokes, Games and Verbal Dueling

It is noted that the riddle is closely related to other genres of folklore like folk songs, jokes, proverbs, tales, games etc. This chapter concerns itself with the study of dialogic games, riddle poems, especially the Khasi *phawar*, riddle jokes and verbal dueling that takes place among the people of the Khasi community

.

Part A

Phawar and Riddle Poems

Phawar which is a rhyme couplet is a good example of Khasi folk poetry. Different types of *phawar* are sung on different occasions. There are religious as well as secular or social *phawars*. The religious *phawar* are performed during religious ceremonies. Secular or social *phawar* consist of those sung to celebrate a successful hunt, victory in battles, during the sport of archery, social gathering and so on. Traditionally only men used to compose and sing these *phawar*, especially in association with the traditional archery games. But today the occasions for *phawar* singing have become more diversified and increasingly secular because even women also take part in *phawar* singing and composition.

Phawar tradition obviously shows the presence of riddle element in the versification system which reveals the metaphorical structure of the quintessential riddle. The scholar's intention here is to make a study and analyze the content of

phawar and poems which contain riddle elements. These *phawar* when analyzed reveal hidden meanings of the text. Examples of *phawar* and riddle poems which contain some elements of riddles are given below.

Tik ho lih baiong

Ia I mem shiliang lbong.

Translation

Shake, you black man,

Hit the one-legged white woman.

In this *phawar*, the black arrow is compared to a black man and the target which is white in colour is compared to a one-legged white woman. It is to be noted that this *phawar* introduced the concept of a white woman and Africans. So it may be assumed that this piece was composed anonymously after the British came to colonize these hills.

Dohkha ha nanpolok ki ia bie j ia u shana

Da peit ho parari ioh phi bie j ia u mama.

Translation

Fish at Ward's lake are crazy of chanas

Look my compatriots lest you are crazy of uncle.

This *phawar* when analyzed reveals the hidden meaning embedded in the text. Ward's Lake is a beautiful man-made lake located in the heart of Shillong, behind

the famous Shillong Club. This picturesque lake was constructed by the then Governor of Assam, Sir William Ward in the year 1893-94. This lake is also locally known as *Nan Polok* (after the name of the engineer Mr. Pollock, who built it). The lake abounds with fish of different colours and sizes. People who through this beautiful lake used to feed the fish while standing on the wooden bridge in the middle of the lake. It is said that the fish of *Nan Polok* or Ward's Lake are very fond of *moogh dal*, a variety of lentil. In the context of this *phawar*, fish is a symbolic representation for young girls who have attained marriageable age. The Khasi males always used the phrase *Leit khwai* or to go fishing when trying to court young girls. In this *phawar*, the word *dohkha* (fish) refers to young and naive Khasi girls who like the fish of Ward's Lake can be easily lured and swept away by the false promises of love and uncle symbolizes any non-tribal male or men from the plains of India. Here the false promises of love means the promises of the non-tribal men to love and respect the young Khasi girls only later after marriage to be left alone as the man would return to his native place and marry a woman from his own community. It is to be mentioned here that the Khasis always fondly call any non-tribal male as uncle irrespective of his age. In the above *phawar*, the youth had seen in many cases the plight of the Khasi women after being abandoned by their non-Khasi husbands. So, seeing the danger awaiting the community, the young Khasi males warned and cautioned the girls not to be fooled by the non-tribal males into marrying them.

Part – B

Riddle Games

Another point taken up for study in this chapter is riddle games. Lee Haring calls these riddle games as dialogic games. (Lee Haring 1992: 51) Such games are played by children in many parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills which involve the use of riddles or contain riddle elements in them. These games are very popular and the dialogue in these games is mostly imitation of formal conversation. These games also function as folk model for dialogue. Both boys and girls participate in these dialogic games.

Below is an example of a dialogic game collected from Jaintia Hills. There are two versions of this game, one played in the Upland Jaintia Hills and the other which is played in the War-Jaintia areas.

Ong kani 'e-ja bei,'

Ong kani 'cheiwon u ioh'

Ong kani 'panram panchah'

Ong kani 'myntlang mynrkhiang'

Ong kani' rah ka wait wow u sdai

Phet cha khloo pom dow sla pathoo'.

Translation

This one says 'mother give us food'

This one says 'from where we will get'?

This one says 'borrow from others'

This one says, 'winter and dry season'

This one says 'take a big knife and a spade

Go to the jungle and cut the pumpkin leaves.'

This game is very old. No one knew for sure its origin. But there are speculations that this riddle game originated during the Anglo-Jaintia war (1860-63). During this war, a great famine took place in Jaintia hills and the people suffered greatly due to scarcity of rice which is the staple food of the people. In order to survive people had to live on whatever they got like edible leaves of plants and wild vegetables. It is said that during this famine, many people survived on the leaves of pumpkin plants. Usually, the Khasis used pumpkin leaves for curry and it is considered to be a very delicious dish.

In this dialogic game, the children used to play by personifying the five fingers of their hand, with five hungry children. The small finger represented the youngest daughter who asked their mother to give them some food as they were very hungry. But being poor, the mother could not afford to give food to her children. So, the ring finger which represented fourth daughter, told the youngest sister who asked for food from where they would get as food was very scarce at that time. On hearing this, the third daughter represented by the middle fingers asked her mother to borrow some food from others, so that they would be able to satisfy their hunger. The second daughter represented by the index finger said that their

mother could not borrow food from others as it is a dry season where people could not plant anything and so food is not plentiful. But the first daughter represented by the thumb, being the eldest one, understood the financial condition of their mother better than her other siblings, advised her sisters to take out a dao and a spade and go to the jungle to cut the tender leaves of pumpkin plants in order to fill their stomach.

There is another version of this dialogic game being played by the War-Jaintias who live on the southern slopes of Jaintia Hills. The text is reproduced as follows.

Ong kene 'ae ji mae'

Ong kene 'di ae ju ae?'

Ong ke ne 'shwiah ram shwiah chah'

Ong kene 'lah tlang lah rhiang'

Ong kene 'phet blar shaw'.

Translation

Said this one, 'mother give me food'

Said this one 'what to give'?

Said this one, 'borrow from others'

Said this one 'when its winter and dry season'

Said this one, 'I will run far away'.

In the past, this game was very popular. But today many have forgotten about it except for some old people. In this game, the five fingers represent the five

daughters of a very poor woman. The youngest daughter represented by the small finger asked for food from her mother as she was very hungry. But her sister, the ring finger asked how her mother would give her food since there was no food in the house. The third daughter or the middle finger said that they should borrow from others. On hearing this, the second sister or the index finger said if they borrow some food from others, they could pay what they had borrowed when winter comes, since during winter they would be able to get some work. But the eldest sister being fed up with them for their complaints about food when there was nothing to eat at home, said she would run away from home. So it is said that only four sisters stay together after their eldest sister left and migrated to some other places to live separately far away from them. So the thumb represented the eldest one as it is a bit far from the other fingers.

It may be mentioned here that the third sister says that they could pay back what they borrow when winter comes. This may be due the fact that winter is the busiest season in *War-Jaintia* areas as it is a season when the products in the region like areca nuts, betel leaves, bay leaves, oranges etc have to be plucked and sold in the markets. During this time the owners of betel nut plantations and orchards have to engage many labourers in the process of plucking and carrying these products to markets. It should be noted that *War-Jaintia* region lies in the steep slopes and terrains of Jaintia Hills and till the late 1970s and early '80s there were no approach roads in many areas of the region. So the products have to be taken to their destination through physical labour.

The difference in these versions may be due to the fact that the geographical locations, occupation and economic activities of the upland Jaintia and *War-Jaintia* people are different from one another. In the upland of Jaintia Hills cultivation of different varieties of paddy is the main occupation of the people. The people of both the areas are cultivators and it is found that rice culture is very prevalent among the upland Jaintias. But this is not the case with the *War-Jaintias*. They are mostly cultivators of areca nuts, betel leaves, citrus fruits (especially oranges), bay leaves etc. and in the past these products were export to different parts of the land.

Part –C

Riddle Jokes and Verbal Dueling

The bearing of jokes on Khasi riddles is also discussed in this chapter. Khasi riddle jokes serve as a setup for the punch-line answer. Parody riddle jokes extend the nature of riddle joke and humour into absurdity and nonsense. They are acceptable for people as they provide tools for disputing ideas, social practices and making fun of all these conditions. Riddles offer appropriate linguistic means for transforming the people's necessity to dispute into a linguistic play with words results in a purifying process through parody and laughter. Riddle jokes often occur in topical cycle. They explore a single topic develop as a fad; eventually, interest in that set of jokes declines and replaced by the next set of joke fad.

Sometimes riddles are also used as a satiric commentary by the people of one village or region about the people of another village or region. Typically riddle

jokes attribute a ludicrous and socially inappropriate trait to the people allegedly about whom the joke is told. Riddling, as part of evolving strategies sometimes turn into verbal dueling.

Contests, games and other phenomena such as insulting and joke behaviours have been viewed by many scholars as symbolic forms, and are modeled upon and reveal aspects of the social systems in which they are found. Ritualized verbal dueling is found in all cultures in the world and the description and analysis of verbal dueling in several cultural and social setting have attracted scholarly attention. Adamson Hoebel noted that song duels are used among some Eskimo groups to “work off grudges and disputes of all orders, save murder.” (Hoebel 1967: 93) Most scholars see specific forms of ritualized verbal contesting as being formed by human experience in the society in which it is performed and most have characterized this particular mode of social interactive behavior as being both a personal and social rituals. The themes reveal individual state of beings as well as the major concerns or pressure points of the society in which it emerges. Verbal dueling is seen by many investigators as being a form of symbolic warfare among individual which demonstrate some aspects of their power or weakness in relation to the rest of the groups. In many cultures, verbal dueling always occurs among male groups. But it has been observed that verbal dueling among the Khasis occur among boys and girls too.

The typical data that have been collected among the Khasis are those riddle jokes and verbal dueling that one particular locality or region told about the other

locality or region. Examples of riddle jokes that have been collected are reproduced below.

leileh wom em wa sngawthuh iei klam War?

Riddle referent: *Neibhah wa poi khatduh ki cha U Blai.*

Translation

Why it is that nobody understands the *War* dialect?

Riddle referent: Because they were the last one to come to God.

The dialect of the *War-Jaintias* is very different from other Khasi dialects. This dialect is not intelligible to people outside their range of habitation. So the upland *Pnars* used to ridicule the *War-Jaintias* by saying that on the appointed day, when God asked all the Khasi sub-groups to come and collect their dialects from him, the *Wars* as they lived in the precipitous slopes covered with dense jungle, were the last to reach. When they reached, they found that there was no more dialect left for them. So to pacify them God gave them some unintelligible dialect.

Mano ba rah da u phlas haba leit thied umphniang sharak?

Riddle referent: *Ki Nong Laimu.*

Translation

Who takes a thermo flask when going to buy kerosene?

Riddle referent: *Laimus.*

The inhabitants of *Laitumkhrach* and *Mawlai*, the two localities in Shillong, are fond of ridiculing and insulting each other. The verbal dueling between these two localities is well known to everybody living in Shillong. *Laitumkhrach* is the educational hub of the city where many prestigious educational institutions of the state are located there. On the other hand, the inhabitants of *Mawlai* consist mostly of people who emigrated from different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. So the residents of *Laitumkhrach* are considered to be highly educated and arrogant, while those of *Mawlai*, to be backward and ignorant. The residents of *Laitumkhrach* are ridiculed by others, that since they consider themselves to be too high-class compared to the others that when going to buy kerosene, they carry a thermo-flask instead of a kerosene container. It is to be noted here that the Non-Khasis pronounce *Laitumkhrach* as *Laitmukhrach* and hence, the people of the locality are nicknamed as *Laimu*.

There are songs composed in such a way that the words sound like song duels between young boys and girls in the community. One such song is reproduced here.

Kynthei... O ngi im pahuh pahai
Ha la I trep ha 'nongkyndong ngi ioh 'erbatemon
O ka beh ryngkat bad ka aiom.

Shynrang.... Ym dei (3) ymdei kumta te thei.

To wan bad ngi sha sor Shillong

Jingstad phin biang ngi ong

Oh! Balei phin sah biej ha nongkyndong?

Kynthei... Kynjai (3) balei ko bah phi shu kren sat

Balei phim da pyrkhath sha?

Phi la ioh mad ia sor Shillong

Phi klet noh iala shnong

Wow ko bah sah biej te phin ong.

Kynjai. (3)

Shynrang... Ym dei ko thei ba ngi bishni

Jingim palei jong phi mo

Haba phi don jingstad jingnang

Ka shnong kan iaid shaphrang

Balei- balei phi sngewthuh bakla ianga.

Kynthei... Ynnai- ynnai ko bah jingim sor jong phi ngim kwah

Ani ki shat ki rong ka sngi

Ba wan shoh naphang sepngi

Ki wan rah ki bah na sor te phi.

Shynrang... Ym dei

Kynthei... Ka dei.

*Shynrang... Balei phi kren pharshi wat shu kynnoh ia ngi
Ngi shu ia kdew ngi shu ia pynni lada phi sngap ia ngi
Ia- ia leit sha sor phin sa iohi.
Kynjai(3)*

*Kynthei... Kum shnong jong ngi phin ioh naei
Khie wad kylleng pyrthei bah
Ha ka aiom ba phuh ba phieng
Ki pah ki niang kongwieng
Oh! ban mih na shnong hi te ngi tieng
Kynjai (3) balei phi sngap noh bah?*

Translation

Girls... O we live in abundance
In our own huts in the country side we breathe the sweet breeze
O it blows along with the season.

Boys... No (3) no it is not like that girls
Come with us to Shillong
Education you will get we say
Oh! Why will you remain ignorant in the country side?

Girls... Softly (3) why boys you say like that

Why don't you think properly?

You have tasted Shillong City

You have forgotten your own village.

Softly. (3)

Boys... Girls it is not that we are jealous

Of your good and calm life

When you are educated

The village will progress

Why- why you did misunderstand me.

Girls... No- no boys your city life we do not want

The rays of the sun reflect

They reflect from the western side

Brought by the brothers from the city.

Boys... It is not so.

Girls... It is so.

Boys... Why are you insulting us do not blame us

We are just telling you advising you if you listen to us

Come on let us go to the city you will see.

Softly (3)

Girls... Like our village where will you get?

Go and seek all over the world

In the exciting season

The cicadas are chirping

Oh! to go away from the village we are afraid

(Softly) why are you silent guys?

This song is an example of a verbal duel between the young boys and girls. Here, in this song the boys are shown as the educated ones who have left their village to study in Shillong city, while the girls are uneducated and live in the village. The song opens with the girls telling the boys that they lead a simple and contented life in the village where they breathe the fresh breeze that blows all seasons. But in the second stanza the boys contradict the girls by asking them to come to study in the city where they would get good education because if they continue to live in the village they would remain illiterate and ignorant.

In the third stanza the girls replies back and asked the boys why they have to insult them. To the girls, their village is the best place in the whole world and they do not want to leave. They reprimand the boys by saying that just because they

live in the city they have forgotten about the wonderful and contented life the people led in the village. Life in the village is very different from that of the city. People in the village usually lead a laid back life where there is no rush and free from pollution and the humdrum of city life. The girls in this song tried to make the boys understand about the carefree life they lead at home. But in the fourth stanza, the boys countered them by saying that they are not jealous of them in any way but only trying to tell them that without education their village would never progress as uneducated people are ignorant of various issues pertaining to the development and prosperity of their village. In the remaining stanzas the girls ridiculed the boys about the city lifestyle that is quite different from those of simple villagers and said that they did not want to follow a new lifestyle as that would affect the manners and simple lifestyles of the village folk. But the boys not wanting to be beaten in the verbal duel try to soften the feelings of the girls and tell them that they just want to suggest going to the city to be educated and not for anything else. And they also promise to take them along if they want to go, so that they could see with their own eyes about the benefits of being educated. To this, the girls retort back and tell the boys that their village is the happiest place and even if they go the world over they would never find a place as beautiful and as good as their village which lies in the midst of natural beauty. But in the end the girls confess that the reason that they did not want to go out of their village is because they are scared of the outside world.

Chapter V

Modern Khasi Riddles

This chapter deals with riddles that have evolved during the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia hills by the British and with those riddles that have evolved with the advent of modern technology.

It has been observed that there are plenty of Khasi riddles which do not fall under the traditional category. Rather, these riddles may be put under the category of modern riddles. Historically, many riddles were found to have evolved after the coming of the British to these hills. In this category it has been observed that descriptive elements of riddles reflect colonial influence in the day to day life of the community. With the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia Hills by the British, the local people came into contact with others from other parts of the world like the white and the black men. This in turn led to the evolution of new sets of riddles whose descriptive elements come from observation of the western culture and which showed impact of foreign culture on the Khasi culture as well. Some of the riddle texts are reproduced and analysed below;

*U Phareng, u Khasi bad u Dkhar ki iashoh hapoh kawei ka kper haduh ba
kin da mih snam, katba u Negro pat u nang peit na shabar ka kper.*

Riddle referent: *Bam kwai, tympew, shun bad u duma sla.*

Translation

The white man, the Khasi and the non-tribal are fighting till they are covered in blood inside a fence, while the African is watching from outside.

Riddle referent: Chewing of areca nut, betel leaf, lime and tobacco.

In this riddle the descriptive elements refer to white men and Africans. The white man refers to lime which is white in colour, the areca nut (*kwai*) to a Khasi and a betel leaf (*tympew*) to a non-tribal. The Khasis are very fond of chewing areca nuts along with betel leaf and lime. Areca nuts and betel leaves play a very significant role in the life and culture of the Khasis. The Khasis always show their hospitality and welcome guests to their homes by offering *kwai* and *tympew* (areca nut and betel leaves) to the visitors to chew. So areca nuts and betel leaves along with lime is a symbol of hospitality and goodwill in Khasi culture. Along with areca nut and betel leaf, there are some people who also chew tobacco leaves by putting the same in the outer part of the gums. Chewing of areca nut along with betel leaf and lime will turn the saliva in the mouth to red colour. So the act of chewing areca nut and betel leaf along with lime is compared to three persons from different races fighting with one another till they shed blood, the red saliva in the mouth is likened to blood and the African who watches the three people fighting inside the fence refers to the tobacco leaf which is dark brown in colour.

Ka ei ka ta ka ba niad ia ka durkhmat jong ka baroh shi sngi?

Riddle referent: *Ka baje iing.*

Translation

What is it that wipes its face with two hands all day?

Riddle referent: The clock.

This is a modern riddle as clocks were introduced to us by the colonial masters. In this riddle, the clock is compared to someone having a face, and the two hands that wipe its face refer to the two hands of the clock, the minute and second that indicate the time of the day. Before the coming of the British, the Khasis all over the hills did not have the concept of hours, minutes or seconds. The Khasis in the past, measured the time by looking at the position of the sun in the sky. According to the scholar's mother, when they were young (in the 1940s and '50s) they did not have any watch or clock at home (in the rural area). But in the evening they always knew the time to start cooking for dinner by looking at one particular flower called *Khleo ro smit* in *War-Jaintia* dialect or *Tiewpor* in Khasi language. This flower is known as Four o'clock flower or the Marvel of Peru in English. This particular flower would bloom only in the late afternoon and during the day the petals would close. *Khleo ro smit* in *War-Jaintia* dialect means the flower that bloom only in the evening and *Tiewpor* in Khasi means the flower that tells the time.

Riddles Evolved through Modern Communication Technology

Modern communication system, especially the internet and mobile phone technology has brought a very interesting mode of information exchange by

means of Short Message Service (SMS) and the electronic mail which reveals that there is a folkloric text which can be developed and used. It has been found out that there are certain E-mail and SMS texts that constitute folklore genres. SMS and E-mail are new media of folklore and for this reason the use of the methods of folkloristics for their study may yield relevant result. Riddles evolved through the internet and SMS have been used and studied in this chapter. . Riddles created through the internet and SMS were put under three categories. 1) Riddle jokes 2) Purported obscene riddles 3) Real obscene riddle.

Riddle Jokes

What is the similarity between students during exams and Amir Khan in Ghajini?

Riddle referent: Both suffer from short term memory loss and wrote answers on their bodies.

It has been observed by many teachers that those students who always study for their exams only at the eleventh hour tend to forget many important parts of their answers during exams. They always complained that their minds became blank and could not recall what they have learned. Some of these students even resort to many unfair means. One of the most common ways of cheating is that students usually write important gist of the answer they expect to be asked during exams on their body especially on their palms, arms and thighs. In the Hindi movie *Ghajini*, Amir Khan, the protagonist of the movie suffers from amnesia as he was

struck on the head by his assailants. To remember the important events that occurred during this period of his life, Amir Khan also wrote whatever he remembers on his body. He tattooed the name of the persons who killed his girlfriend etc. so that he could remember what had happened to him while suffering from short term memory loss.

Which state in India has the largest English speaking population?

Riddle referent: Day time ... Kerala

Night time ... after two pegs ... Meghalaya.

This is an ethnic riddle-joke which makes fun of the two communities in India. Kerala is a state where Malayalees are the original settlers and the Khasis live in Meghalaya. Kerala has the highest literacy rate in the country. But it has been observed that many of the natives even though literate cannot speak English. In Meghalaya, English is the official language of the state and the medium of instruction in schools. English is also the common language between the different communities living in the state. Like any other ethnic community in North-East India, Khasi men are very fond of liquor. At night after imbibing alcohol drunkards start showing off their English language speaking skills by speaking in broken English. Those who have observed this incident created this riddle to ridicule both the communities.

Purported Obscene Riddles

In this category, the descriptive element (s) seems suggests something risqué, having sexual connotation, but the answer is quite innocent and tame.

I am 7 inches long; I have hair at my base.

When I move in and out of the hole, white fluids come out.

Who am I?

Riddle referent: The Toothbrush.

The above riddle falls under the purported obscene riddle category. Here in this riddle the descriptive elements seem to refer to the genital of a male. But in fact, it refers to a toiletry item, a toothbrush. The hole in this riddle refers to the mouth of a person and the white fluids to the saliva mixed with toothpaste. The simple act of brushing one's teeth here seems to refer to sexual intercourse.

Real Obscene Riddles

In real obscene riddles the riddle referent always have sexual connotation.

What do a hooker and 108 have in common?

Riddle referent: Both open all the time.

In this riddle joke, a hooker is compared to 108 services rendered by Emergency Management and Research Institute (EMRI). Hookers can be found everywhere

especially in towns and cities across the country. Even in Shillong and other places in Meghalaya, there were many instances where the operation of flesh trade has been reported in newspapers and in electronic media as well. 108 Emergency services have been launched in the state of Meghalaya since 15th November, 2008. The service rendered by the EMRI all over Meghalaya is laudable. EMRI centres are opened to the public twenty four hours a day, in order to be able to help those who are in need of their help. Hookers are also said to offer their services to their customers at any time of the day. So those who see this similarity about the time of their services created this riddle joke.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

This last chapter specifies the finding that evolved from the previous chapters of the study.

It is obvious from the preceding chapters that verbal art of the Khasis continues to exist in the oral tradition and in the context of Khasi folklore; only a small portion of folklore materials has been documented or written down. The previous chapters have also been concerned with showing how Khasi riddles have undergone a gradual but significant change. The investigation has provided evidence that the Khasis do have a good repertoire of traditional riddles a corpus of which has been slowly replaced by modern ones.

The study of Khasi riddles reveals that the Khasi community, despite having a good repertoire of riddles generally believes that they do not have a good collection of the same. This belief has been responsible for not attracting any scholarly attention to this genre and therefore the documentation and scholarly study of this genre is negligible. Moreover as riddles are very short in form and are often perceived to be used for entertainment only, the people tend to believe that they do not serve any purpose save that of being a juvenile form of recreation. Because of this, the popularity of Khasi riddles cannot be compared with the other genres of folk literature such as the tale and proverb.

The scholar has also observed that unlike the other communities where riddles have religious connotation, among the Khasis, riddles are used purely as a form of entertainment and contest among the youth and children to amuse themselves. No evidence has been unearthed to show otherwise that riddles are used for any serious purposes.

Traditionally Khasi riddles derived from close observation of nature and things around them. But the study reveals that with the advent of modern science and technology, there has been rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization all over Khasi and Jaintia hills which greatly affect the use of riddling as a verbal art.

The study has also observed that most Khasi traditional riddles are found to refer to bodily functions and to derive from close observation of the habits, customs and tradition of the Khasis. The study also shows that there are riddles whose origin could be traced back to many Khasi folktales.

The present study on riddles also reveal that Khasi riddles are closely related to other genres of folk literature such as folk poetry, dialogic games, jokes and verbal dueling. Another finding is that the traditional practice of riddling as a conventional verbal art is dwindling but riddling through the internet and short message service is growing vigorously.

It has been found out that the study of the internet and SMS riddles that are in circulation among the Khasis do not confine only to those typical riddles that are related to the community, but also those concerning other culture and events that occur though out the globe.

Lastly, the scholar has found out that riddling as a verbal art still subsists as an oral tradition among the Khasis. The invasion of modern technology has greatly affected the conventional practice of this verbal art, but it cannot stamp it out altogether.

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A STUDY OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN KHASI RIDDLES

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN FOLKLORISTICS.

BY

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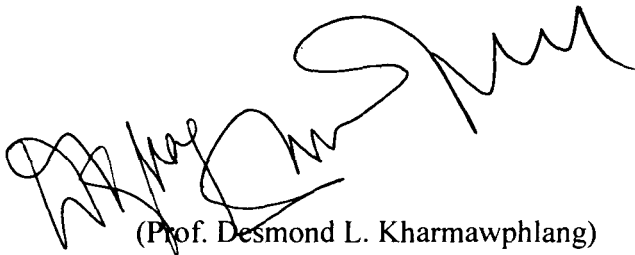
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DECLARATION

I Rimika Lanong, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me. The contents did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree awarded to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody. This thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

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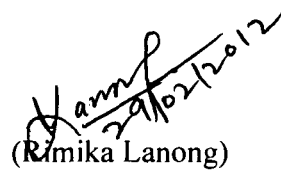
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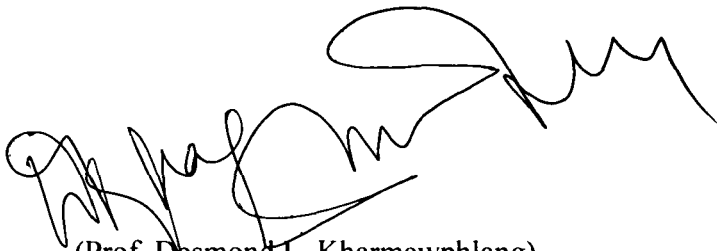
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled '*A Study of Traditional and Modern Khasi Riddles*' submitted to the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North-Eastern Hill University, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Folkloristics, is an authentic work done by Smt. Rimika Lanong and has not been submitted in part or full in this or any university for any degree.



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PREFACE

The concept of the riddle is universal and riddling is an art that is known to be widely practiced since time immemorial. The riddle is used to sharpen the mind and test the knowledge and wit of a person. It acts as a device to exercise and train the intellect, instill cultural values and attitude of participants. Scholars and folklorists from Aristotle to the present day have considered the riddle as an expression of traditional wit and wisdom. Perhaps Aristotle was probably the earliest thinker to have given attention to the riddle by associating it with metaphor. A riddle comes in the form of a poser and presents an intriguing form of folk literature. The riddle also constitutes a very important genre of folk literature and has occupied an important position in folklore in so far as expression and articulation of folk wisdom is concerned.

The practice of riddling can be traced back to the dawn of literary expression. It is not confined to some section of the society, but rather to every section of the people, kings and paupers alike, that is from the palace to the simple huts of the folk, the riddle is known to have its domain. Therefore, the riddle is one of the best attested ancient folklore genres with numerous examples found in different societies across the globe.

The riddle as a genre of folklore is a proper subject to be studied and analyzed. The form and contents of the riddle have been of special importance to the

scholars from ancient times to the present day. Riddles have been placed into different categories by different folklorists. The uses and functions of the riddle vary from one culture to another. The riddle usually has two aspects, the ritualistic and recreational and the common shared function of the riddle is for entertainment and recreation. In certain cultures, however, riddling has various religious connotations as an activity during rituals. Other functions of riddles are also cited as verbal outlet for aggressive feelings and sexual desires.

Like other communities across the world, the Khasis of Meghalaya too have a rich tradition of riddles that forms an important component of their verbal arts. But it must be said that no attention has been devoted to this oral heritage in term of documentation and analysis. Therefore it is important to document, study and understand the riddles that are in circulation among the Khasis from the past era to the present day.

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encouragement and help in type-setting the computer work have made my work easier.

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I owe an enormous debt of gratitude and appreciation to my parents (Late) B.L. Tongper and Mrs. N. Lanong for their love, prayers, support and encouragement during the time of my research, especially my father, who had sometimes accompanied me during my fieldwork when he was alive. My love and thanks to all my brothers and sisters for always being there for me and their involvement in my research work in one way or the other.

I would also like to thank the students, youth and friends in my Internet and SMS riddle groups for circulating and giving me plenty of data which in the end enabled this thesis to see the light of the day. Without their cooperation and support it would have been very difficult for me to obtain the internet and SMS riddle data.

Above all my greatest gratitude and thanks to God, the Almighty for the guidance, help and strength that enables me to complete this research work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Riddles constitute a very important genre of folk literature. They have occupied an important position in folklore in so far as expression and articulation of folk wisdom is concerned. They have well-designed structures. The riddle is one of the best-attested ancient folklore genres with numerous examples in Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Sanskrit traditions.

The *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* states that ‘riddles rank with myths, fables, folktales and proverbs as one of the earliest and most widespread types of formulated thought. A good case could be probably made for their priorities to all other forms of literature or even to all other oral lore, for riddles are essentially metaphor, and metaphors are the result of the primary mental processes of association, comparison and the perception of likenesses and differences (Leach 1950: 938). Botkin’s *Folsay* states “riddles perhaps even more than most types of traditional lore have a way of staying put. Their vigorous compactness of forms seems to give them a peculiar hold on the popular imagination and in many cases to ensure their preservation for centuries” (Leach 1950: 939).

The riddle has been defined differently by many folklorists. Archer Taylor, one of the greatest riddle scholars of modern times, has struggled to define analytically the structure of the riddle in terms of the ambiguity which seems to be the most commonly characteristic of the true riddle. He felt that there

was inadequacy in the description of the norms of the riddle. He defines “the true riddle or the riddle in the strict sense compares an object to another entirely different object” (Taylor 1951:1). Later he improved his definition by saying that the essential structure of the riddle consists of two descriptive elements, one positive and one negative. Here the positive one is metaphorical and the negative one is literal. Alan Dundes and Roger D. Abraham define riddles as “questions that are framed with the purpose of confusing or testing the wit of those who do not know the answer” (Dundes 1965: 130).

According to Durga Bhagwat the riddle “incorporates a question primarily and an answer secondarily. In the question a fact is concealed in the form of a metaphor, while in the answer the hidden meaning is revealed and the real purport of the implied sense is fully expressed. Concealment thus becomes the most vital function of the riddle” (Bhagwat 1965:1). William Hugh Jansen describes the riddle as “a question, direct or indirect, complete or incomplete, in traditional form whereby the questioner challenges a listener to recognize and identify the accuracy, the unity, the truth in a statement that usually seems implausible, or self contradictory, but that is in its own peculiar light always true” (Tristram 1968:231).

The riddle appears to be a contest in which one central person competes with another or others for the possession of the role of arbitrary authority. Riddling is not a game of strategy because victory is not achieved by rational choice. It is rather a game of rhetoric or arbitrary power in which victory is achieved by prior access to arcane knowledge.

The concept of the riddle is universal. Aristotle was probably one of the earliest thinkers to give attention to the riddle by associating it with metaphor. Riddles are an ancient and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. This could be seen in Sphinx riddles where Oedipus killed the Sphinx by grasping the answer to the riddle it posed. Samson outwitted the Philistines by posing a riddle about the lion and the beehive. In both cases, riddles, far from being mere child's play, are made to decide matters of life and death. Archer Taylor says in his book *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*, that riddling is a universal art and cites examples of riddles from hundreds of different cultures including the Finnish, Hungarian, American, Indian, Chinese, Russian, Dutch and Filipino sources among others (Taylor 1951). The practice of riddling can be traced back to the dawn of literary expression.

All folklorists agreed that the riddle as a genre of folklore is a proper subject to be studied and analyzed. Scholars and folklorists from Aristotle to the present days have considered the riddle as an expression of traditional wit and wisdom. The form and contents of the riddle have been of special importance to the scholars from ancient times. The riddle usually has two aspects, the ritualistic and recreational. Perhaps Frazer was one of the first to study it scientifically. The usage of the riddle on divergent occasions among the different races, both savage and civilized, seemed a mystery to him" (Frazer 1995: 194).

Riddles are very closely related to jokes. Much that can be said of jokes can be said of riddles too. This is not because riddles are necessarily jokes. In modern

culture, riddles tend to be jokes, but this congruence of the two *genres* is ethnographically the exception rather than the rule. It is not because riddles are a sub-class of jokes that some of the same concepts become relevant to both, but because both riddles and jokes frequently share the same tendency to depend upon some ambiguity or ambivalence, though the ways in which they exploit this differ. Freud refers to “the peculiar negative relation that holds between jokes and riddles, according to which one conceals what the other exhibits” (Freud 1960: 31). He explains how in a certain kind of riddle “the technique is given as a pre-condition and the wording has to be guessed; while in jokes the wording is given and the technique is disguised” (Freud 1960: 31). Elsewhere, he describes riddles as “the counterpart of jokes” (Freud 1960: 215) and refers to “the ambiguity of words and the multiplicity of conceptual relations” (Freud 1960: 172) as crucial to the genre.

The uses and functions of the riddle vary from one culture to another. But one of the commonly shared functions of the riddle is for entertainment and recreation. Riddles are mostly used by people especially children and youth to amuse themselves. Riddles are also used to test the knowledge and wit of the person. So they act as educational devices to exercise and train the intellect, to instill cultural values and attitudes to the participants. Riddles are also believed to develop or strengthen the ego of the riddler, the riddlee(s) and the audience present in any riddle contest. In certain cultures, however, riddling has various religious connotations as an activity during rituals. Other functions of riddles are also cited as verbal outlet for aggressive feelings and sexual

desires. Riddles are used as devices for mediating conceptual ambiguity and stimulating cognitive re-examination.

In India, the tradition of riddles is very ancient. It is as ancient as the earliest Indian myths and is closely related to them. It can be traced back to an age earlier than the Vedas (Bhagwat 1965: 3). Riddles in ancient India were used in religious ceremonies such as sacrificial rites, in marriage and death ceremonies. The ritualistic riddle is primarily religious, theological or speculative while the non-ritualistic is chiefly literary or, at times, didactic.

Demographic and Cultural Profile of the Khasis

Meghalaya, the abode of cloud, is one of the seven sister states in North-East region of India. It was carved out of Assam in 1972. Its capital, Shillong, is known for its scenic beauty and it was given the name Scotland of the East by the British. The state of Meghalaya is the original home of the Khasis and the Garos, the two dominant tribes residing in the state. The Khasis occupy the eastern part and the Garos the western part of the state. Khasi is a general term accorded to the various sub-communities that inhabited the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The name includes the (1) *Khynriams*, (2) *Pnars*, (3) *Bhois* (4) Wars and (5) the *Lyngngams*. The Khasis have a mysterious origin. They stand apart like an isolated island in their language, culture, dress and physical features in the midst of other ethnic communities in the North-East India.

Geographical description

Meghalaya is a hilly region and is well-known for its picturesque landscapes and natural beauty. The Khasis inhabit the eastern part of Meghalaya which is

generally known as Khasi and Jaintia hills. This region lies approximately between 25° N and 26° N latitude and 85° 49 E and 92° 52 E longitude. The area is bounded by Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagoan and Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam on the north, Cachar and Dima Hasao district on the east, on the west by East and South Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya and on the south by Bangladesh.

The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills are situated on an imposing plateau known as the Shillong Plateau or the Meghalaya plateau. The Khasi and Jaintia hills form the central and eastern parts of the plateau. These hills covered an area of 14,754Km and are characterized by rough topography, and grassland, hills and river valleys are found in this region. This plateau is formed of the oldest rock formation, the Achaean system. Towards the Northern plateau, the hills are rising almost to the same height, extending northward and gradually gently slope towards the plain of Assam. This submontane region is known as Ri Bhoi area. The northern area has an average elevation of about 170-820 meters and slope toward the north. Toward the Southern section of the plateau, the hills are rather steep, precipitous and marked by deep gorges and the valleys are deep and beautiful. The narrow strip of land at the foot of these slopes formed the natural boundary with the plain of Bangladesh. The central part of Khasi and Jaintia Hills running east to west hovers around 1500meters and the highest peak, the Shillong peak is about 1965mtrs above the sea level. The land consists largely of rolling uplands that are dissected by river valleys and abounds in streams, rivers and waterfalls. Most of the rivers originate from the central plateau and flow towards the north and south. Rivers like Umngot,

Umiam Mawphlang and Kynshi in Khasi hills and Lukha, Myntdu, Prang and others in Jaintia hills flow towards Bangladesh. Umiam Khwan, Umtrew, Myntang, Kupli, etc. flow towards Brahmaputra. The central upland is characterized by a diversity of relief. Its highest area is dominated by the Mawphlang upland on the west. The steepest part of this central upland is in the southern side. The climate of shillong plateau is influenced by elevation and distribution of physical relief. The Khasi and Jaintia hills experience a moderate climate. But the sub-montane region in the north and the foothills in the south experience hot and humid climate in the summer and cool in the winter while in the central plateau, it remains cool throughout the year. The land is rich in mineral deposits like coal, lime stones, sillimanite and uranium etc. The land receives heavy rainfalls during summer and cold in winter. Mawsynram and Sohra (Cherrepunjee) are known as wettest places on earth, with a rainfall of about 14,000mm annually. On the whole, the Khasi and Jaintia hills receive an average of 7700mm of rainfall.

The Khasis mainly live in the four hills districts of the state viz. East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia Hills Districts. Those who inhabit the middle ranges of Khasi Hills are called Khyntiam or Nongphlang, the Pnar inhabit the Eastern central plateau; the War occupy the steep slopes in the southern parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, (they are known as *War-Khasi* and *War-Jaintia* respectively) and the Bhoi, in the northern part of Khasi hills.

Racial Affinity and Origin of the Khasis

The origin of the Khasis is shrouded in mystery. Their folklore and oral traditions tell about their divine origins. The divine origin of the Khasis could

be traced back to the popular myth in which the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* (Seven Huts) came down to the Earth from the Sky through a golden ladder.

It is very difficult to talk about the origin of the Khasis in the absence of any written records. It is generally believed that the Khasis were one of the earliest communities who have migrated from somewhere in the South-East Asia to the Brahmaputra Valley where they resided before coming to their present homeland.

Many researchers have done research on the origin of the Khasis in the last century but almost all of them have different conclusions. According to P.T.Gurdon, “The origin of the Khasis is a vague question. Although it is likely that the Khasis have inhabited their present abode for a considerable period, there seem to be a fairly general belief amongst them that they originated from somewhere ...” (Gurdon 1907: 10). Gurdon also wrote that the Khasis have a great affinity with the people of the Far East especially the Mon-Anam.

J.R Logan is of the opinion that the Khasis have a close relationship with the Mons or Talaings of Pegu and Tenasserim, the Khmer of Cambodia and Anams. He also identifies a tribe known as Palaungs who inhabits the Shan state of Myanmar, as the closest kinsmen of the Khasis (Rana 1989: 65). Modern research scholars like Walter G. Griffith and others are of the opinion that the Mundas were the ancestors of the Khasis. They also hold the view that the Khasis belong to the Mon-Khmer group of Indonesia and that

linguistically they are related to the Mundas who are located in the Chotanagpur area (Gurdon 1907: 21-22).

In the absence of any written records, the Khasis have to depend on their oral tradition to know their history. But many scholars have accepted that the Khasis came from the East and belong to the Mon-Khmer group.

Language and Linguistic Affinity

The Khasi language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages, which is branched under the Mon-Khmer. The Khasi speakers live in the eastern part of Meghalaya. The Khasis adopted the Sohra dialect as the standard language of the community. In addition to the standard language there are many dialects and sub-dialects spoken by Khasis belonging to different regions of the hills.

Many scholars have classified Khasi under the Mon-Khmer family of languages. Linguists like Schmidt (1906), Sebok (1942), Diffloth (1982) and Zide (1992) grouped Khasi language under Mon-Khmer along with Palaungic, Khmuic, Wa, Vietmuong and others as they seem to share many cognate forms with Khasi language.

Traditional Administration

Traditionally, the Khasi hills are divided into thirty *Hima* (traditional states) and the Jaintia hills into twelve administrative units called *Eleka*. The head of the Khasi traditional state is *U Syiem* or Chief and that of *Eleka* in Jaintia hills is a *Doloi* (traditional administrative head). Before the coming of the British,

Jaintia hills were under a single chieftain known as *Ka Hima Sutnga*, which was again divided into twelve units known as *Eleka* for administrative convenience. The *Syiem* and *Doloi* have limited authority. According to customs, they cannot perform any important act without first consulting and the approval of their respective *Durbars* (traditional council). In the *Syiemship* system, the *Syiem* is assisted by the *Myntri* (the assistants of the *Syiem*). The *Syiem* manages the state business through the *Myntri*. In Khasi hills there is no land revenue. The land to a great extent is the property of the clans, villages or traditional provinces. The *Syiem* is always appointed from a *Syiem's* family. The line of succession to the *Syiemship* is through the female side i.e. the brother or maternal nephew of the *Syiem* only can succeed him but not the son.

Religion

The Khasis believe in God the Creator (*U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw*). He is represented by a goddess, *Ka blei Synshar*. According to the popular origin myth, the Khasis believed that in the beginning there were Sixteen Huts (*Khadhynriew Trep*) that were living above with the Supreme God. These Sixteen Huts used to come down to earth to work by means of a golden ladder. However when the golden ladder was severed because of the jealousy and sinfulness of man, the Seven Huts were stranded on earth. In consequence of their sin, the Seven Huts could no longer communicate with God as before. The sun also shone no more and darkness spread over the earth. When this happened, the children of the Seven Huts looked up to God for his mercy. *U Syiar* (Cock) was sent to act as a mediator between God and man and the connection was restored again though not like before. Thus from then onward

U Syiar was addressed as 'the liberator (*nongbahkhala*) of mankind.' *U Syiar* is the sacrificial animal and stands as the symbol of the Khasi indigenous faith.

Khasi religion is based on the ethics of right living and conduct. It is believed that God sent man to this world to earn righteousness (*ban kamai ia ka hok*). Another aspect of Khasi religion is God's commandment that every Khasi has to uphold namely- *Ban im tipbriew-tipblei* (to know man and to know God) and *tipkur-tipkha* (to know the maternal and paternal relatives). These are sort of natural law that had been inculcate in every Khasi's consciousness that regulate his thought, words and actions. It is the essence of Khasi religion that the duty of man here on earth is to live a righteous life.

Ka Leh Niam Iap (Death Ceremony) is another element of the Khasi religion. The Khasis glorify their dead as they believe that after death, they have become supernatural beings and were ordained to bless the living ones. The Khasis invoke the name of their first ancestral mother (*Iawbei*), Father (*Thawlang*) and the maternal uncle (*Suidnia*) to obtain their blessings. Respect and love for the dead is very important. All religious performances such as sacrifices, offering of food to the dead, prayers and invocations are strictly observed. At the death of a person, a cock is sacrificed, because the Khasis believe that the cock acts as a guide to the departed soul to reach the court yard of God (*Dwar u Blei*). They call the cock '*U 'Iar Nongprat Lynti*' (a cock that clears the path). It is said that if a cock is not sacrificed, the deceased will not reach the court yard of God, the Creator. It is believed that souls that earned righteous life leave this world and go to join the company of their

ancestors. While bad souls go to *Khyndai pateng niamraor Mynkoi U Jum* (a subterranean world where the evil spirits assembled). Another important ceremony that is related to *ka Leh Niam Iap* is the Bone deposition ceremony. After the deceased is cremated, the bones are collected and kept in a permanent family ossuary. But for those who died a tragic death, their bones are kept in a separate place.

The Khasis also worship other gods and goddesses who are the subordinates of God the Creator, like *ka 'lei Synshar* (goddess of decree), *Ki Ryngew Ki Basa* (deities that guard villages), *Ki 'lei Lum 'lei Wah* (deities that guard the rivers and hills), *Ki 'lei Muluk* (the gods of *Hima* or traditional Khasi states). These are propitiated yearly by the sacrifice of animals or fowls etc. They perform thanksgiving ceremonies to appease these deities with prayers and offerings. These deities are believed to be the guardians of the family and villages.

Divination is another characteristic feature of Khasi religion. Egg breaking Divination (*Ka Shat Ka Khein*) is very popular among the Khasis. In this ritual, eggs are broken on a wooden board called *ka Dieng Shat* in Khasi, and the signs and omens are interpreted through the position of the broken egg shells on the board. Another method of divination is the examination of signs and omens through the entrails of a fowl which is also widely practiced. It is the essence of the Khasi religion that a person's life on this earth is to live a righteous life (*ban kamai ia ka hok*) as ordained by God, the Creator.

Matrilineal System

The unique institution among the Khasis is the matrilineal system. Mother kinship is dominant. Due to the matrilineal character of the Khasi society, the children adopt the surname of the mother's clan. As the children adopt the mother's clan they belong to the mother, and as such there is no illegitimate child in the society, whether the woman had borne a child from a man with whom she had gone through a formal marriage ceremony or not. The Khasi community is consisted of many clans who traced their lineage from the ancestral mother (*ka lawbei*), who was the founder of the clan.

Kinship

As regard to the kinship system of the Khasis, one can say that it is different from other Indian societies. The system of kinship amongst the Khasis is based on *Ka tipkur-tipkha* (to know one's maternal and paternal relatives). It is clan exogamy. Members who belong to the father's side are respected, whether young or old. As the Khasi system of kinship is exogamous, so inter marriage within clans who claim to originate from a common ancestry is prohibited. Intra-clan sexual relationship is the greatest sin among the Khasis and couples who commit such acts are ostracized from the society. A non-Khasi woman who marries a Khasi man is not only accepted and assimilated, but she becomes the progenitress of a new clan through a ritual known as *Tangjaid*. In the *Tangjaid* ceremony, the non-Khasi woman who marries a Khasi and her children will be given a new surname as they cannot take their father's title according to Khasi tradition.

Marriage

Marriage among the Khasis has both religious and social aspects. It is a big social institution among them. Marriage ceremonies differ from one place to another. One of the most remarkable features of the Khasi marriage is that it is customary for the husband to go and live with his wife in his mother-in-law's place, and not to take his bride home as in the case of other communities. This is mandatory if the wife is the youngest daughter of the family, whereas those who married the elder daughters may take their wife and live separately after they have one or two children and when they can afford to construct their own home. Polygamy is rare among the Khasis as they practice the monogamy system. Polygamy is not encouraged and generally looked down upon. Due to the exogamous features of the society, intra-clan marriage is strictly prohibited. Violation of the clan exogamy is considered to be a crime. It is known as *Ka Sang* in Khasi. Cross cousin marriage is not allowed. Love marriage is prevalent among the Khasis. But arrange marriages also do take place in some cases.

According to Gurdon there are three types of marriage ceremonies prevalent amongst the Khasis. These are 1) *Ka pynhiar synjat*, 2) *Lam doh* and 3) *Ka Iadih Kyiad* or *Ia suit* (Gurdon 1907:127). There are certain forms of marriage ceremonies among the Khasis. Marriage usually takes place at the bride's house. The boy of marriageable age selects a girl he loves and after some association with her, they inform their families about their wish to marry. If there is no taboo and obstacles between the families and if both sides agree, the marriage is fixed. Marriages are preceded by betrothals in which the man

along with his close relatives from both the parents' sides would go to the girl's house to ask for her hand by performing a ceremony called *ka lateh ktien*. Three days before the marriage the groom usually avoids visiting the bride's home. On the morning of the wedding day, the bride's family sends food like rice and boiled meat locally know as *ka doh Jynlar* to the groom's house in baskets and vessels. On the day of the marriage, the groom along with his marriage party consisting of his maternal uncles, his father and his brothers, other relations and friends wearing their best attires go to the bride's place after having a feast in the groom's house. On the way they would be received by the representatives of the bride's side to welcome them. An exchange of *Kwai* (areca-nuts along with betel leaves and lime) takes place amongst them. The *Ksiang* (Negotiator) leads the groom and his party to the bride's house. In the bride's house also there is a *Ksiang* representing the bride's side. A dialogue between the *Ksiang* marks the start of the ceremony. The marriage centers round the citation of contracts among the *Ksiang* of the two sides and the pouring of libation from two *klong* (gourds). The priest will take three pieces of dry *khapiah* (fish) as a symbol of solemnization of the marriage. Rings are exchange and the priest declared before all the elders and all who present that they all bear witness to the union of the two as husband and wife. After the ceremony is over, the dry fish will be placed over the roof of the house. The female clan members of the groom never go with him to the bride's house on the wedding day. After the feast, the relatives and friends of the groom go back to their respective places while the groom remains in the bride's house.



Three or four days after the marriage, the bride along with her husband and relatives pay a visit to her husband's home and have the blessing of her mother-in-law. The mother of the bride is not allowed to go to her son-in-law's place during this visit. After this formal introduction, the wife and her family can freely visit them.

In case of the Jaintias, the offer of marriage is always made by the male. He may choose any one he likes to be his wife. But marriage within the clan or sub clans is strictly prohibited. When the girl agrees to the boy's proposal, the matter is discussed by his family members including his maternal uncle(s). The male's family then will send the negotiator generally the male's maternal uncle to the girl's parents. If everything is alright and there is no obstacle to prevent the marriage between the two, the girl's family arrange for a ceremony called *Likhang Pathi*. In this ceremony, the girl's maternal uncles, come to the male's family to give one betel nut and five betel leaves. Engagement is the prerequisite of the marriage. The maternal uncles of both sides fix the date of marriage. Jaintia marriage usually takes place after dusk.

In accordance with their tradition, the Jaintia's house is divided into five parts, namely, the *Dhari*, *Trethlong*, *Dpai*, *Chlur* and *Cherakut*. On the marriage day, the groom along with the marriage party goes to the bride's house taking with them bamboo or wood pine torches. Some selected persons from the bride's side come to the groom's place to escort the marriage party. When the groom's party arrives, they are accommodated in a separate row in front of the house called *Dhari* (a kind of porch) and are served with food. The groom's

feet are washed, dried and applied with mustard oil by the bride's family. After this, he is taken to another room called *Trethlong* and was made to sit on a special mat prepared for him only. At this time the groom is considered as sanctified and no one is allowed to touch him or the mat where he sits till the marriage ceremony is over. During this time, the bride is seated in another room known as *Chlur* along with her friends. Betel nuts are exchanged between the two sides and a *Lamiutang* ceremony begins. The negotiator called *U Waheh Kni u Chynrang* from the groom's side talks and shows the boy as a person with good character. He wishes the couple on behalf of all a happy and prosperous married life. Then the representative from the girl's side called *U Waheh khanatang* speaks in a similar way and wishes the couple for a happy life. After this, the priest takes over with the invocation to the goddess *Ka blai Synchar*. The exchange of marriage contract and pouring of libation take place. Water sprinkling is also done by the priest.

After the feast, at midnight, the groom's party goes back to their respective places leaving the groom behind at the bride's house. The following morning, he returns to his mother's home. He visits his wife only during the night. The husband is known as a visiting husband. There are cases when the husband goes to stay at the wife's house permanently and such man is called *Niangjiah*. In such cases, the consent of all family members is to be obtained and a special prayer is performed. But in case of his death, his bones will have to be deposited in his own clan's cairn.

Divorce

Divorce cases are known and there are no rigid conditions for divorce, it is the concern of individual couples that lead to a divorce. Divorce among the Khasis is common and is by mutual consent. When the couple wishes for divorce, a simple ritual is performed in the presence of a witness. After the ritual is done, the village crier will make a public announcement. Remarriage after the divorce is prevalent among both men and women.

Dress and Ornaments

The traditional dresses of the Khasi women are different from their neighbouring communities. The Khasi women used *ka Jainpien* which is wrapped around their waist and loop down to the ankle over which *ka Jainkyrshah* (a kind of apron) is tied from the left shoulder and looping down below the knee. The Khasi women can also be distinguished by their dress which they called *Jainsem*, which consists of two pieces each about one and half metre, tied over both the shoulders. On festive occasions they also wear their traditional dresses called *Dhara* made of silk. A kind of shawl called *Ka Tapmoh* which covers the head and upper part of the body is worn by the women. Over the *Jainsem*, a garment known as *Jainkup* is worn. This is draped over the shoulders, its two ends knotted in front at the chest. It covers the lower end of *Ka Tapmoh* and falls down to the knee. Another important part of the Khasi woman's dress is *Ka Pla Kieng* (a cotton haversack) where she kept money, betel nuts and leaves, keys, knife and other things.

The Khasi men wear *Ka Jymphong* or a sleeveless coat mostly made of cotton with fringes stitching below the hem. Other items of men's dress consist of a waist girdle, which is worn beneath *Ka Jymphong*, a cap with earflaps and dhotis. Today the *Jymphong* may be said to be out dated as it is replaced by male Western attires. *Jymphong* was no longer worn except in some ceremonial dances.

The Khasis are very fond of jewelry especially those made of gold and silver. They also used coral beads. These coral beads, reddish in colour are made into necklace, half of them being moulded in pure gold. These are locally known as *Paila*, which are worn by both men and women. Earrings are worn by both men and women. There are three types of earrings used by women. These are '*Siar kynthei* (long earrings bedecked in the earlobes and made of pure gold), *Wahdong* (chainlike round earrings made of gold, with the topmost ends converging in the upper part of the ear) and *Lakyr deng* (earrings worn in the earlobes and made of pure gold). Men wear earrings known as *ki 'Siar shynrang*. These are different from those worn by women. Women also used gold bracelets (*Khadu kti*), gold chains (*Kynjri ksia*) and finger rings. During ceremonial dances, women also wear *u Shan ryndang* (a close fitting necklace worn at the neck) and *ka Pansngiat* (crown) made of silver or gold.

Position of Women in the Society

Women enjoy a dignified and respectable position in the society. They are considered to be the custodians of property. Khasi women enjoy more freedom in comparison to other women of other neighbouring communities. A woman

is accorded with respect as she is considered to be the one through whom the clan is propagated. But although women occupy an important position in the society, yet they have no rights in traditional political and administrative spheres. Khasi women are not allowed to participate in the Village Durbar and are excluded from political, administrative and judiciary processes.

Festivals

The Khasis have their own festivals which are both religious and festive. Some of the most well-known festivals of the Khasis are *Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem*, *Ka Shad Nongkrem* and *Ka Behdeinkhlam*. *Ka Shad Sukmynsiem* literally means 'Dance to the heart's contend'. This dance usually takes place during spring season before the next sowing or planting. It is a dance of thanksgiving to God for all the blessings he showered during the past year and for the blessings that are yet to come. Maidens take part in this dance glorifying their maidenhood. Men, young and old, also take part in this dance praying for strength and vitality and to exult the virility already given unto them. *Ka Shad Nongkrem* or the *Nongkrem Dance* is the annual religious ceremony of the traditional Khasi state called *Khyrim*. This dance is usually held for five days where the people pray to God for his blessings. Another important festival of the Khasis is *Ka Behdeinkhlam* which literally meant 'to drive away the plague'. It is usually celebrated by the Jaintias during the month of July after the sowing is done.

Khasi Riddles

The Khasis of Meghalaya, like other communities all over the world, have a rich tradition of riddles which forms an important component of their verbal

arts. The Khasi equivalent for the word riddle is *Ka Jingkyntip*. It is also known as *Khohpuit* among the Pnars and *Kyntiap* among the *War-Jaintias* which are sub-groups of the Khasi community. The word *Jingkyntip* derived from the word *Jingtip* which means knowledge or information or to know. So we may say that *Jingkyntip* to the Khasis means to test the prior knowledge or the information that one possesses in relation to riddles. But it must be said that no attention has been devoted to this oral heritage in term of documentation and analysis. The practice of riddling among the Khasis usually takes place in informal settings, in social gatherings, in family circles, among friends and colleagues. Riddling is an independent art and is more popular among the children and youth.

Statement of the Problem

The research work on Khasi riddles is motivated by many factors. It is a historical fact that that the other genres of folk literature of the Khasi Community such as narratives, folksongs, proverbs, maxims and others have been documented and studied by many collectors and scholars since the nineteenth century (Nongrum 2000). The same however can not be said of riddles. Till date not even a single booklet of riddles is in existence and the scanty mention that riddles receive in printed form are part of larger texts such as tales, novels and plays. There are strong indications that show that the riddle is a fairly dynamic genre capable of being generated and perpetuated through oral transmission but accountably, its diffusion especially as an item of folk communication is limited. The endeavour and scope of this research work is to make a study of the riddle as a genre of oral literature. Another

point taken up for study is the *Phawar* which is a rhymed couplet and a good example of Khasi folk poetry. It appears that there are riddle elements in the *Phawar* in the versification system which reveals the metaphorical structure of the quintessential riddle. This also brings into focus the existence of the inter-genres such as riddle jokes, riddle poems and riddle games.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to document riddles that are in circulation among the Khasis. After a complete documentation, they will be classified according to the accepted typology followed by different folklorists. A special category is made for those riddles that do not fit in the accepted typology. Literary genres have significant bearings on the community they spring from, and this aspect is analyzed in respect of Khasi riddles. The study of the traditional and evolving traditions of Khasi riddles is the first of its kind and this will contribute, in a big measure, towards the professional study of verbal arts of the Khasi community.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study data has been collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources have been generated from field work, written documents and *Phawar* compositions. This scholar has also employed direct interview method and non-participant observation method to elicit the required data. Data has also been collected through informal riddle sessions among youth and children and also among college students studied in different colleges in Shillong, Jowai, Nongpoh and Nongstoin. The scholar has also

visited many villages in different parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills and has been able to unearth valuable information through interactions with informants belonging to different age groups from Sohkha, Nongtalang, Dawki, Nongbareh, Jowai, Rymbai, Umtra, Mawryngkang, Thadnongia, Pynur, Smit, and Mairang villages. Data has also been collected from Mawlai, Laitumkrah, Jaiaw, Nongthymmai, and Mawkhar localities of Shillong.

Another method of data collection that the scholar employed was the use of modern communication systems i.e. the internet and mobile phones. Cell phones and the internet contain vast stores of riddles and these will be studied and analyzed accordingly. A database of internet and Short Message Service (SMS) riddles has been created by the scholar and an SMS riddle group was formed for the compilation of the data. In this way the data had been collected from people belonging to different professions like doctors, engineers, teachers, sports persons, lawyers, business people, musicians and student community. The members of the SMS group circulated among themselves all the data they have received and passed them on to this scholar. Riddle groups have also been formed by the scholar through social networking like Facebook and Orkut to collect the required data.

The scholar also gathered information and data from secondary sources. Published books, articles, journals both printed and online ones, newspapers, magazines, seminar papers, visuals and websites served as the main sources for secondary data.

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CHAPTER II

Folklore and Verbal Art

The term Folklore was first coined by William J. Thoms, a British antiquarian in 1846. In his letter published in the *Athenaeum*, he suggested the use of a good Saxon compound Folk-Lore ... “the Lore of the people” to replace all other what some cumbersome and even slightly misleading terms. William Thoms further urges readers of the *Athenaeum* to collect examples of those “manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs etc.” many of which “assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them” (*Aethaenum*, No 982, 1846: 862-863).

Folklore is commonly considered as the lore of the illiterate rural folk by many. We also tend to think of folklore as something set in the past. Folklorists have made attempts to define the term folklore. Their attempts to define folklore have contributed a lot to the domain of folkloristics. But we should understand that though the term folklore is comparatively a new creation, nonetheless ‘folklore is as old as mankind’ (Handoo 2001:1). It should be noted that the materials of folklore had been collected and studied with scholarly interest long before Thoms coined the term, under various labels such as ‘Popular antiquities’ or ‘Popular literatures’ and so on. Herder, a German Nationalist had used terms such as *Volkslied* (folksong), *Volkjsseele*, (folk soul), and *Volksglaube* (folk belief) in the late eighteenth century (Dundes 1985: 5). The Grimm brothers published the first volume of their famous *Kinder und Housmarchen* in 1812 which was recognized by Thoms himself

and which is very often used as evidence by Western scholars to trace the growth of folkloristic studies. Scholarly collections of folklore materials were also done in Asia, particularly India where works such as the *Kathāsaritsāgar*, *Pañcatantra* or *Jātaka* (Handoo 2001: 6) are believed to be much older than many folklore collections in the west, older than even the Grimm's collection.

Thoms was very much influenced by the Grimm's brothers of Germany. This could be seen in his following remarks:

“.....until some James Grimm shall arise who shall do for the Mythology of the British Island the good service which that profound antiquary and philologist has accomplished for the Mythology of Germany. The present century has scarcely produced a more remarkable book, imperfect as its learned author confesses it to be, than the second edition of the “*Deutsche Mythologie*” and, what is it? - a mass of minute facts, many of which, when separately considered, appear trifling and insignificant - but, when taken in connection with the system in to which his master-mind has woven them, assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them.” (Athaeneum. No. 982 (August, 22, 1846) pp. 862- 863).

When Thoms coined the term folklore, it seems he was very clear about what constitutes folklore. His words and phrases such as “manners”, “customs”, “neglected customs”, “fading legends”, “fragmentary ballads” etc. do give us a

picture about what folklore meant to him and his awareness of folklore which was closely tied to currents of romanticism and nationalism (Dundes 1985: 4).

In 1878, twenty two years after the coinage of the term Folklore, the British Folklore Society was established with Thoms as its first director. The American folklore society which was formed ten years later in 1888, followed the English model, and while it did not offer any definition on the term folklore, the objectives were given as “ the study of folklore in general and in particular the collection and publication of the folklore of North America” (North American Journal of Folklore 1898, 11: 302). By the last decade of the nineteenth century, many national folklore societies had been formed in Europe.

Definitions of folklore are many and varied. According to the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, there are twenty-one definitions of folklore offered by different folklorists. The difficulties experienced in defining folklore are real and legitimate. This is because Folklore as a new field of inquiry is straddled between Humanities and Social sciences.

The term folk appear to be confusing and misleading. Because in the 19th century the term *folk* was defined as:

“a group of people (the peasants, non-literate or illiterate or rural people) who constituted the lower stratum of the society”

(Dundes 1978: 2).

If this definition is accepted then one would have to conclude that one day folklore would disappear as soon as the peasant society ceased to exist. If we accepted the above definition then we can say that the urban dwellers are not folk, and as such they have no folklore. But in the true sense folklore is still continuing in all societies. This is because folklore is not static but subject to change and continuity.

According to Jones and Georges the word folklore;

“... denotes expressive forms, processes, and behaviours that we customarily learn, teach and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions and judge to be traditional. They are based on known precedents or models, and because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, thought, belief, and feeling”
(Georges & Jones 1995:1).

But most are in agreement with Alan Dundes who contend that the term folk can refer to;

“... any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is -it could be a common occupation, language or religion- but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally, most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not

know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity” (Dundes 1978:7).

Lore refers to wisdom, teaching, education and knowledge.

The contribution of Thoms through his coinage of the term folklore had two important consequences all over the world. Firstly it led to the founding of an academic discipline known as Folklore in many part of the globe. And secondly it generated a long and unending controversy about the definition and about what should or should not be included in the discipline of Folklore.

It is a historical fact that the area of inquiry in folklore has been found to be overlapping, repetitive and duplicitous in the sense that the same cultural phenomenon has been studied by different disciplines and at times in identical manner. This in turn led to the controversies regarding the boundaries of each area of inquiry. For example since both literary scholars representing the discipline of literature and folklorists studied folk literature, sometimes on similar line and sometime in different ways, folklore studies began to be considered as part of the literary studies therefore denying it the status of a separate discipline which has its own distinct characteristics. In the same way when a folklorist studies a physical artifact of culture, anthropologists started behaving exactly in the same manner like the literary scholars in the case of text based folk literature.

Since the beginning of the scholarly studies of Folklore in the early nineteenth century, folklorists have been aware that the phenomena they study are integral parts of a complex of creation and conventions which are fundamental to the existence, perpetuation, and survival of the human as a social being. This complex of interrelated behaviours of man serve as a base for what is commonly known as culture. Folklore has been conceived as cultural phenomena long before Edward B. Tylor's definition of the word culture in 1871. Culture is defined by Tylor as that "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1924: 1). Even the early Greek writers such as Hesiod and Herodotus knew that the myths they characterized were not instinctive phenomena, but rather they are aware they are stories that individual human beings create and other subsequently learn, repeat and live by. The Grimm's brothers had indicated that their collection of German legends (*Deutsche Sagen* 2. Vols. 1816-1818) were part of the larger whole that embodied and revealed the character of a nation. This is reflected in their foreword to the *Deutsche Sagen* Volume I, 1816:

"We recommend our book to devotees of German poesie, history and language and hope that it will become to all as purely German fare. For it is our firm belief that nothing is as edifying or as likely to bring more joy than the products of the fatherland. Indeed an apparently insignificant, self occasioning discovery and endeavour in the study of our own indigenous culture can in the end bring more fruit than the most brilliant discovery and cultivation of foreign fields" (Ward 1981: 11).

Throughout the history of folklore as a discipline, it has been observed that those were the pioneers in the documentation and study of folklore then were also pioneering students of culture. By 1871 the year, Edward Tylor gave his famous definition of Culture and Anthropology subsequently emerged as an academic discipline with culture as its central construct, folklorists had, for more than fifty years been trying to conceive examples of folklore as aspects of culture. Folklorists have also been aware that folklore is related to other aspects of cultures of which they are a part. Therefore folklore serves as an important source of cultural knowledge and understanding. The varied definitions of folklore by different scholars, not only define the folkloric phenomenon, but also try to list the genres that make this phenomenon. But this gives rise to controversies and debate that centre on the problem trying to draw a line between Cultural Anthropology and Folkloristics. In the academic circles both Anthropology and Folklore, there was at least one thing on which all by and large seems to agree, i.e. folk literature or verbal art. Scholars seemed to agree that folk literature is a separate area of inquiry and falls under Folklore. But when Folklore scholars tried to include material culture, social folk customs and performing art which generally fall under folklife, the controversies became more obvious. Scholars were suspected that both the students of Folklore and Cultural Anthropology in the end might be studying the same subject matter with identical theoretical perspective and methodology and this might lead to the achieving of similar results. But W.H. Goodenough put an end to such speculations by saying:

“The separation of cultural anthropology and folklife study ... is not a reflection of an intrinsic difference in their respective

subject matter: rather is a reflection on how Euro-American scholars have identified themselves with the peoples whose customs and cultures they study. Anthropology- because of its early interest in human evolution and because of its early concentration on people with hunting and horticultural economies, on the mistaken assumption that they were fossilized relics of a general past human state- has come to be associated popularly with the study of the so called primitive peoples. But the designation primitive hardly fits the people who produced the civilization of Central and South America, of West Africa and the Orient. Consequently Anthropology has come to be viewed more recently as the study of non-Western peoples. The disciplines of Rural Sociology and Folklore in the United States and Folklife in Europe, on the other hand, dealt with Western peoples. There is nothing wrong with such a division of labour on practical grounds. What has been wrong is the false pretention by some that it represented a basic difference in the kinds of phenomenon studied, an assumption following from an ethnocentric conceit of the sort expressed in the idea ‘the White man’s burden’” (Yoder 1976: 19).

The revolution that occurred in the Folklore discipline in the 1970s was unprecedented. It involved radical redefining the academic discipline of folklore. There is a change in the perception of folklore. Many folklorists started advocating that folklore is not only about the past. It is about the now and

the happening. This in turn led to the emergence of Contemporary or Urban Folklore e.g. urban legends, jokes, place lore, playing the dozen, yo'mama jokes and rap, occupational lore, etc. and modern technology lore.

Richard M Dorson has outlined four broad sectors of folklore and Folk life studies. These are:

- 1) Oral literature
- 2) Material Culture
- 3) Social Folk Customs
- 4) Performing Arts

Oral Literature: Oral literature is also called verbal art or expressive literature. They are spoken, sung and voiced of traditional utterances. Traditionally this sector is known as folk literature. Oral narratives like myth, legends, folktales, jokes anecdotes, proverbs, riddles, charms etc fall under this sector. Each of these forms will have many sub genre depending on the culture in which these genres are found. Oral or folk poetry is another subdivision of oral literature.

Material culture: Material culture which is also known as Physical folklore concerns with the study of techniques, skills of the folk in building their homes, making clothes, preparing food, tools and implements etc. This aspect of folklore is visible rather than aural.

Social folk customs: This is another branch of folklore which is very close to material culture. It studies the festivals and celebrations involving the

participation of the folk in large numbers. These festivals and celebrations may be either religious or secular. Folk religion and folk medicine also fall under social folk customs.

Performing folk art: This last sector of folklore and folk life concerns itself primarily with traditional music, dance and drama.

Khasi Folklore Studies

In the late 19th century, Folklore as an academic discipline has been established in many parts of the world and the collection and documentation of folklore material had gained momentum across the world. Collection of folklore material in the North-Eastern part of India in general and Khasi-Jaintia hills in particular was no different from others as it was done by colonial civil servants, missionaries and the educated elites among the native Khasis. So it could be said that collection and documentation of folklore material started with the coming of the British to this land. This could be traced back to the time when the Khasi language was reduced to Roman orthography by Thomas Jones I, a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary. Though some scholars had made an attempt to collect and document Khasi folklore materials, still many are yet to be documented in different parts of the hills. The growth and development of Khasi folklore studies can be roughly divided into four periods: the Missionary Period, the Seng Khasi Period, the Modern period and the Post-Modern Period.

The Missionary Period (1841-1894)

The first burst of missionary activity can be traced back to 1841 when a missionary by the name Thomas Jones, first landed in Cherrapunjee on 22nd June, 1841. After one year he started the first school and published the first Khasi book using Roman orthography. During the early years of the Missionary period there were no trained compilers/collectors of folklore material. But the missionaries have contributed a lot to the development and creation of the sense of identity among the Khasis during that period. The name of John Roberts deserved to be mentioned here. He came to these hills in the year 1871 and unlike the other missionaries, he published not only religious texts but also included a wide range of literature borrowed and translated from the occidental, general knowledge and other texts that had no Christian content. This eminent scholar-missionary had collected and documented many Khasi folk tales which was published posthumously by his wife in 1914 in Wales. In the fourth Khasi reader that was published in 1895, *Phawar* (oral verses chanted in traditional tunes) were perpetuated. His attempt to compile Khasi idiom and Phawar in their pure and natural forms contains the seeds for evolution of folklore material. In 1891, Morkha Joseph wrote a poem based on the oral narrative of *U Sier Lapalang*.

Even though it is a well known fact that the Christian missionaries came to these hills with the primary purpose to proselytize yet most of the folklore material collected during this period was the result of the efforts of missionaries and colonial civil servants who collected and recorded the habits, customs, manners, oral tradition and rituals of the Khasi people.

The Seng Khasi Period (1895-1920)

The work of the missionaries led to the creation of the sense of identity among the Khasis. This period saw the emergence of writing by a host of Khasi writers. Although the Khasis have come under the influence of Western education and Christianity in a fairly long way, yet during this period, there were Khasi intellectuals, prominent among whom were Jeebon Roy Mairom, Rabon Singh Kharsuka and Radhon Singh Kharwanlang who had not dispense with their traditional narratives and folklore many of which are connected with traditional belief and rituals of the Khasis. These stalwarts founded the *Seng Khasi Movement* in 1899, a socio-cultural organization of the Khasis who adhered to the traditional Khasi religion. These Khasi scholars were firstly prompted by a genuine apprehension created by Christianity influence into Khasi traditional life and its culture. Secondly they reacted to the missionary as well as colonial portraiture of Khasi culture which regard the religious practices of the Khasis as demonic. The first generation of Khasi literary writers challenged and sought to correct this false presentation. These writers busied themselves with writings concerning customary practices, discourses on religion, folk narratives and *Phawar* and other related to Khasi folklore. Jeebon Roy was the pioneer of the Khasi cultural awakening. In 1897 he published his first book *Ka Niam Khasi* (The Religion of the Khasis). Although a booklet, it provides information on the indigenous rites, customs and other themes. In 1899-1900, his three Primers were printed as school textbooks and the second and third readers contained a selection of folk tales and worthy ethical instruction.

Rabon Singh Kharsuka was another writer who contributed tremendously to the growth of Khasi folklore studies. His first publication was a booklet entitled *Ka Kitab Jingphawar*. It contained fragmentary short stories, folk tales, animal tales, maxims and religious practices. Another book by him was *Ka Kitab Puriskam*, a collection of twenty folktales. Most of his writing deals with Khasi religion, rites and sacrifices, ordeal and divination, cremation ceremonies, besides Khasi maxims and mythology.

Another outstanding contributor to the growth and development of Khasi folklore during the *Seng Khasi Movement* period was Radhon Singh Beri. His substantial contribution was a collection of Khasi Oral poetry (*Phawar*), *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen* in two parts which appeared in 1902-03. *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen* is a collection of typical Khasi proverbs and still considered as one of the best book on Khasi maxims.

The Modern Period (1921-1770)

The turn of the century saw the emergence of folklore material through the writings of eminent personalities like Homiwell Lyngdoh, H. Elias Sohliya, Soso Tham, Primrose Gatphoh and others. Homiwell published on the Cherra mortuary customs in the leading monthly *U Lurshai* from June 1927-February 1928. His other publication was *Ka Kitab Pomblang Bad Thung Syiem Sohra* (1928). This book served as an eye opener to the annual traditional state ceremony held at *Smit*, the *Khyrim* traditional state head quarter.

In 1921 Mrs. Raffy published a collection of *Khasi folk tales*. J. Bacciarello, a Salesian missionary published a collection of folktales entitled *Ki Dienjat Ki*

Longshuwa (The Footprints of our Ancestors) in 1931 which contained fascinating Khasi folk tales and maxims especially those collected from Sohra areas. Till date this book is considered to be the source of folklore materials.

But Khasi folklore studies saw a real blossoming during this period at the hands of H. Elias and Primrose Gatphoh. Elias' lucidity unfurled itself in his *Ki Khanatang u Barim*, a collection of forty four folktales. Primrose Gatphoh is another noted collector of Khasi folklore. The year 1937 saw the appearance of his *Ki Khanatang bad U Sier Lapalang* a collection of fascinating folktales collected from different parts of the hills.

One should not forget SoSo Tham's crowning work; *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniewtrep* (1937) for this book is a source of Khasi folklore materials. Another collection is *U Khasi Hyndai* (1959) which interspersed with ethical and mythology, proverbs and fables and cultural models.

The Post Modern Period (1970s onwards)

The post modern period witnessed the growth of folklore studies through the writings and compilation did by mostly college and university educated writers such as Donbok T Laloo, M.P.R. Lyngdoh, D.L. Kharmawphlang, K. S. Nongkynrih etc. Laloo, a self taught folklorist, has greatly contributed to the enormous growth of folklore studies in Khasi and Jaintia hills. He had done an extensive work in collecting folklore materials in the Bhoi area. His works like *Ka Shad Sajer Part I & II*, *Ka Rong Biria U Hynniewtrep* etc. gave us an insight into the rich folklore heritage of the Khasis. Another noted Khasi folklorist who has raised the status of Khasi folklore studies to its present

height is D. L. Kharmawphlang, the first trained folklorist among the Khasis whose name deserved to be mentioned here. He has collected and recorded many folktales especially those existed in the northern part of Khasi hills. He has also published books and articles on Khasi folklore and produced fascinating documentary films on the traditional customs, practices, and life of the Khasis, especially those who live in the *Bhoi*, *Lyngngam* and *Jaintia* hills. His book *Ki Matti Byrshem* is the first theoretical book on Khasi Folklore.

The riddle as a verbal art

John Mc Dowell defined riddle as “an interrogative ludic routine, a question and answer exchanged not for information but in play” (Mc Dowell 1976:550). In general, riddling is a kind of game involving quick and deep thinking which increases the intelligence and sharpens the mind. It put into play semantic and folk logic. As an oral communication system, riddles have their origin in the psyche of the people and they involve close observation of nature and things around it. Riddles are a genre of oral literature which is also known as verbal art. Oral literature or verbal art includes all the spoken, sung and vocal forms of traditional utterances which include the folk narratives or tales and songs which circulate by word of mouth. It also includes proverbs, riddles and charms. These are forms of aesthetic expressions. Verbal art was first proposed as a term to distinguish folktales, myths, legends and other literary forms from other material which are commonly considered as folklore but which anthropologists classify under other categories. It is only necessary to compare myths, folktales, proverbs and riddles in verbal art, with the direct statements of ordinary speech to see similar concerns with the form of

expression, over and above the needs of communication. Among these distinctive features may be the form of statement, the choice of vocabulary and idiom, the use of obsolete words, the imagery of metaphor or simile, the set number of repetitions, the formalized openings and closings, the incorporation of cultural details, conventionalized greetings or directional orientations and other stylistic features which are absent in ordinary conversation.

The medium of expression in the verbal art is the spoken word. But this is subjected to the limitations of the medium and the technique by which a person manipulates it, the phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of the language in which it is expressed imposes limitations on verbal art and on literature as well. Picturesque speech forms are often a simpler matter of local vocabulary or idiom which involves an aesthetic choice on the part of the narrator within the fixed limit. In verbal art, a considerable degree of freedom may be allowed to the narrator of a folktale. Verbal art like the dance depends upon repeated performances for their continued existence. Although a folktale may survive for centuries in recognizable form, it does not have an independent existence outside the mind of those who know it. It cannot survive without being repeatedly told. Verbal art is dynamic and intangible. Even when the narrator is expected to repeat a tale as nearly verbatim as he can, there is still the possibility of considerable change with the passage of time. The amount of change that occurs probably depends upon the complexity of the forms, and assuming an equal emphasis on exact repetition, one would expect at least

more change in long, involve narratives than in proverbs and riddles which are short in structures.

Oral literature or verbal art differs from written literature not only in methods of transmission but also in creation. The material of verbal art originate without writing, through improvisation, written literature exists in written form. The mode of composition and transmission of verbal art is verbal while written literature is composed and transmitted in writing. But it is to say that these two traditions have not followed independent courses. They have intermingled and influenced one another. In expressive literature, the significant characteristic is the artistic use of the word it is this characteristic that is responsible for creating space for this form of verbal art to exist and interface with each other.

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Chapter III

Types of Traditional Khasi Riddles

Definitions of the riddle in oral tradition have been based primarily on studies of two types: those concerned with the structure of the riddle, either grammatically or in terms of thematic units, and those concerned with cognitive aspects of the riddle, i.e. its functions psychologically, sociologically, and intellectually, as performed in context. Other scholars like Charles Scott, Thomas A. Green and others have attempted to define and classify riddles using the linguistic approach. Scholarly study of riddles dates back to the eighteenth century when scholars such as Karl Mullenhoff and Gatson Paris in 1855 and 1877 respectively encouraged the comparative investigation of riddles. But comparative studies may have reached their high point with Antti Aarne's comparative study of individual riddles (1918-20). Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, an Argentinian folklorist had made an innovation in riddle classification, who in his 1911 collection, *Adivinanzas Rioplatenses*, made the nature of comparison (comparison to plants, animals etc.) on the basis of the classification rather than the nature of solution or answer. Lehmann Nitsche's method was followed by the Swedish folklorist Carl Von Sydow in 1915 and later by Archer Taylor in his superb collection *English Riddles from Oral Tradition* (1951). Claude Lévi-Strauss has devoted a major modern work to the topic of classification of riddles (1962; 1966). In England, E. R. Leach (1964; 1964) and Mary Douglas (1966) have brought classification into the foreground of their attention and have aroused an

awareness of related problems concerning the mechanisms where by conceptual categories are set up, preserved and mediated.

The riddle, as a genre of folk literature, has fascinated many folklorists who have found immense scope in subjecting it to structural analysis. Scholars such as Alan Dundes, Brian Sutton-Smith and Robert and Forman have done excellent work on riddles. Perhaps the earliest structural analysis in terms of basic units is that of Robert Petsch in his 1899 dissertation, *Neue Beiträge Zur Kenntnis des Volstratselkernel*. It is said that modern conception of the riddle structure stemmed either negatively or positively from Robert Petsch's dissertation. He sees five basic elements in the riddle form: an introductory frame, a denominative kernel, a descriptive kernel, a block element and a concluding frame. But Petsch was aware that all the five elements were rarely found in all the riddles. William R. Bascom expands this framework in his attempt to define and explain the actual syntactic patterns of riddles as well as variations on basic patterns of riddling, both in grammar and culture (1949: 1-16) Charles Scott makes two attempts at classifying riddle structure. In his earlier work, he seeks to define, isolate and classify stylistic devices in the riddle from a linguistic base (1965). Later he seeks to treat the riddle structure in terms of immediate constituent and topic-comment analyses (1969). The European-literary approach to riddles has tended to emphasize on the question of origin, diffusion, classification and form. Mathilde Hein made an excellent introduction to this approach (1966). In *The Nordic Riddle: Terminology and Bibliography* (1964) Laurits Bodker, demonstrates the concern with genre and sub-genre definition.

The structural aspect of riddles have been competently dealt by Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes in their article entitled *Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle*, in which they distinguished categories of riddles on the basis of whether the riddles are metaphorical or literal, oppositional or non-oppositional. Oppositional riddles are those in which there is some kind of contradiction (antithetical, privational or causal) between at least two descriptive elements, for example, *born in water, dies in water?* Here the riddle referent is *salt*. In the non-oppositional riddles, the descriptive elements are not contradictory, for example, *got yellow from inside, green outside*. The riddle referent is *pumpkin*. Both these examples are also literal riddles because the riddle referent or answer and the topic of the descriptive elements in the riddle question are identical. In metaphorical riddles, the riddle referent and the descriptive elements are different, for example, *two rows of white horses on a red hill*. The riddle referent here is *teeth*. Roger Abrahams (1968) and Abrahams and Dundes (1972) have pointed out techniques of confusion besides opposition and metaphor by which 'the image' (or *Gestalt*) presented in the riddle-question is impaired and therefore is, in most cases, undecipherable. In addition to opposition, they discuss incomplete detail, too much detail and false Gestalt in which the detail in the riddle image suggest an answer, often embarrassingly obscene, which is not the 'right answer'.

Riddling is a distinct game. The language with its emphasis on with and the connecting of unrelated things is an end of a continuum (Haring 1992: 38). Riddles are classified according to specific structures and functions and these are diversified in different social settings. This researcher found out that the

Khasis have a very good repertoire of riddles. It is also found out that most Khasi traditional riddles mainly refer to bodily functions and numerous are also derived from close observation of nature and things around them. The different types of riddles collected from different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills will be studied and analyzed below. The samples of riddles collected are fitted into the following categories viz. oppositional and non-oppositional, metaphorical, riddle parodies and conundrum.

Oppositional Riddles

Oppositional riddles are but one of the several kinds of the Khasi riddles. There are numerous of what Georges and Dundes call contradictive riddles. In oppositional riddles, the first and the second descriptive elements do not appear to form an integral whole or unit. Only upon formal enunciation of answers, the two separate elements can be properly and logically joined. In oppositional riddles, the riddle will always deny the main function of a common object. It is in this sense that riddles play cognitive boundaries, creating tension by denying the familiar function of a familiar object (Lieber 1976: 255-265).

U don shibun ki khmat, um dei u ksuid;

U shong halor ka khet bad u phong pansngiat, um dei u syiem.

Riddle referent: *U sohtrun.*

Translation

He has many eyes; he is not a ghost;

He sits on the throne and wears a crown, but he is not a king.

Riddle referent: The pineapple.

The above riddle is the example of oppositional riddle. Here we see some kind of contradiction between at least two pairs of descriptive elements. In the first part of the riddle, the descriptive element *eye*, denied the descriptive element *ghost*. And in the second part the descriptive elements *crown* and *throne* denied the other, *king*. In the first part, the *eyes* refer to the small hairy cavities on the body of the pineapple. The *throne* refers to the leaves on the stalk of the plant and the *crown*, to the small leaves on the head of the fruit.

Ka bam na tdong bad eit pat na khmut.

Riddle referent: *Ka suloi*.

Translation

She eats with her tail but produces excrement from her nose.

Riddle referent: The gun.

In this riddle, we see the contradiction between the first descriptive element *Ka bam na tdong* (*she eats with her tail*) and the other, *ka eit pat na khmut* (*produces excrement from her nose*). Normally all men and animals eat with their mouth, and produce the excrement through their bowels. The tail here is referred to the loading compartment of the gun and the nose, to the muzzle through which the bullets will come out when the gun is fired.

Ka bam na khlieh, eit pat napoh kjat

Riddle referent: *Ka shlim*.

Translation

She eats with her head, and defecates from the sole of her foot.

Riddle referent: The traditional smoking pipe

The above riddle has two descriptive elements. The first is *ka bam na khlieh* (eats with her head) and the second is *eit pat na poh kjat* (defecates from the sole of her foot). The *Shlim* is a smoking device used mostly by old people especially in the rural areas. It is made of the wood of the litchi and other trees. It has a cavity which is fixed with a wooden pipe. When a person uses it, he has to keep some tobacco in the cavity and light it with fire. The person then will suck and inhale the smoke of the tobacco through a wooden pipe. So here the head refers to the wooden cavity of the *shlim* and the sole of the foot to the hollow pipe of the smoking device.

Bam na khlieh

Eit na khlieh

Tangba ksem na jingshong.

Riddle referent: *Ka shlim.*

Translation

Eats from head

Defecates from head

But farts from the bowel.

Riddle referent: The traditional smoking pipe.

This is an oppositional riddle because the first descriptive element *ka bam na khlieh* (eats from head) is contradictory to the second and the third descriptive

elements *ka eit na khlieh* (defecated from head) and *ksem pat na jingshong* (farts from the bowel). Naturally all human beings eat with their mouth but defecate and fart through their bowel. But in this riddle the descriptive elements are contradictory to one another.

Ka khlaw khlem mrad,

Ka bneng khlem khlur,

Ka pung khlem dohkha.

Riddle referent: *U soh snepkor.*

Translation

A jungle without wild animals,

A sky without stars,

A pond without fish.

Riddle referent: The coconut.

In this riddle we see there is a contradiction between three pairs of descriptive elements. In the first pair, the descriptive element *jungle* denied the descriptive element *without wild animals*. In the second one, *sky* contradicts with the descriptive element *without stars*. And in the third, *pond* is contradictory to the descriptive element *without fish*. The coconut is covered on the outer part by some fibers in green colour when it is fresh or brown when it is dried. The coconut milk and the white portion which is edible are inside. Here, *a jungle without animals* refers to the outer most part of the coconut, *a sky without stars*, to the white and edible portion of the coconut and *a pond without fish* to the coconut milk.

Naduh dang rit haduh ba un dang samla, u shu khapbrib ngain ngain;

Uu sa peit pat ynda u la tymmen.

Riddle referent: *U jaiur*.

Translation

From childhood till youth, he closes his eyes;

When he is old he started opening them.

Riddle referent: *Jaiur* (*Zanthoxylum armatum*)

The above riddle is an example of an oppositional. The two pairs of descriptive elements in the above riddle are found to contradict each other. Usually, when people are young they are much excited, full of life and enjoy looking at what is happening around them. They are in the habit of looking at the beautiful things around them. But when one is old, he or she naturally does not have the energy to look at all the enjoyment and things that happen around them. So, here the descriptive element *naduh dang rit haduh ba un da samla, u khapbrib ia la ki khmat* (from childhood till youth he closed his eyes) is contradictory to *u sa peit pat ynda u lah tymmen* (when he is old he started opening them). *Jaiur* (*Zanthoxylum armatum*), a kind of wild pepper indigenous to the North Eastern part of India, is mostly used as spices in cooking. It can also be eaten raw along with food. When eating this spice raw, it produces some kind of titillation effect on the tongue. This spice has natural cover which breaks open when it is matured and dried. This phenomenon is observed and causes those who see to create a riddle of such kinds.

U phong jain ynda sum, loit pat ynda dep.

Riddle referent: *U khwai dohkha*.

Translation

He put on his clothes while taking bath, and takes them out as soon as he finishes taking bath.

Riddle referent: The fishing hook.

The above riddle shows that the first descriptive element *u phong jain ynda sum* (he put on his clothes while taking bath), is contradictory to the descriptive element *u loit pat ynda u dep sum*. (he takes them out as soon as he finishes his bath). Here in this riddle, the clothes refer to the baits that cover the fishing hook. Usually the bait is put on the fishing hook only when the fishing rod is thrown into the water.

U phong jain tang shu shit ka sngi,

U loit lyngkhuid tang shu slap.

Riddle referent: *U sainar thad jain*.

Translation

He wears clothes when it is hot and takes out all his clothes when it rains.

Riddle referent: The clothes line.

In this riddle, the descriptive element *u phong jain tang shu shit ka sngi* (he wears clothes when the sun is hot), is contradictory to the descriptive element, *u loit lyngkhuid tang shu slap* (and takes out all his clothes when it rains). Naturally in these hills, the weather is hot in summer when it does not rain.

But during rainy season, the weather tends to be cold. So, people do not put on many clothes when the weather is hot. But in contradictory to the above riddle, they put on more clothes when it rains.

Katba nang bam katta nang raikhoh.

Riddle referent: *Ka nap.*

Translation

The more she eats the more she becomes thin.

Riddle referent: The tong.

The above riddle shows one pair of descriptive elements which are contradictory to one another. Usually the more people eat the more they will tend to gain weight. So the first descriptive element *katba nang bam* (the more she eats), is a contradiction of the second descriptive element, *katta nang raikhoh* (the more she becomes thin). The Khasis usually used the tong for taking out hot charcoals from the hearth in the kitchen as well as for roasting dry meat and fish. So when the tong is manipulated for this purpose, it gives the appearance of becoming smaller as the two hands are brought closer to each other.

U bam da ka shyntur,

U eit ruh na shyntur.

Riddle referent: *U khiew.*

Translation

He eats with his mouth, and defecates from his mouth.

Riddle referent: The cooking vessel.

In this riddle, the first descriptive element *u bam na shyntur* (he eats with his mouth) is contradictory to *u eit ruh na shyntur* (produces excrement from his mouth). Before cooking, the food has to be kept inside through the mouth of a vessel and in the same way it is also taken out. That is why; the saying *eats with the mouth and produces excrement also from the mouth*. Like many Khasi riddles, this one too refers to bodily functions, where a cooking vessel is compared to a living being.

Ym lah ban iohi ia i

Hynrei lah ban iohsngew ia i

In nym kren lym da phi kren shwa maphi

Riddle referent: *U maw sawa*.

Translation

It cannot be seen

But you can hear it

It would not talk

Unless you talk first.

Riddle referent: Echo.

In this oppositional riddle, there are two pairs of descriptive elements. In the first pair, the descriptive element *ym lah ban iohi ia i* (it cannot be seen) is contradictory to the descriptive element *hynrei lah ban iohsngew ia i* (but you

can hear it) and in the second pair, the descriptive element *in nym kren* (it would not talk) contradicts with *lymda phi kren shwa* (unless you talk first).

Ka kpoh jong ka, ka sngaid katba kam pat dep bam, bad tang shu dep bam ka lah raikhoh.

Riddle referent: *Ka lyngkhung*.

Translation

Her stomach is bloating before eating, after eating, it is flattened.

Riddle referent: The bird trap.

In this riddle the first descriptive element *ka kpoh jong ka, ka sngaid katba kam pat dep bam* (her stomach is bloating before eating) is in opposition to the second descriptive element *tang shu dep bam ka lah raikhoh* (after eating, it is flattened). In *War-Jaintia* of Meghalaya, a traditional bird trap locally called *Lyngkhung* is usually made of bamboo and some tough threads obtained from the tender bark of one tree locally called *sten*. It is shaped like a bow. Before any bird is trapped in it, it will look like a bow. But after trapping, it will flatten itself automatically. Naturally after eating food, we feel like our stomach is bloating as it is full. But in this riddle we see the contradiction between the two descriptive elements.

U wei u syngkhlieh, ki thiah shibun bha ki briew.

Riddle referent: *Ka khlieh*.

Translation

One pillow, many people sleep on it.

Riddle referent: Head.

This is an oppositional riddle. The first descriptive element *u wei u syngkhlieh* (one pillow) is contradictory *ki thiah shibun bha ki briew* (many people sleep on it). Usually only one person lies his head on one pillow. But in this riddle, a pillow is referred to a person's head and people to the hair on the head of a person.

Lai ngut shipara, ki phong tang kawei ka juti.

Riddle referent: 'Nuih kseh.

Translation

Three brothers, wearing only one shoe.

Riddle referent: Pine leaves.

This is another example of oppositional riddle. In this example, the first descriptive element *laingut shipara* (three siblings) is a contradiction of the second descriptive element *ki phong tang kawei ka juti* (wearing only one shoe). In this riddle, the three siblings refer to the three needle pine leaves and a brown cover that wrapped the three needle pine leaves together, to a shoe. Man has to wear one pair of shoes as he is a two legged being.

Nga shait thiah mynsngi bad shait her pat tang mynmiet;

Nga lah ban her tangba ngam don sner.

Riddle referent: *Ka langbadur.*

Translation

I sleep by day and fly by night;

I can fly but I have no feather.

Riddle referent: The bat.

In this oppositional riddle, there are two pairs of descriptive elements. In the first pair, the descriptive element *nga thiah mynsngi* (I sleep by day) is opposed to *nga shait her pat tang mynmiet* (fly by night) and the other descriptive element *nga lah ban her* (I can fly) is opposed to *ngam don sner* (I have no feathers). It is always seen that bats as opposed to other mammals, used to sleep during the day but hunt for food during the night. Another characteristic of bats is that they can fly but their wings are featherless.

*Baroh shisngi ka thiah sngi, ynda lah miet ka khie bad trei baroh
shimiet haduh ban da shai.*

Riddle referent: *Ka sharak.*

Translation

The whole day she sleeps, when night comes she gets up and works the whole night till dawn.

Riddle referent: The lamp.

In this oppositional riddle, the descriptive element *ka thiah baroh shisngi* (she sleeps the whole day) is contradictory to the second descriptive element *ynda lah miet ka khie bad trei baroh shimiet* (when night comes she gets up and works the whole night). Usually it is a nature of man to work during the day

and to sleep and rest during the night. But in this riddle the lamp is compared to someone who works only at night and rests during the day.

Ka bam na kpoh bad eit nadien.

Riddle referent: *Ka rynda.*

Translation

She eats with her stomach and defecates from her back.

Riddle referent: The wooden plane

This is an oppositional riddle. The first descriptive element *ka bam na kpoh* (she eats with her stomach) is in contradiction to the second descriptive element *ka eit pat nadien* (she defecates from her back). Normally almost every living being eats with their mouth and defecates from their bowels.

Tang shu pynpra ia ka ing jong ka tang shiphang ka lah shna da kaba thymmai.

Riddle referent: *Ka thapbawa.*

Translation

As soon as her house was dismantled she will make a new one within no time.

Riddle referent: The spider.

This is another example of oppositional riddle. In this riddle the first descriptive element *tang shu pynpra ia ka ing jong ka* (as soon as her house was dismantled) is in opposition to the second descriptive element *shiphang*

ka lah shna da ka ba thymmai (she will make a new one within no time). In reality it takes time to construct a new house. Here the spider's house is referred to her web. It has been observed that if the web of any spider is destroyed, within no time it will weave a new one.

*Ka tang shu thngan ka lah sngaid,
ynda ka lah dep bam pat ka lah raikhoh.*

Riddle referent: *Ka ryntieh.*

Translation

When she is hungry, she becomes fat

As soon as she finishes her food she will become thin.

Riddle referent: The bow.

In this oppositional riddle, the first descriptive element *ka tang shu thngan ka lah sngaid* (when she is hungry, she becomes fat) is contradictory to the second descriptive element *ynda lah dep bam pat ka lah raikhoh* (as soon as she finishes her food she will become thin). It is seen that before the arrow is shot the archer used to stretch the string of the bow with the arrow and after the arrow is shot the bow will become flat.

Ka tyngshain beit borabor wat lada ym ju pynkhuid ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka sngi.*

Translation

It always remains bright without cleaning it.

Riddle referent: The sun.

This is an example of oppositional riddle. Here we see that the first descriptive element *ka tyngshain beit borabor* (it always remains bright) contradicts the second descriptive element *wat lada ym pynkhuid ia ka* (without cleaning it). Usually bright things always need to be cleaned and polished to retain their brightness. But in the case of the sun, it is always bright and it gives light to the world.

Kawei ka jingthiah ki thiah shibun bha ki briew.

Riddle referent: *Ka jingpruid.*

Translation

One bed many people sleep on it.

Riddle referent: The match box.

In this oppositional riddle, the first descriptive element *kawei ka jingthiah* (one bed) is contradictory to the second descriptive element *ki thiah shibun bha ki briew* (many people sleep on it). Here, the bed is referred to a match box and the people to match sticks which are kept inside a match box.

Lai ngut ki briew, kawei ka jainspong.

Riddle referent: *Lai ki mawbyrsiew.*

Translation

Three men, wearing one turban.

Riddle referent: The Khasi traditional hearth

This is an oppositional riddle. Here the descriptive element *lai ngut ki briew* (three men) is contradictory to *kawei ka jainspong* (one turban). A Khasi

traditional hearth consisted of three stones called *ki mawbyrsiew* which are planted into the floor and arranged in a triangular formation usually in the middle of the kitchen. A cooking vessel is always kept on top of these stones. In this riddle, the three men refer to the three stones on the hearth and a turban, to a cooking pot which sits on the top of the three stones.

Um don khmat tang ba u iaid beit thik thik.

Riddle referent: *U thliem.*

Translation

He has no eyes, yet he knows his way well.

Riddle referent: The leech.

The above riddle is an oppositional one. It is seen that the first descriptive element *um don khmat* (he has no eyes) is contradictory to the second descriptive element *u iaid beit thik thik* (he knows his way well). This riddle is derived from a Khasi folktale about the origin of the leech. According to the folk tale, once upon a time, there was a very lazy young man who never wanted to do anything to help his parents. All his family members were fed up with his lazy nature. Once, his mother sent him to clear the weeds in their field so that they could cultivate crops there. Everyday before he went to the field, she used to pack and give him some food to eat in the afternoon. But when the young man reached the field, he never did anything but waste his time by sleeping the whole day in the field. When he woke up from his sleep, he would eat his food and return home. Every day in the evening his mother would ask him how the work was done. He would reply that he almost

finished clearing the weeds. This went on for the whole week. One day his mother came to see what he had done. When she reached there, she was so shocked to see that the whole field was still covered with weeds and she could not see him anywhere. She went searching for him and at last, she found him sleeping soundly under the shade of a tree. Seeing him sleeping like that, enraged her very much that she took one big stone that was lying nearby and hit him in the eyes with it. The young man was rudely wakened up from his sleep and felt the searing pain in both his eyes. At first he could not comprehend what had happened. But when he heard his mother screaming and swearing at him, he realized that his mother had blinded him. According to the tale, the young man became blind and turned into a leech and swore that from that day onward, he would live by sucking the blood of men and animals. It is believed by many that leeches do not have any eyes. But it is surprising to see that they can always reach and cling to their prey (man and animals) to suck their blood. This is may be due to the reason that they can sense and smell their prey.

Phi kit ia ka kat sha ba phi leit

Hynrei kam ju pynkhia ia phi.

Riddle referent: *Ka kyrteng jong phi*

Translation

You carry it where ever you go

But it does not weigh you down.

Riddle referent: Your name.

This is an example of oppositional riddle. The descriptive element *phi kit ia ka kat sha ba phi leit* (you carry it where ever you go) is contradictory to *hynrei kam ju pynkhia ia phi* (but it does not weigh you down). Usually when we carry something wherever we go, it tends to weigh and bother us. But this is not so with our name.

Ha iing ka leh sih,

Ynda ka leit sha khlaw ka pynbhabriew ialade.

Riddle referent: *Ka suloi.*

Translation

At home, she never cleans herself up

But when she goes out to the jungle, she will clean and make herself beautiful.

Riddle referent: The gun.

This is an oppositional riddle. Here the first descriptive element *ha iing ka leh sih* (at home she never cleans up herself) is contradictory to the second descriptive element *ynda leit she khlaw ka pynbhabriew ialade* (when she goes out to the jungle she will clean and make herself beautiful). It is seen that hunters when they do not go hunting, they will just keep their guns in the corner at home. But before going to the jungle for hunting, they used to clean and oil their guns thoroughly. Because if a gun is not cleaned and oiled properly before using it, when it is being used, it will not work properly as some parts of the gun will tend to get stuck with rust and also could backfire becoming dangerous for the user.

Lah ban pynkhein ia ka khlem da shoh ne pynhap ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka kular.*

Translation

It can be broken without striking or dropping it.

Riddle referent: The promise.

This falls under oppositional riddles. The descriptive element *lah ban pynkhein ia ka* (it can be broken) is opposed to *khlem da shoh ne pynhap ia ka* (without hitting or breaking it). *Promises* being abstract cannot be touched or seen but they can be easily broken.

Lada iaid halor ki ba im kim ju thnum;

Lada iaid halor kiba iap ki thnum bnum shi bnum.

Riddle referent: *Ki sla dieng.*

Translation

Walk on the living they do not even mumble;

Walk on the dead, they mutter and grumble.

Riddle referent: Leaves.

In this oppositional riddle, the first pair of descriptive element *lada iaid halor ki ba im kim ju thnum* (walk on the living they do not even mumble) is contradictory to the second descriptive element *lada iaid halor ki ba iap ki thnum bnum shi bnum* (walk on the dead, they mutter and grumble). It has been observed that if somebody walks or trample on fresh leaves, they hardly make any sound as they are soft. But if someone happens to walk on the dried

leaves, they rustle and make noise. Usually if somebody happens to walk or trample on any living being like man or animal, they will always make some noise or yelp due to pain. But this is not so in the case of leaves.

Ka don ki kti tangba kam lah ban bat,

Ka don ki bniat tang ba kam lah ban dait,

Ka don ki kjat tangba kam lah ban iaid,

Ka don ki khmat tangba kam lah ban iohi.

Riddle referent: *Ka Khunbynriew.*

Translation

Hands she has but cannot hold,

Teeth she has but cannot bite,

Feet she has but cannot walk

Eyes she has but cannot see.

Riddle referent: The doll.

This oppositional riddles has four pairs of descriptive elements. In the first pair, the descriptive element *ka don ki kti* (hands she has) is in opposition to *tangba kam lah bat* (but cannot hold). In the second pair, *ka don ki bniat* (teeth she has) is contradictory to the descriptive element *tangba kam lah ban dait* (but she cannot bite). The third pair, *ka don ki kjat* (feet she has) contradicts with the descriptive element *tangba kam lah iaid* (she cannot walk). And in the final pair, the descriptive element, *ka don ki khmat* (eyes she has) is in contradiction to *tangba kam lah ban iohi* (but cannot see). A doll being an inanimate thing does not have life.

Phi pynmynsaw ia u

Hynrei um iam

Phi iam pynban maphi

Riddle referent: *U piat.*

Translation

You harm him

But he will not cry

Instead it is you who will cry

Riddle referent: The onion.

This is an oppositional riddle. Here the descriptive elements *phi pynmynsaw ia u* (you harm him), *hynrei um iam* (but he will not cry) and *phi iam pynban maphi* (instead it is you who will cry) are contradictory to one another. Usually when someone is hurt physically by another person, it is the one who got hurt who would cry due to pain. But in the case of onion if we cut and peel it, our eyes will be full of tears.

Non-oppositional Riddles

In non-oppositional riddles, the descriptive elements are not contradictory. It is found that there are plenty of such kinds of riddles which fall under this category. The following samples of non-oppositional riddles are given and analyze below.

Ka iam tang shu pynjaboh ia ka phyllaw jong ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka khmat.*

Translation

She weeps if you litter her courtyard.

Riddle referent: The eye.

The above riddle is an example of non-opposition. Here *ka phyllaw* (the courtyard) is referred to the outer portion of the eye, and *iam* (weeping) to the tears. It is seen that when some foreign bodies accidentally get into the eyes, they will become red and tears will start coming out.

U shoh beit ia la ka kmie.

Riddle referent: *U maw tylliat.*

Translation

He always beat his mother.

Riddle referent: The grinding stone.

A grinding stone is consisted of two parts. One is a flat stone which is known as *u maw kmie* (a mother stone), and the other, a small round or elongated shape stone known as *u maw khun* (a child). Traditionally, the Khasis used grinding stones to grind spices, herbs etc for cooking and medicinal purposes. So a grindstone can be found in every Khasi household especially in the villages. When spices or herbs are to be grinded, they will be kept on the surface of the flat stone and the smaller stone is used for pounding/grinding purpose. That is why the smaller stone is referred to as a wicked son who always beat his mother.

Lada hap najrong ruh ym leilei.

Riddle referent: *U dkhiew.*

Translation

If he falls from the top, comes to no harm.

Riddle referent: The ant.

This is a non-oppositional riddle. It has been observed that an ant being a small and lightweight creature, if it falls down from high above, it will come to no harm.

U stem na jrong, saw na poh.

Riddle referent: *U soh priam.*

Translation

Yellow from outside, red inside.

Riddle referent: The guava.

The guava, which is found in abundance in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, is a very popular fruit among the children. Usually there are two varieties of guavas found in these hills. One variety is yellow in colour, from inside as well as outside and another variety which is yellow from outside and red inside.

Ynda lah miet lah kwah suh thliw.

Riddle referent: *U huk jingkhang.*

Translation

Only at night he wants to enter the hole.

Riddle referent: The door hook.

Door hook which is found in almost every Khasi household is the answer here. It is seen that Khasi home especially in the rural areas hardly close their doors during the day. This is because the elders never allowed the doors especially the main door of the house to be kept close as it is believed that only the *Duhjait* (family who has no girl child to carry the title of the mother) used to close their doors to friends and relatives. But once night descends, all doors used to be closed.

Tang shu aiding, u lah jaw ummat.

Riddle referent: *U bombati*.

Translation

As soon as he is lighted, his tears will fall.

Riddle referent: The candle.

The above riddle is an example of non-oppositional. Candles are made out of wax. It is observed by many children that as soon as the candle is lighted, the wax will melt and will be collected at the bottom of the candle. So here the melting wax is compared to tears of a person (*ummat*).

Ka pynmih umphniang na tdong.

Riddle referent: *Ka syiar*.

Translation

It produces oil from the tail.

Riddle referent: The hen.

In this non-oppositional riddle, the excrement of the fowls which is always semi liquid is referred to as oil. And the tail is referred to the bowel of the fowl.

Ka don tang kawei ka shkor baheh napdeng ka met jong ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka mok.*

Translation

It has only one ear in the middle of her trunk.

Riddle referent: The mug

In this riddle, the handle of a mug which is always fixed in the middle of a mug is compared to an ear.

Ka ksiar najrong, ka rupa napoh.

Riddle referent: *U riewhadem.*

Translation

Golden outside, silver inside.

Riddle referent: The maize.

In this riddle, the covers of maize are referred to as *ka ksiar* (golden), and the inside of maize as silver. Maize is covered by leaves which are green in colour when tender but turn yellowish when it is matured. The inside of maize which is off-white in colour is compared to silver here.

Khoh ia kaba nalog, shet ia kaba shapoh,

Bam ia kaba nalog bret ia kaba shapoh.

Riddle referent: *U riewhadem.*

Translation

Remove the outside, cook the inside.

Eat the outside and throw away the inside.

What is it?

Riddle referent: The Indian corn.

This riddle talks about the Indian corns. It has been observed by many that Indian corn is one of the main products of the farmers in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In many rural places corns serve as staple food for the people. Usually corn may be cooked by boiling it in the water, or frying or roasting. Before eating, the leafy covers of the corn have to be removed and thrown away. Only the grains of the corn can be eaten while the inner most part of the corn has to be thrown away as it is inedible.

U dei u jingthaw ba phyla tam na baroh;

U don ar tylli ki khmat sha khmat bad bun tylli sha dien.

Riddle referent: *U klew.*

Translation

He is the strangest of all the creatures;

He has two eyes in front and many more behind.

Riddle referent: The peacock.

This riddle falls under the non-oppositional category. Here the strangest creature refers to a peacock. A peacock is a very beautiful bird with colourful feathers. The round-like-shape and shiny spots on the feathers of the tail of the peacock are referred to as eyes located on his back in this riddle. This riddle has its root in the Khasi folktale about *u Klew* (peacock) and *ka Sngi* (sun). According to the folktale *u Klew* and *ka Sngi* were husband and wife. The couple lived happily in the sky which is the abode of *ka Sngi*. It is to be noted here that in the Khasi culture, the sun is given a feminine gender. But a time came when *u Klew* longed to return to the earth. One day his longing to return to the earth was so great that he could not stop from looking down at the earth from the sky. It so happened that while he was looking down from above he chanced to see a beautiful girl wrapped in yellow dress. So he decided to return to earth to look at the girl. The sun on hearing this pleaded with her husband not to do so but he did not pay heed to her. He came down to earth from the sky only to find out that the girl who enticed him was not actually a girl but a garden full of mustard flowers. The sun was so sad and wept and her tears fell on his feathers while he flew down. The shiny spots on the back of the peacock are said to be the tear drops of the sun that fell on him while he descended to earth.

Metaphorical Riddles

In this category, the riddle referent and the topic of description are different. The biggest collection of samples falls under metaphorical category. Many Khasi riddles consist of an elaborate metaphorical question and answers that

are very short. These riddles pose questions to the riddlee and ask them to see the literal base for the metaphor.

U pynmih da u nampliang na tdong ban ialeh ia ki nongshun jong u.

Riddle referent: *U ngap.*

Translation

He produces his arrow from his tail to fight against his enemy.

Riddle referent: The bee.

This is a metaphorical riddle. *U nampliang* is an arrow which is used only in hunting and in wars by the Khasi hunters and warriors respectively. This arrow is different in shape from other arrows which are used in different occasions. In this riddle *u nam pliang* (the arrow) refers to the sting of a bee in its tail. The bee used to fight against its enemy by stinging them, thus causing pain to the victims. So the sting of a bee is compared to a hunting or war arrow (*nampliang*) of the Khasis.

Ka kup ia ka knup jong ka naduh dang rit haduh ban da iap.

Riddle referent: *Ka dkar.*

Translation

She wears her rain shield from childhood till she dies.

Riddle referent: The turtle.

This is another sample of metaphorical riddle. In this riddle, the rain shield refers to the shell of the turtle on its back which is similar in shape with a

Khasi traditional rain shield. A Khasi traditional rain shield is made out of bamboo and some big leaves. Before the coming of the British to these hills, these types of rain shields were very popular as people used them to prevent themselves from excessive rain and sun. But today, this rain shield is in the danger of being extinct due to the use of umbrellas which were introduced by the British. These days rain shields can only be found only in some pockets of Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya.

Ar tylli ki soh uwei u dieng.

Riddle referent: *U tyrnem.*

Translation

Two fruits on the same tree.

Riddle referent: The hammer.

The above example is a metaphorical riddle. It has been observed that the Khasis used iron hammers especially in carpentry work. The iron part of a hammer is always bigger on the sides and slimmer in the middle. A wooden handle is fixed in the middle of the iron part. Here the wooden handle is likened to a tree and the two sides of an iron hammer to two fruits on a tree.

U mih thylliej ynda lah tymmen.

Riddle referent: *U biskot.*

Translation

He has a tongue when he is growing old.

Riddle referent: The squash.

In this riddle, the squash vegetable is referred to as someone whose tongue grows only when he is growing old. It has been observed by many that squash when tender do not have any bud or sprout on its head. But when it is matured, the embryo of the squash which is inside grows bigger and sprout from where tender leaves will spring out later comes outside through the head of the vegetable. Here the descriptive element tongue refers to the exposed embryo of the squash. It is to be noted that squash plants is a common sight all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya.

Tang shu kha ka kmie ia ka, ka lah pynkyrshah ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka siej*.

Translation

As soon as her mother gives birth to her, she wraps her with a Khasi traditional apron.

Riddle referent: The bamboo.

This is an example of metaphorical riddle. In the spring season, tender bamboo shoots sprouted from the earth around the bamboo groove. These tender shoots are covered by some kind of brown covers, which usually fall off when the bamboo shoot become bigger and taller. Here a bamboo shoot is a metaphor which refers to a young daughter wrapped in a Khasi traditional apron. Traditionally, *Jainkyrshah* (a traditional Khasi apron), which is a checked cloth (one and half meter in length and one meter in breadth) is used by Khasi women and grown up girls as an apron. Bamboo grooves are found in abundance in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Hence this riddle derived from close

observation of nature. The above riddle is collected from the *War-Jaintia* area, where the bamboo is given a feminine gender (*ka*). So the cover which covers the tender shoots is referred to as an apron used by Khasi women.

Ka long ka ba shlur bha; ka don artylli ki kti kiba jrong,

Kam ju sheptieng ban tur sha ki nongshun jong ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka nap*.

Translation

She is very brave; she has two long hands,

She is never afraid to face her enemy.

Riddle referent: The tong.

In this riddle, the two long hands of a woman are referred to the two hands of a tong. As mention earlier, the Khasis use tongs mainly in the kitchen to take out hot charcoals from the hearth. It is also used for other purposes like roasting dry meat or fish. Here in this riddle the tong is referred to as a brave lady with two long hands, who is never afraid to fight against those she considers her enemies.

Ar ngut ki khun synrap, ki ia knieh beit mano ban ia id sha khmat.

Riddle referent: *Ki kjat*.

Translation

One pair of identical twins, one will always try to go ahead of another.

Riddle referent: A pair of legs.

In this riddle, a pair of legs is a metaphor. Here the two legs of a person are compared to identical twins. It is often observed that though there are many physical similarities between many identical twins, yet we can also see many differences in their nature. There is always sibling rivalry and competition among them. So here a pair of identical twins who always try to outdo the other is referred to a pair of human legs.

U tang shu mih na kpoh ka kmie, u lah kura ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka jingpruid bad u kyndok.*

Translation

As soon as he comes out of his mother's womb, he will punch her.

Riddle referent: The match box and match stick.

In this metaphorical riddle a match box and a match stick are metaphors. A match box is compared to a mother and a match stick, to a son who punches his mother as soon as he comes out of his mother's womb (i.e. the inside of a match box). Here in this riddle we see that the act of taking out the match sticks out of the box is compared to a mother giving birth to a child, and the striking of a match stick on the match box, as an act of punching one's own mother.

Sanphew ngut ki khynnah ki phong ki tupia kiba ia sryiem kumjuh.

Riddle referent: *Ki kyndok jingpruid.*

Translation

Fifty children, wearing similar designed caps.

Riddle referent: The match sticks.

In this metaphorical riddle, the match sticks in a match box are compared to fifty children and the heads of match sticks covered with sulphur to similar designed caps worn by the fifty children.

Tang shu kha ka kmie, ka lah lynthaw ia ka khun ha madan.

Riddle referent: *Ka eitmut.*

Translation

As soon as the mother gives birth to her child, she will throw her on the ground.

Riddle referent: The mucus

This is a metaphorical riddle. In this riddle, mucus is a metaphor. Here the nose of a person is compared to a wicked mother who has no qualm to throw away or give up her child as soon as she gives birth to him. It has been observed that many children and sometimes even grown up especially in the rural areas, where handkerchiefs are not often used, used their hands in cleaning the mucus from their nose. They usually used their hands and fingers in taking out the mucus from their nose and throwing it on the ground.

U khiew ba buh um da khongpong

Riddle referent: *Ka khmut bad eitmut.*

Translation

Water kept in an upside down vessel.

Riddle referent: Nose and mucus.

This is a metaphorical riddle. Here a nose full of mucus is a metaphor. When a person suffers from cold, he tends to have a running nose as the mucus is watery. So a nose of a person, who is having a cold, is compared to a water vessel which is kept upside down.

Tang shu mih u hymmen na iing,

U para ruh u la bud lang.

Riddle referent: *Eit, jung.*

Translation

As soon as the elder brother comes out of the house,

The younger one will also follow suit.

Riddle referent: Excrement and urine.

In this metaphorical riddle, the excrement and urine are metaphors. The excrement is compared to the elder brother, urine, to a younger one and a human's bowel to a house. It is true that whenever we pass out excrements, urine also will also come out naturally But this is not so, in the case of passing urine. The act of expulsion of excrement and urine from our body is compared to someone coming out from the house.

Kat sha ba leit ka kit ia la ka iing.

Riddle referent: *Ka mattah.*

Translation

She carries her house where ever she goes.

Riddle referent: The snail.

In this example of metaphorical riddle, the shell of the snail is a metaphor. The house of a snail refers to the shell on its back. Many snails which can be found in the bushes, trees etc. have some kind of shells on the top of their backs.

Ka khlieh bad ki kjat kum ki jong ka sim,

Ka tdong kum ka tdong dohkha.

Riddle referent: *Ka wait tyngkrong*.

Translation

Her head and feet like a bird's;

Her tail is like that of a fish.

Riddle referent: The dao (A Khasi dao used in the kitchen for cutting meat and vegetables).

In the above riddle, *ka wait tyngkrong* (a dao specially made for cutting meat and vegetables) is a metaphor. The head and legs of *ka wait tyngkrong* have some similarities with those of a bird and the lower part of a dao looks like the tail of a fish. So this observation causes those who see the similarities between *ka wait tyngkrong* and the bird and fish to create such kinds of riddles.

U mih snuih na jrong,

Hapdeng don ka thliew kaba sma pyut haduh katta katta.

Riddle referent: *U kwai pyut*.

Translation

It is hairy from outside,

And has a cavity in the middle which gives a very strong odour.

Riddle referent: The rotten areca nut.

The above example is a metaphorical riddle. A rotten areca nut which had been soaked in water for a long time is a metaphor here. This riddle also falls under a special sub-type called the *Risqué* or *Purported obscene riddle*, where the description suggests something *risqué*, usually sexual, but the correct answer is quite innocuous and tame. Here the hair, a cavity and a strong odour seems to refer to something *risqué* and sexual (the private part of a woman) but in fact the riddle referent is something very simple and tame. The Khasis never eat *supari* or dry areca nuts. In the *War* areas of Khasi and Jaintia hills, fresh areca nuts that were plucked during the winter are usually kept and soaked in the ponds filled with water to prevent them from drying up and to last till the next winter season.

Shiphew ngut ki briew ki leit beh mrad hapoh kawei ka khlaw ba rben,

Tang arngut ki ioh ban bam ia ka doh.

Riddle referent: *Ki 'Ti kmie.*

Translation

Ten people went for hunting inside a big forest,

But only two get to eat the meat.

Riddle referent: Thumbs.

In this riddle, a pair of thumbs is a metaphor. Here, the ten hunters refer to the ten fingers of a person, a big forest to the head and the animals to the lice. It is observed by many that when someone looks for lice in the hair of another person, he or she will have to use all their fingers. But when the louse is caught, only the two thumbs are used for killing them by crushing the vermin between the thumbnails. That is why the two thumbs are referred to the only two hunters who get to eat the meat.

Arngut shipara, lah kerkut da ki nongap,

Ym ju kham don ba ioh ban rung,

Lada don ba rung'

Lah mynsaw ki arngut shipara.

Riddle referent: *Ki khmat.*

Translation

Two sisters are guarded by sentries,

Nobody can enter,

But if someone does enter,

The sisters will get hurt.

Riddle referent: The eyes.

The eyes and eyelashes of a person are the metaphors in this riddle. The eyes are compared to two sisters here, and the sentries, to the eye lashes that surround the eyes. It has been observed that eye lashes prevent foreign particles from entering into our eyes. In case any foreign particle enters our

eyes, tears will come out as our eyes will be hurt. So, those who observe this phenomenon create this riddle about the eyes.

Tang shu kha ka kmie ia u, u lah takor ia ka.

Riddle Referent: *U tyrkhang.*

Translation

As soon as his mother gives birth to him, he knocks her with his knuckles.

Riddle referent: The fern

In this riddle, the fern is a metaphor. The tender, young leaves of the fern usually bend downward with the top of the leaves touching the stem of the fern. Here the tender leaf is compared to the male child and the stem of the fern, to the mother of the child. This phenomenon in which the tender buds of the fern touching its stem is compared to an act of knocking one's own mother with his knuckles.

Bah u khun ia ka kmie.

Riddle referent: *U star bad ka khoh.*

Translation

The son carries the mother.

Riddle referent: The traditional carrying strap and the conical basket.

In this riddle, the traditional carrying strap and the conical basket made of bamboo are the metaphors. A traditional basket which is conical is shape and a

strap is used by the Khasis for carrying things on their backs. Here the strap is referred to as the son and the conical basket, as the mother. So, the act of carrying a basket with a strap is compared to a son carrying his mother.

U khun u leit shangkai,

Ka kmie pat ha ing.

Riddle referent: *U shabi bad tala.*

Translation

The son is roaming, the mother stays at home.

Riddle referent: The key and lock.

This is a metaphorical riddle. In this riddle, the key and the lock are the metaphors. The son refers to a key and the mother to a lock. When the door is locked, the lock remains on the latch of the door. But the person who locks the door always carries the key with him or her wherever he or she goes.

Kiba shad napdeng ki don sopti kiba shad narud khlem sopti.

Riddle referent: *U kba bad u khaw haba peh.*

Translation

Those who dance in the middle wear dresses, those on the sides are naked.

Riddle referent: Paddy and rice on the round-flat winnowing basket.

This is another metaphorical riddle. Here the paddy and rice in the winnowing basket are the metaphors. Traditionally the Khasis used a flat winnowing fan

locally known as *ka kynrih* which is flat and round in shape to separate the paddy from rice during the cleaning process. During the winnowing process, when a person shakes the flat basket the paddy will stay in the middle of the basket while rice will be collected on the sides. Here the paddy is referred to as dressed dancers while the rice as naked ones.

Ar ngut shipara, ki ia shong ing marshilliang lum.

Riddle Referent: *Ki shkor.*

Translation

Two siblings; living on the opposite sides of the hill.

Riddle Referent: Ears.

The above riddle is an example of metaphorical riddle. Here the two siblings refer to the ears and the human head as a hill. So the two siblings living on the opposite sides of the hills refer to the two ears on both sides of a human head.

Ka dieng jri ha ranab lum

Riddle referent: *Ka shkor.*

Translation

A banyan tree on the side of the hill.

Riddle referent: The ear.

This is a metaphorical riddle. Here, the banyan tree refers to an ear and the side of the hill to the side of a person's head where the ear is located.

U mih shnuih na jingshong.

Riddle referent: *U piat.*

Translation

He has hair on his buttocks

Riddle referent: The onion.

This is a metaphorical riddle. Here the onion is referred to as someone who has hair on his buttocks. The roots of the onion are compared to hair and the bottom of an onion to a man's bottom.

Ka tang shu dep trei kam ka lah leit thiah shapoh nala.

Riddle referent: *Ka tari Khasi.*

Translation

As soon as she finishes her work, she will go and sleep in the drain.

Riddle referent: The Khasi traditional knife.

In this riddle the Khasi traditional knife is a metaphor. A Khasi knife is made of iron and the handle is made either of wood or plexiglass. It is made in such a way that the blade of the knife is folded and fitted into the handle which is grooved when one is not using it. This act of fitting the sharp edge into the groove of the handle after using it is compared to some one sleeping in the drain after finishing one's work.

Ka tang shu dep bam ka lah sma ia la ka jingshong.

Riddle referent: *Ka tari Khasi.*

Translation

As soon as she finishes her food, she would smell her buttock.

Riddle referent: The Khasi traditional knife.

This is another metaphorical riddle that refers to the Khasi knife. Here, the handle of a knife is compared to the bottom of a person. The act of fitting the sharp edge of a knife into the handle after using it is compared to some one smelling his bottom.

Mama ba jrong ba pei jingshong.

Riddle referent: *U Thyrnia*.

Translation

Tall uncle, with a hole on the seat of his pants.

Riddle referent: The needle.

This is a metaphorical riddle. In this riddle, tall uncle refers to the needle. The hole on the seat of uncle's pant refers to the eye of a needle which is use for threading. It is to be noted here that the tall uncle refers to a non-tribal person or those who are from the plains of India. The Khasis used to fondly call all non-tribal males as mama (uncle). It has also been observed that the Khasis are shorter in stature compared to plain people. So long needle using for stitching and mending clothes is compared to non-tribals who are usually taller compared to the Khasis.

*Uei uta u ba jrong bad raikhoh, u shait trei tang haba shai bad u don
tang kawei ka khmat?*

Riddle referent: *U thyrnia*.

Translation

What is long and slim, works only when there is light and has but one eye?

Riddle referent: The needle.

This is an example of metaphorical riddle. Here the needle is likened to someone who is tall and thin with only one eye. The eye here is referred to the eye of a needle. Needles are always used for stitching and mending clothes. This work is usually done mostly during the day or when there is enough light. No one can do needle works in the dark as any mistake will lead to an injury if the fingers are accidentally pierced by the needle.

Ha krem bah, ki shipai ki shong hangta ba ap ia u syiem.

Riddle referent: *Ka shyntur, ki bniat bad u thylliej.*

Translation

In a big cave, the soldiers live there to guard the king.

Riddle referent: The mouth, teeth and tongue.

This is another example of metaphorical riddle. Here the mouth, teeth and tongue of a person are the metaphors. In this riddle, the mouth is compared to a big cave, the teeth to soldiers who guard the king and a tongue to the king.

Uei u Khlur khyndew?

Riddle referent: *U kynphad*

Translation

What is the star of the earth?

Riddle referent: Cotton.

In this example of metaphorical riddle, the star of the earth refers to cotton. Cotton, which is usually pure white in colour, is compare to a star in the sky. It has been observed by those people living in the Bhoi area where cotton is cultivated, that cotton which is very light in weight when blown away by the wind look like stars above the earth.

Kat sha ba leit ka rah dongmusa,

Tangba ka thang pat ia ka ynda lah miet.

Riddle referent: *Ka 'niangbading*

Translation

Where ever she goes, she carries her bamboo torch,

But she lights it only at night

Riddle referent: The firefly.

In the above riddle, the firefly is likened to a woman who always carries a traditional bamboo torch where ever she goes. Fireflies could be seen even during the day. It is to be noted that they do not emit light from their bodies during the day. But once dusk descends, fireflies can always be seen even from afar due to the light that emits from their bodies.

Ha poh thwei ba jyndong,

Dohka heh I ialehkai.

Riddle referent: *U Thylliej*

Translation

In a very shallow pool

A big fish frolics

Riddle referent: The tongue.

This riddle falls under metaphorical riddles. Here, the big fish playing in the water refers to the person's tongue and the shallow pool is saliva inside the mouth.

Shipyrton ki shipai,

Don tang kawei ka nongialam kynthei ka ba synshar ia ki,

Lada ka iap baroh ki shipai kin iap.

Riddle referent: *Ka kiaw ngap.*

Translation

A battalion of soldiers,

Controlled by a woman,

If she dies, all the soldiers also will perish.

Riddle referent: The queen bee.

In this metaphorical riddle, the woman who controlled a battalion is referred to a queen bee and a battalion of soldiers, to the bees living with a queen bee in a beehive. It is a well-known fact that if the queen bee of a particular beehive dies, then the whole colony of bees will perish.

Ka tupia jong u da ki shiah suda.

Riddle referent: *U sohtrun.*

Translation

His cap is thorny.

Riddle referent: The pineapple.

This is an example of metaphorical riddle. It has been observed that the leaves on the head of a pine apple are thorny. So in this riddle, the thorny leaves, on the head of the pine apple is likened to a person's cap made of thorns.

U soh halor ki sla

Ki sla halor u soh.

Riddle referent: *U sohtrun.*

Translation

A fruit on top of the leaves

The leaves on top of the fruit.

Riddle referent: The pineapple.

In this metaphorical riddle, we see the pineapple is described as something which came out of the leaves and the leaves which came out of the fruit. It has been observed that pine apple fruits came out of the stem of the plant surrounded by the thorny leaves. And on the head of the fruit the bud of leaves used to appear. This bud is usually planted in the earth as new plants.

Nga don tang kawei ka khmat ba iong bad u sniuh ba shai rong;

*Nga ieng beit ha khyndew bad ka khmat jong nga ka bud ia ka kynrad
jong nga kat shaba ka mareh kylleng sawdong ka pyrthei.*

Riddle referent: *U tiew sngi.*

Tranlation

I have only one black eye and my hair is bright in colour.

I always stood on the ground and my eyes follow my mistress as she
races around the world.

Riddle referent: The sun flower.

In this metaphorical riddle, the sun flower is compared to somebody with only one eye and light colour hair. The eye here refers to the centre of the flower which is black in colour, the bright hair to the yellow petals of sun flowers and the mistress to the sun in the sky. It has been observed by many that sunflowers always turn their heads towards the sun. It is to be noted that in many cultures around the world the sun is always given a masculine gender. But in the Khasi culture, the sun is always referred to as a female. So that is why in this riddle the sun is referred to as a mistress.

U wei u paia da ki spah tylli ki jingkhang.

Riddle referent: *Ka skum kyieng.*

Translation

One pillar with hundred of doors.

Riddle referent: The wasp's nest.

In this riddle, the pillar refers to the nest of a colony of wasps. It has been observed that the wasps mostly like to have their nests on trees. The nests are

usually elongated in size hanging from branches of trees. Each nest is divided into many compartments like cavities where each wasp used to live. These compartments like cavities are compared to doors.

Kynthei ba khraw bor

Ba phong tang da ki sopti nar

Teng teng ba saw

Teng teng ba rong soh

Ha ki kti ka rah ki nap nar

Ban ialeh ia ki nongshun.

Riddle referent: *Ka tham.*

Translation

A mighty woman

Wrapped in iron armour

Sometimes red

Sometime orange

In her hands she carries iron pincers

To fight against her enemies.

Riddle referent: The crab.

In this metaphorical riddle, the crab is likened to a mighty woman. Her iron armours refer to the hard shell that covers the body of the crab. It has been observed by many that there are two types of crabs that can be found all over Khasi and Jaintia hills. These are reddish and orange in colour. But the most common ones are those reddish crabs while the orange ones are rare to find.

The iron pincers here refer to pincer-like hands of crabs which they often use to defend themselves against any attack.

Shuwa ban rung ha krem ka lah law lymbuid.

Riddle referent: *Ka kait*.

Translation

Before entering a cave, she strips off her clothes.

Riddle referent: The banana.

This is another example of metaphorical riddle. It is seen that before one eats a banana and puts it into his or her mouth, one has to peel off the cover. A banana here is compared to a woman, the cover of a banana to her clothes and the mouth of a person to a cave.

U boit ba sngaid kpoh u ialeh kai hapoh um.

Riddle referent: *U dohkha kot*.

Translation

A dwarf with a bulging stomach is playing in the water.

Riddle referent: The tiny fish with a balloon like stomach.

In this riddle, a dwarf with a bulging stomach refers to a tiny fish that is found mostly in waters adjoining plain areas. This tiny fish has a balloon like stomach and a very big head. This tiny fish is very ugly to look at. In the *War-Jaintia* areas, short and tiny men are always referred to as *U kot*.

Ke khot nar tep ie di pyrup ke tipoh syrwu.

Riddle referent: *Ke hynro.*

Translation

An iron bowl buried upside down in the sand.

Riddle referent: The tortoise.

In this metaphorical riddle the iron bowl refers to the shell of the tortoise. This riddle is in *War-Jaintia* dialect and is collected from in and around Dawki. This village located on the bank of the river Umngot is very close to the plains of Bangladesh. In the past, the sand all along the bank of the river was a breeding place for tortoise. So tortoise breeding in the area was a common sight. The sight of a tortoises lying in the sand made them looked like metal bowls buried upside down in the sand.

Nga khawa ia ka lieng da saw tyly ki boitha

Hynrei ngam ju mih shabar ka tnum jong nga.

Riddle referent: *Ka dkar.*

Translation

I row my boat with four oars.

But I never come out of my roof.

Riddle referent: The turtle.

In this riddle, the metaphor is the turtle. Here, the turtle is compared to someone who can row a boat with four oars. The four oars here refer to the

four feet of the turtle which she uses when swimming in water and the roof to the turtle's shell on her back.

Ka rah ia ki lbong jong ka shajrong tang shu treikam.

Riddle referent: *Ka kanshi.*

Translation

She lifts her thighs as soon as she goes to work.

Riddle referent: The scissors.

This is a metaphorical riddle. Here a pair of scissors is compared to a woman. It is observed that when a pair of scissors is used, the two hands have to be used. So the act of cutting something with a scissor is compared to a woman who lifts her thighs while working.

Ka tang shu tymmen ka lah kiew niangmong ki ngap.

Riddle referent: *Ka sohbrab.*

Translation

As soon as she grows old, her cheeks will be covered with pigmentation.

Riddle referent: The passion fruit.

In this riddle, the ripe passion fruit is the metaphor. Usually when the passion fruits are tender, they are green in colour. But a ripe one is reddish or purple in colour. Here, in this riddle an old woman who has pigmentation on her cheeks is referred to a ripe passion fruit.

Ha kawei ka lypung shibun bha ki briew ki ia hylla ia kyrkait,

Tang shu wan kawei ka kynthei ka thap lut iaki baroh.

Riddle referent: *Ka siang king ja bad shikhiew ka ja.*

Translation

In one place, many people are screaming and making noise,

When one woman comes, she slaps them all.

Riddle referent: The spatula and a pot of boiling rice.

In the above riddle, a pot of boiling rice and the spatula for stirring rice are the metaphors. While cooking, when rice is boiling, certain sound comes out due to the boiling of water and a wooden spatula is used to stir the rice in the pot. When the rice in the pot is stirred, the sound would stop for sometimes. Here people who were screaming and making noise are referred to boiling rice and the lady who slaps them refers to the spatula which is used for stirring them.

Ar tylli ki krem pubon,

U wei u rishot hapdeng.

Riddle referent: *Ki thliew khmut.*

Translation

Two caves,

One pillar in the middle.

Riddle referent: The nostrils.

This is a metaphorical riddle. Here the nostrils are the metaphors. The nostrils in the nose of a person are compared to two caves and the cartilage inside the nose to a pillar which supports the two caves (nostrils).

Ha trai u lum ka pung,

Ha kliar pat ka don ka ding ba meh,

Hapdeng pat ki briew ki ia lynnir ia pyrta haba ki iohi ia ka ding.

Riddle referent: *Ka daba.*

Translation

At the foot of the hill, a pond,

On its top a burning fire,

On the sides there are many people screaming on seeing the fire.

Riddle referent: The traditional hookah.

In this riddle the traditional hookah is likened to the hill. The pond at the foot of the hill refers to the water at the bottom of a hookah. The fire at the top of the hill refers to a container at the top of a hookah where the burning tobacco is kept. And the screaming of the people refers to the sound produced by the water in a hookah when one inhales and exhales the smoke.

Ki bniat jong nga ki nep har har

Ban dait da ki bniat dei ka kam jong nga.

Riddle referent: *Ka kurat.*

Translation

My teeth are very sharp

To bite with my teeth is my job.

Riddle referent: The saw.

In this riddle, the metaphor is the saw. The saw is usually used for cutting things like wood etc.

Ngam ju lah ban buhrieh

Nga pyni lut kat kaba nga iohi.

Riddle referent: *Ka iit khmih.*

Translation

I can never hide anything

I show off everything I see.

Riddle referent: The mirror.

This is a metaphorical riddle. The mirror is the metaphor here. It is compared to someone who cannot hold any secret. When someone looks into the mirror he will see his own reflection and whether we like it or not mirrors show all our imperfections.

*U shipai hapdeng ki syntiew,u rah ka waitlam ba don bih bad
pyndonkam ia ka ban iada ialade na ki nongtuh.*

Riddle referent: *U ngap.*

Translation

A warrior among the flowers, he bears a poisonous sword and used it against the thieves.

Riddle referent: The bee.

In this riddle, the bee is the metaphor. Bees always collect nectar from different flowers. So the bee here is likened to a warrior and his poisonous sword to its sting.

*Myn dang khynnah u phong sopti rong jyrngam,
Ynda lah tymmen pat, u phong sopti rong saw.*

Riddle referent: *U sohmynten.*

Translation

During childhood, he wears green,
In old age he wears red.

Riddle referent: The chili.

This is another example that falls under the category of metaphorical riddles. Here, the chilly is a metaphor. When chilies are tender, they are green in colour but once it is ripe and matured it will turn red. So the green chili is compared to someone young who wears green dress and red chili to an aged person who wears a red dress.

Mano ba shait thiah bad ki juti?

Riddle referent: *U kulai*

Translation

Who goes to bed with his shoes on?

Riddle referent: The horse.

In this metaphorical riddle the horse is compared to someone who sleeps with his shoes. The shoes here refer to the iron hooves that are put on the hooves of the horse to prevent him from injuring his feet.

Nga sngewtynnad ban shad pynkhih syngkai ha suin

Hynrei ngam don sner kum ki sim.

Riddle referent: *Ka kot kudi.*

Translation

I love to dance and twist my waist in the sky

But I do not have feathers like other birds.

Riddle referent: The kite.

This is a metaphorical riddle. Here, in this riddle, the kite that flies high up in the sky and twisted and tossed by the wind is compared to someone who likes to dance and twist his waist very much. Kites are usually made of colour papers or polythene sheets with a long string attached to it.

Nga iong ngain ngain bad sniewdur hynrei baroh ki ieid ia nga

Nga rieh ha ki jaka ba dum

Ki briew ki wad ia nga haduh ba kin da thait ian

Ynda ki lap ki shoh pynban ia ka khlieh jong nga

Bad sei ia nga shabar ka jaka rieh jong nga..

Riddle referent: *U 'Dewiong.*

Translation

I am black and ugly but everybody loves me

I hide in dark places

Men seek me till they are exhausted

When they found me they strike my head

And take me out of my hiding place.

Riddle referent: Coal.

In this riddle, the coal is a metaphor. Here the coal is compared to someone who in spite of being black and therefore ugly everybody loves him. Coal is found in some places like in the northern parts of Jaintia hills and the south-western part of Khasi hills. It is considered to be a very valuable mineral and therefore is often called *Black Gold* by the people. Here digging of coal and taking it out from the coal shafts is compared to a person hiding in dark places, which is being beaten and taken away from his hiding place.

Tang shu poi ka pyrem nga lah sdang ban phong jain

Ha por lyiur lei lei nga phong da ki jain ba itynnad.

Ynda sdang khriat nga sdang ban loit ki jainphong

Ynda lah tlang nga ieng lyngbuid.

Riddle referent: *U dieng*

Translation

When spring comes, I start putting on my clothes

In summer especially I wear beautiful clothes

When it's getting cold I start taking off my clothes

In winter naked I stand.

Riddle referent: The tree.

In this metaphorical riddle, the tree is a metaphor. It has been observed that in spring times, the branches of trees are covered with buds of leaves. In summer, the whole tree will be covered with green leaves. But in autumn, the trees will start to shed their leaves and in winter, the trees will be leafless as all the leaves have fallen off.



*Ka ing kaba don ar ngut ki dkhot, teng teng lai ngut, niar ba phin shem
tang iwei;*

Pynpra ia ki kynroh, bam noh ia ki ba shong hangta.

Riddle referent: *U shana budam.*

Translation

A house with two occupants, sometimes three, rarely one;

Break the walls and eat the boarders inside.

Riddle referent: The peanut.

In this riddle, the house with occupants refers to the cover of the peanut, and the peanuts inside the brownish cover to the people living inside the house.

Conundrum

A conundrum is something that is mysterious and puzzling. It also used to explain riddles that are known as riddles of multiple classifications. These types of riddles also play on or manipulate words.

Ka khoh te ka khoh, tangba ym lah ban kit ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka khohsiew.*

Translation

It is a basket, but nobody can carry it.

Riddle referent: The knee.

This is an example of a conundrum. In Khasi language *ka khoh*, the first part of the word *khohsiew* means a conical basket which the people used for carrying things on their backs along with a traditional carrying strap.

U soh te u soh tangba ym lah ban bam ia u.

Riddle referent: *U sohpet*.

Translation

It is a fruit, but nobody can eat it.

Riddle referent: The navel.

This riddle falls under the conundrum category. In Khasi language, the fruit is known as *u soh*. That is why the riddle refers to navel as a fruit which cannot be eaten by anybody.

Ka ksing te ka ksing tangba ym lah ban tied iaka.

Riddle referent: *Ka ksing shkor*.

Translation

It is a drum but we cannot beat it.

Riddle referent: The ear drum.

This is another example of conundrum. The Khasis called a drum as *ka ksing* in their language. Here the drum which cannot be beaten by any one refers to the ear drum of a person.

Riddle parodies

Riddle parodies are a sub-category that tries to make fun of riddles. The riddle referent in a riddle parody always upsets the expectation because answer is straight forward and aims at making fun of the riddle and the riddlee.

U syiar halor u dieng u kha pylleng,

Shano ka pylleng kan hap?

Riddle referent: *U syiar um ju kha pylleng.*

Translation

A cock on the tree lays an egg,

Where will the egg fall?

Riddle referent: The cock never lays an egg.

This riddle is an example of riddle parody. Everyone knows that only hens lay eggs. A cock being male can never lay eggs.

Ki shait kyrteng kumno ia ki biej tasngeng?

Riddle referent: *U sniang.*

Translation

What do they name the fools?

Riddle referent: The pig.

In this riddle parody, a fool or a naive person is always called a pig. This is because in Khasi culture the pig is considered to be the dullest and the most foolish among all the animals. This riddle is believed to have originated from a folk tale about the pig and the dog. The story says that in the olden days the pig and dog offered their services to man in return for shelter and food in his home. Both the dog and the pig wanted to stay inside his house and to eat the same food that he took. One day, man took both the pig and the dog to the field and asked them to plough the field. He also told them that the one who

did most of the work would be allowed to live in the house while the one who worked less would be put outside. After the master left, the pig ploughed the land while the dog did nothing but slept the whole day. In the evening, when the dog woke up, he saw that the whole field was ploughed by the pig. The dog went to the ploughed field and danced on it till only his foot prints could be seen. When the master came, the pig complained that the dog did nothing the whole day and he alone ploughed the field. But when the master inspected the field he found only the footprints of the dog. He chided the pig and called him a liar. The pig tried to tell the truth but man would not believe him. In the end, the pig was asked to live outside the house and the dog with man. But it has been observed that even in Western culture too the pig is always considered not to be an intelligent animal. This can be seen even in English phrase like the one which goes, ‘to throw precious stones in front of swine.’

Balei u ngaptung u rwai eh?

Riddle referent: *Ban pynbiej ia ki kynthei ba dang samla.*

Translation

Why does a drone sing so loud?

Riddle referent: To fool the young female bees.

The above riddle is an example of riddle parody. It has been observed that a drone hums louder than any other bees in the beehive. He is also a lazy one because he never did any useful work like collecting nectar from flowers. In many cases also, it is found that lazy and worthless fellows always tried to talk big in order to impress others, especially girls in the hope of winning their

heart. So those who observe this behaviour of a drone create this kind of a riddle.

Balei ba u ksew u bishni ia ka miaw?

Riddle referent: *Namar ba ka miaw ka ioh ban shong hapoh iing.*

Translation

Why the dog is jealous of the cat?

Riddle referent: Because the cat gets to live inside the house.

This is another example of riddle parody. In this riddle we see the answer is straight forward. It has been observed by many that cats and dogs always fight, and their constant fighting is interpreted as a case of jealousy between the two species. But it has also been observed that this riddle might have sprung from two folk tales which tell us how the dog and the cat came to live with men in the old days. These two folk tales tell us how man allowed the dog to live with him but let it live at *ka shyngkup* (a kind of porch, an area in front of a Khasi traditional house.) and the cat, in the kitchen. So due to this arrangement, the children used to joke that the dog was jealous of the cat as she got to live inside the house of man, where as he was made to live outside. It was said from that time onwards the jealousy between the cat and the dog started.

Balei ba u maji um treh ban kit lang ia ka blang bad ki tympew ha ka lieng jong u?

Riddle referent: *Namar ba blang kan bam lut ia ki tymphew.*

Translation

Why the boat man does not want to carry the goat and the betel leaves together in his boat?

Riddle referent: Because the goat will eat all the betel leaves.

This sample falls under the riddle parodies category. Here we see a very simple and straight answer that the boatman does not want to carry the goat and the betel leaves in the same boat because it has been observed that goats are very fond of betel leaves. So if he carries the goat and the betel leaves together, by the time he reaches the other side of the river, all the betel leaves will be eaten by the goat. Betel leaves which is one of the main products in the War-Jaintia area, is considered by the Khasis as very precious. This may be due to the reason that betel leaves have a deep significance in the socio-religious economic life of the people. According to a Khasi folk tale, it is God, the creator who had given a betel leaf, betel nut, lime and tobacco to the people. It is said that once upon a time, there lived two bosom friends, *U Nik Mahajon* and *U Shing*. *U Nik Mahajon* was very rich while *U Shing* was very poor. But their economic status did not come in the way of their friendship. Whenever *U Shing* went to *U Nik*'s home, the latter would not allow him to go home without having something. One day *U Shing* asked *U Nik* that he should come to visit his home too sometimes. So *U Nik*, one evening went to *U Shing*'s home. *U Shing* and his wife *Ka Lak* welcomed him warmly and asked him to sit in the main room. *U Shing* went to the kitchen and asked his wife to prepare some food for his friend. But on that day there was nothing in their

house. So *U Shing* asked his wife to go out and borrow some from friends and relatives. *U Shing's* wife went out to her friends and relatives to get some food. But unluckily on that day, the others also had nothing to give her. So she came back empty handed. On reaching home, the wife told her husband about it. *U Shing* was very sad and dejected. He told his wife he felt very ashamed as his friend had come for the first time but he could not offer him any food. There in the kitchen he could not bear it anymore. He took one knife and stabbed himself to death with it. On seeing her husband dead, *U Shing's* wife also took the same knife and killed herself along with her husband. After a long time, *U Nik* was wondering why his friend did not come to sit with him. So, he went to the kitchen and to his shock he found only the dead bodies of his friend and his wife. When he looked around the kitchen, he saw a pot of water boiling on the hearth and realized that his friend killed himself because he could not feed him. *U Nik* then said that he better die with his friend rather than live alone. He too took the same knife and stabbed himself to death with it. In the wee hours, one thief, running away from his pursuers sighted the house with an open door. He went and hid himself inside the house. There he sat near the hearth to warm himself and slowly fell asleep. At dawn when he woke up, to his horror, he saw the three dead bodies lying prostrate on the floor of the kitchen. He was very scared as he thought that if somebody were to catch him there they would accuse him not only to be a thief but a murderer as well. So, he too he took the same knife and killed himself. When the people came to know about this sad incident, they prayed to God and requested him to show them some other simpler ways to receive and welcome people into their house, ways that would not affect the poor or the rich. It is said God

heard the people's prayers and from the four dead bodies came betel nuts (from the dead body of *U Nik*), betel leaf and lime (From *U Shing* and his wife) and tobacco (from the corpse of the thief). The Khasis used betel leaves as an edible along with areca nuts and lime. In Khasi culture, betel leaves along with betel nuts and lime are given to friends and people who visit their homes as a sign of hospitality and goodwill. In marriage ceremonies the relatives of the groom are welcomed with betel leaves and areca nuts. Even in death and bone deposition ceremony, betel leaves play a very significant role. Betel leaves are used during *Chliang* rituals where money is put on betel leaves and kept near a cremation site or bone deposition site. Betel leaves are also used during *Ka Phur* ceremony where the relatives offer food to their dead ones. So it is seen here that betel leaves play a very important role in the life and culture of the Khasis.

Jia aiu lada u Dkhar bad u Pnar ki ia kynduh?

Riddle referent: *Kan kulmar thlim ka pyrthei.*

Translation

What will happen if a non-tribal and a *Pnar* meet?

Riddle referent: The whole world will be in chaos.

In this example of riddle parody, as the answer is very straight. It has been observed by *War-Jaintia* (a sub-group of the Khasi community) that the *Pnar* (uphill Jaintias) and the non-tribals (in this case, the Hindu *Bangalees* who live in the plain of Bangladesh bordering the slopes of *War-Jaintia* areas) used to converse among themselves very loudly. The *War-Jaintia* used to say that

the behavior of the *Pnar* and the *Bangalees* are very similar in many respect. It is also said that once the *Pnar* or the *Bangalees* start talking among themselves, no one else can converse in their midst due to their loud conversation. It is believed that this riddle derived from some akin words in *War-Jaintia* dialect which goes like this - *U Pna* - *U Rmen* which mean the uphill Jaintia and the non-tribal.

Balei ba u ksew u lah ban sma ia ki dienjat jong ki mrad?

Riddle referent: *Namar ba ki pohjat jong ki ki sma 'tung rymbai.*

Translation

Why the dog can smell the footsteps of other animals?

Riddle referent: Because their paws smelled of fermented bean chutney.

This riddle derived from a famous Khasi folktale *Ka Iew Luri Lura* which is very popular among all the Khasi children. In the context of the Khasis the answer is very simple and straight as it is believed that the dog can trace the scent of any animal due to the smell of '*tungrymbai* on their paws. The following story seeks to explain why the dog could trace the scent of animal even till today. The story says that once upon a time in the remote past human beings and animals lived in peace and harmony without disturbing one another. All men and animals spoke the same language and could understand each other. During that time there was a common market where all the animals came to buy and sell their things. On one market day, a bitch called by the

name *Dom* came to sell its product, ka '*tungrymbai* (a Khasi cuisine made of fermented beans and that produced a foul smell). *Dom* set its shop in one corner and called to the other animals to come and buy its '*tungtoh*. But all the animals walking near her stall closed their nose as the '*tungtoh* emitted strange odour. All animals gathered around the bitch and accused it of bringing and selling dirt in the market. They started insulting the poor bitch for daring to bring such stinking stuff to the market. They went into rampage and started to destroy the bitch's stall. They overturned the basket where '*tungrymbai* is kept kicking and trampling the basket and threw everything on the ground. The bitch begged them not to do so but they did not listen to her. Some animals especially the deer, insulted her so much that the bitch ran away from there in shame and disgrace. She went to complain to the tiger who was the presiding priest of all the animals. The bitch brought along the '*tungrymbai* as proof before the judge for the injustice meted out to her by its fellow animals. But when it brought the '*tungrymbai* in front of the tiger, all the animals began kicking and stamping its stuff with their feet. The bitch was deeply hurt and felt insulted that she ran away from there and came to man to ask for justice. Man announced to all animals that there would be an assembly to look into the complained of the bitch against the other animals. But no one came to attend the assembly. The bitch felt greatly insulted by her fellow animals, decided to seek shelter with human beings. She requested man to allow her to live in his house. She promises to be man's servant to guard him and his property. She also made a vow to avenge herself on those wrong doers who had insulted her in the *Jew Luri Lura*. Man agreed to avenge the bitch's ill treatment at the hands of other animals. From then onward the bitch avenged herself by

helping her master to track down the other animals while hunting. She could track down every animal because of the smell of 'tungrymbai which they still carry on the paws of their feet.

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CHAPTER IV

Riddle Elements in Folk Poetry, Jokes, Games and Verbal Dueling

It is noted that the riddle is closely related to other genres of folklore like folk songs, jokes, proverbs, tales, plays etc. There is no other genre of folklore which is so complicated and connected with so many genres of folklore and literature at one and the same time (Bhagwat 1965:63). This chapter concerns itself with the study of dialogic games, riddle poems, especially the Khasi *phawar*, riddle jokes and verbal dueling that takes place among the people of different regions of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and sub-groups of the Khasi communities.

Part – A

Phawar and Riddle Poems

Phawar, which is a rhyme couplet, is a good example of Khasi folk poetry. It is a poetic creation unique to the Khasis. In most of the *phawar*, the first two lines are apparently meaningless where as the third and the fourth lines contain the meaning of the song. *Phawar* singers in the first two lines can either refer to animate or inanimate things to make rhymes, with the last second lines. *Phawar* is sung in group and at least a minimum number of two persons are needed. The leader of the group, who is a chief versifier, would lead the song while the rest would join him in shouting the chorus which is articulated with much gusto *Hoi kiw*. Usually, *phawar* can be categorized into two categories, Religious and Secular *phawar*.

Different writers give different definitions of *Phawar*. H. Elias Sohliya, a noted Khasi writer and folklore collector is of the opinion that Khasi phawar has some similarities with the earliest Greek poetry, the common features being the brevity of the poems, the simple repetitive tunes, the use of musical instruments (the Khasis use stringed and pipe instruments and in the case of Greeks, the lyres), community participation or one or more singers, and the themes (war, emotions, nature etc) (Giri 1994:24).

Juanita War is of the opinion that “*Phawar* is a traditional Khasi poetic creation which is composed spontaneously in couplets for special occasions with a peculiar musical quality which is between a chant and a song” (Giri 1994:24).

Kynpham Sing Nonkynrih a prolific Khasi writer and a poet, argues against the contention that holds the Khasi *phawar* to be merely a set of couplets. He is of the view that “despite the short and terse lines, it is neither composed in the English iambic pentameter nor in the rhyme scheme of *aabb* which is normally associated with rhyming couplets.” Nongkynrih defines *phawar* as “a six-line traditional Khasi verse form. It is referred to in the singular as *ka phawar* and in the plural as *ki phawar*. It can be described in three ways: as a limerick because, although it is not-linear, it is often a humorous poem; a verse epigram expressing an ingenious thought with point, usually satirical; and as a gnomic verse because it comprises pithy and sententious sayings, embodying some moral principle or precept, someone which can be quite witty” (War 2009: 43).

Barnes L. Mawrie's definition of *phawar* is that they are a type of poetry invented and developed by the Khasis. They are the poetic creation of the Khasis of old. They consist of a series of rhyming couplets and are usually chanted by a group or two groups in a sort of reply. It has the power to evolve the interest in the listeners because of the lyrics that are replete with funny imageries. These *phawars* are chanted at different occasions-during sports, festivals, hunting and ceremonies of different sorts (Mawrie 2000: 77).

Dhonsing Lyngdoh Nongbri, a noted *Phawar* composer who has published books on *Phawar* says there are two types of *Phawar*; *Ki Phawar Biria* (*Phawar* for entertainment or fun) and *ki Phawar Bashisha* (Serious *Phawar*). According to him, '*Phawar* consists of two parts, *ka Lam* and *ka Pynkop*. *Ka Lam* is the first line of *ka Phawar* and *Ka Pynkop* is its last line'. He further says that an in-depth study of *Phawar* is very important in order to understand its meaning. This is because *Phawars* are full of metaphors. In *Ki Phawar Bashisha* the meaning of *ka Lam* is connected to the meanings in *ka Pynkop*. But in *Ki Phawar Biria*, the meaning of *ka Lam* (first line) is different from *ka Pynkop* (last line) (Nongbri 2000: 8). Examples are reproduced below.

Ka Phawar Bashisha (Serious *Phawar*)

Naduh khlieh haduh khongdong, itynnad u rangbah

Ha ita I kong, iba pyllon te ki khohwah.

Translation

From head to heels, the gentleman likes

The girl with round calves.

Ka Phawar Biria. (Entertainment *Phawar*)

U ksai u thyrnia ba la buh halor miej,

La biang la ka rta, te beit beit bad I baieit.

Translation

Thread and needle that had been kept on the table,

The age is right, straight with the beloved.

As mentioned above, *Phawar* is a form of oral poetry that is unique to the Khasis only. In the past, every Khasi man was expected to be and was also well versed in the art of *Phawar* and this oral tradition was handed down orally from one generation to another. But the same cannot be said as of today. Different types of *phawars* are sung on different occasions. There are religious as well as secular or social *phawars*. The religious *phawars* are performed during the performance of the ceremonial dance for the dead (*ka phur ka siang*), offerings of prayers to *Ka 'lei Hukum* (goddess who gives Orders). Secular or social *phawar* are sung to celebrate victory in battles, during the sport of archery, community work and social gatherings.

It should be mentioned here, that traditionally only men used to compose and sing these *phawar*, especially in association with the traditional archery games. But today, it is seen that many Khasi women and young girls take part in *phawar* singing and composing even in public events. Today the occasions for *phawar* singing have become more diversified and increasingly secular. Today there is a trend where many women and young girls have come forward to take part not only in *phawar* singing but also in composing *phawar*.

Phawar singing is part and parcel of archery games which is known as *ka Rong Biria* in Khasi. It is a traditional sport of the Khasis. The guiding spirits of archery are the tenets of fraternity, equality and justice. The Khasis believed that it is *Ka 'lei Hukum* (deity that gives order to man) who gifted this sporting event to them. According to the story, *Ka Shinam* and *U Mangrin* had passed this sporting gift to their two sons, *Battiton* and *Shynna*. As the two brothers played the game, confusion however arose as to whose arrows had hit the target. The parents then appealed to *Ka Lei Hukum* to solve the issue, who then advised the parents to allot two separate colour arrows in order to differentiate the arrows of the two brothers. *Battiton* chose red and *Shynna* chose black. These colours are retained till today to identify the arrows of two opposing teams or individual archers in archery games.

In archery games, participants are not expected to resort to unfair means for it is believed that the game is governed by the goddess *Ka 'lei Hukum*. The Khasis believe that skill alone does not suffice in archery games. The team or individual shooter must also possess eloquence in putting forward to *ka Mei Hukum*, cogent argument in the form of *phawar* towards the cause of the competition. *Ka 'lei Hukum* is also known as *Ka Mei Hukum* or the Mother Decree. The more convincing the argument, the stronger would be the chance of the team to win the competition. According to the Khasi belief, arguments not only determine the outcome of the match, but also help to deflect the rival's arrow from the target. Psychologically, it may be said that this belief helps in building the confidence of the archer. The winners in archery games would always dance joyously and taunt the losers by singing *Khasi phawar*.

And the losing team would accept all this in a truly sporting spirit, with no ill feelings towards their opponents.

The Khasi *phawar* and some other poems, appear to contain some riddle elements in the versification system which reveals the metaphorical structure of the quintessential riddles. The scholar's intention here is to make a study and analyze the content of *phawar* and poems which contain riddle elements. These *phawar* when analyzed reveal hidden meanings of the text. The *phawars* that are used for discussion are collected from different sources. Examples of *phawar* and riddle poems which contain some elements of riddles are given below.

I thei I nong sohra, I thei nong Sohra,

Tang I balieh tang na shyllang

I mei I nong bynta tang ha ryntieh u khun shynrang.

Hoi...Kiw.

Translation

A girl from Sohra, a girl from Sohra,

Only the forehead is fair

Mother the giver, at the bow of a male child.

Hoi...Kiw.

The above *phawar* is related to archery game and was collected from late Sto Khongsit Ramkheng by late D. T.Laloo. Here, the singer talks about the unskilled archers who tried to hit the target but failed. A girl from Sohra

(Cherrapunjee) whose forehead is fair refers to the target marked in white colour. Khasi women are not allowed to take part in traditional archery games, and because of that they do not gain skill or knowledge of the use of the bow and arrow. So, the unskilled archer who could not hit the target when taking part in the competition is compared to a woman.

U soh lynshangduh hynne, I bilang halor u dieng

Phi la wan shang shane ngin iathang ia I jainslieng.

Hoi...kiw.

Translation

The lynshangduh fruit is here, the he-goat on the tree

You came roaming till here we will burn your loin clothes.

Hoi... kiw.

In this *phawar*, the meaning of the song is hidden in the text. It is seen that the words in the first line of the song are used only for the sake of rhyming with the second line, hence they have no meaning. Here the singers of one archery team warned their opponents that their team would triumph over the other and that even though their opponents had come to challenge them in the shooting arena, in the end the team whom the singers supported would emerge the winner and that would only lead their rivals to embarrassment and shame.

Ngan shanem na ka nyllong, ngan khlaw ka kynthei

La iashem ngong, men khie kyang kaw mei.

Hoi... ..kiw.

Translation

I will strike right in the buttock, I will claw the woman

When meet face to face, you will scream ah! mother.

Hoi.....kiw

This *phawar* talks about the archery game fought by two rivals. Here the rival team would try to make the other less confident and influence them psychologically by taunting and ridiculing each other. The chief singer of one team would taunt the other by saying that the shooters of his team would shoot at the base of the target (*thong*), the bottom of the target is compared to the buttocks of a person and the act of shooting an arrow at the bottom of the target as the act of striking someone on the buttocks. When the arrows of *u 'rang khangkti* (sharp shooter) hit the target on the exact location (the base of the target), the target would become unsteady. On such cases, the arrows of the opponents sticking to the target would fall off. These fallen arrows are compared to the arrows shot by women, who are considered to be physically weaker than men and therefore they were all taken out by the arrow of the sharp shooter. On such situation, the opponents whose arrows fell off to the ground started crying out fervently to the mother. In this context, the word mother did not refer to their biological mothers, but to *ka Mei Hukum* or the Mother Decree.

Tang shu sei la war shaho, jingbang shaba khyllah

Ka la iadei mo, jutang para rangbah.

Hoi.....kiw.

Translation

As soon as they were taken out, the taste was too good

It is connected, the covenant of the elders.

On seeing the arrows of their shooters fell off from the target to the ground, the opponents would be in a state of shock and daze. While the side whose arrow stuck to the target, would be inspired and satisfied as if they had eaten something very delicious. This is because they were sure to win now. To them it is a sweet victory.

Myndai ki nong myndai, I thliew iba khim,

La ai ki nongai, ka hynriew ngi la shim.

Hoi.....kiw

Translation

People of olden times, the hole is narrow,

Given by the givers, the sixth we have taken.

This is another example of archery *phawar* which on closer look at the text reveals its hidden meaning. *Ki rang phawar* (phawar singers) talk about the way of life of our ancestors, their golden and honest words and exemplary deeds which are difficult for today's generation to learn and follow. But once learnt it would bring victory to the people.

Tik ho lih baiong

Ia I mem shiliang lbong.

Translation

Shake, you black guy,
Hit the one legged white woman.

In this *phawar*, the black arrow is compared to a black man and the target which is white in colour is compared to a one legged white woman. It is to be noted that this *phawar* introduced the concept of a white woman and Africans. So it may be assumed that this piece was composed anonymously after the British came to colonize these hills.

Nga tang shu piam la at, la nang lanot I pa

Nga tang shu riam la ngat, la lot ha jaka.

Hoi ... kiw.

Translation

As soon as I hugged her, father was in a tight spot

As soon as I put the trap you are trapped in the spot.

Here the *phawar* talks about the arrows on the target. When the target is full with arrows sticking to it, it expanded as if it would burst into pieces. The word father here refers to an elderly man, who when seeing that the arrows of his team were nearly fallen off from the target and as such would be defeated very soon, started praying and putting forward cogent arguments to *Ka Mei Hukum* for her divine intervention. On such occasions, his team would win with the blessing of *Ka Mei hukum*. While the other team was trapped in his cogent arguments his team defeated them.

*U tiluh la kum u masi,
La ia kynduh bad ngi
Jyndem u jalyngkhan
Ngin khem naba jngan.*

Translation

Tiluh (*Sterculia villosa*) like a bull
You have met with us
Femented millet the jalyngkhan (*Symplocus crataegoides*)
We will massage where it is aching.

This is another *phawar* that the archers used to sing during the archery games. Here, the singer taunts the other team saying that his team is stronger and that they will defeat them very easily. The arrows of the archers of his team will hit and stick at the right place of the target. In such a situation, the arrows of the opponents will fall off the target. When the arrows fall off to the ground, the opponents will be in a risky position to lose. On such occasions, the stronger team will try to strike the other team where they know will hurt them most by teasing and taunting them.

*U Sla kum u slashu,
U tyrso kum u jatira;
Mynta te la kylla,
Shano u 'nai khatsawsynia?*

Translation

A leave like the tea-leaves

Mustard leaf like jatira (*Thalictrum foliolosum*)

Now things have changed

Where is the full moon?

This is a modern *phawar* where the young girls sing and lament about the scarcity of noble and virtuous young men in the present days. *U 'Nai Khadsawsynia* (a full moon) is a Khasi idiom and it refers to a noble young man who is not only handsome but also full of virtue and courage, a man who would protect the women folk when circumstances arises. *U 'nai Khadsawsynnia* is a short form of *U Bnai* the moon and *khadsawsynia* means fourteen night when the moon is full and very bright. On a moonlit night, the silvery beams of the moon would brighten the whole earth and the moon would stand apart from other celestial bodies in the sky. Here, the beauty of the full moon is compared to a handsome young man full of virtue and nobility.

Ah....kitai kitai ki tyngab lieh – 2 sien

Ba lait thaw n'u khiew ranei

Tang ban ioh jaka rieh

Ha byrni rnga du khatei.

Hoi ... Kiw.

Translation

Ah....those, those white crows – 2 times

Escaping from a black earthen pot

Just to get shelter

Even inside a charcoal sack.

Hoi ... Kiw.

Today there are *phawars* sung and composed by members and supporters of political parties during elections in Meghalaya. On such occasions *phawars* are sung to praise and glorify one's own party while taunting the weaknesses of their opponents. The above *phawar* is sung by the members of one Regional party, the United Democratic Party (UDP) of Meghalaya. Before the Assembly election in Meghalaya in 1998, the regional parties in the state came together to form a single regional party to fight against the Congress. As a result of this effort, a new party was founded with an aim to unite the regional parties in the State. It was formed on October, 11th 1997 with late Mr. *E.K. Mawlong* as its founding President. In this song, the singers talk about birds like the vultures and crows that are looking for food and shelter. These types of birds being scavengers did not care what kind of food they have. These birds live mostly on carcasses and garbage. This song has its source in the Khasi folktale about the crow. According to the tale, in days of yore, the crow was actually white in colour having snow white feathers. The cow too was a servant of God then. One day, God sent the cow to deliver his message to mankind. He asked her to tell mankind to cook only one fistful of rice every day, and with his blessing they would never starve but would prosper in life. On the way from God's place to the habitation of man, the crow came and perched on the back of the cow. The crow was busy eating away the ticks on the cow's hide and this in turn pleased the cow very much as she was relieved from the ticks that troubled her. Gradually, the two began to talk and the crow

asked the cow where she was going. The cow told her that she was going to mankind to deliver the message sent by God. When the crow heard the message, she asked the cow to change it and to tell mankind to cook plenty of rice every day and to suffer from diseases, pain and scarcity of food. The cow readily agreed and did so. But when she returned, God was very angry with her for not delivering his message in its true nature and spirit. In his anger, God hit her with his staff on the side of her face and her body and also punished the crow by stuffing and imprisoning it inside a soot-black earthen pot. From then onwards the cow did not have any teeth on her upper jaw and one side of her rib bones was all broken and the colour of the white crow too changed to black because of the soot.

The hidden meaning of the song is about those selfish people (in this case, the politicians) who have no qualms to do anything wrong even at the cost of hurting and destroying others and who do not bother about their reputation just for the sake of wealth and power. It is also to be noted here that Khasi and Jaintia Hills is not a home to white crane which can be found only in the plain areas. The Khasis usually called the white cranes *ki tyngab lieh* which literally means white crow. So, here the white cranes and vultures symbolized the National parties, such as the Indian National Congress Party and others who tries to make their innings in these hills. These parties are considered by many regional parties as Non-tribal Parties and whose high command is from outside the region, possibly a non-tribal and who belongs to some other regions of India.

Dohkha ha nanpolok ki ia biej ia u shana

Da peit ho parari ioh phi biej ia u mama.

Translation

Fish at Ward's lake are crazy of chanas

Look my compatriots lest you are crazy of uncle.

This *phawar* when analyzed reveals the hidden meaning embedded in the text. Ward's Lake is a beautiful man-made lake located in the heart of Shillong city, behind the famous Shillong Club. This picturesque lake was constructed by the then Governor of Assam, Sir. William Ward in the year 1893-94. This lake is also locally known as Nan Polok (according to one version the lake is called Nan Polok after the name of the engineer Mr. Pollock, who built it. But another version says that Polok was the name of a prisoner who was made to dig the lake). The lake abounds with fish of different colours and sizes. People who throng this beautiful lake used to feed the fish while standing on the wooden bridge in the middle of the lake. It is said that the fish of *Nan Polok* or Ward's Lake are very fond of *mooghdal*, a variety of lentil. In the context of this *phawar*, fish is a symbolic representation for young girls who have attained marriageable age. The Khasi males always used the phrase *Leit khwai* or to go fishing when trying to court young girls. In this *phawar*, the word *dohkha* (fish) refers to young and naive Khasi girls who like the fishes of Ward's Lake can be easily lured and swept away by the false promises of love and uncle symbolizes any non-tribal male or men from the plains of India. Here the false promises of love means the promises of the non-tribal men to love and respect the Khasi young girls only later after marriage to be left alone

as the man would return to his native place and marry a woman from his own community. It is to be mentioned that the Khasis always fondly call any non-tribal male as uncle irrespective of his age. In the context of the above *phawar*, the youths have seen the plight of many Khasi women after being abandoned by their non-Khasi husbands. So, seeing the danger awaiting the community, the young Khasi males warned and cautioned the girls not to be fooled by the non tribal males into marrying them.

Ot ka sla ladew, ban iasong ia ka kait;

La ia mareh ki ksew, te hangta la kylla iadait.

Translation

Cut the plantain leaf, to wrap the banana;

The dogs are running, and there they will bite each other.

This couplet talks about two men. One who cut the plantain leaf to wrap the banana refers to a banana seller and a person who does the right things in the society. And the dog that bites refers to the other person who scolds the one who does the right thing. The singer here likened an irritating and quarrelsome man to a dog who always fights with other dogs even without provocation.

Shyllang phynai khriak khriak

I didi na Byrnihat

Nga tang shu iohi liak

Ia I nga la iapmat.

Translation

The fore head is shining so bright
Sister from Byrnihat
As soon as I caught a glimpse of her
I fell for her.

Byrnihat is a small town on the Assam-Meghalaya border and its inhabitants are of mixed population. In this *phawar*, a Khasi youth saw a beautiful girl at *Byrnihat* and at once fell in love with her. It so happened that the girl belongs to a non-tribal community. Here the word *didi* refers to a non-tribal girl.

Pliangsbai na kolkata
Ka kyrnet n'u Lum Shyllong
Hai te i samla
Shu tynnet l'u painkhyllong.

Translation

Ceramic plate from Kolkata
A clarinet from Shillong peak
Look at that young lady
Her hair was kept in a roll.

In this *phawar* it is observed that there is a hidden meaning in the text. Here the ceramic plate refers to things brought from outside or from another culture. The *phawar* talks about how the Khasis are being influenced by other cultures and outside forces in our day to day lives, how we accept such influences for our survival. Shillong peak a sacred peak in Khasi hills which is believed to be

the dwelling place of the famous Shyllong god, is surrounded by air Force establishments. *Ka kyrnet* in the *phawar* refers to a clarinet which is used mainly by bands of the Armed Forces in Shillong. The singer here wants to tell that even if the Khasis are so much influenced by other cultures especially the so called western culture in every aspect of their lives, yet they still love and try to know their culture and way of life. This can especially be seen among the females. The Khasi community is matrilineal where the woman is held in high esteem and is the custodian of the family and clan. It does not matter how modern they may appear to be, but they still, as far as possible, follow their own traditions especially in the way they dress.

U tngaw kum u khaw rnga

U skop kum u jamyniang

Kynmaw ho rang samla

Wat iangop ha u khaw iang

Translation

A langur like charcoal

Chaff like a jamyniang (*Elsholtzia blanda*)

Remember young men

Do not get lured by khawiang. (Intoxicating drink)

In this *phawar*, the singer talks about the young men in the Khasi society. The singer here has seen the effects of liquor among the Khasi youths as many of them have fallen victims to alcoholism. The number of Khasi youths who fall prey to alcohol and other abusive substances has increased every year. This

menace has led to many broken families in the society. So, the singer reminds the young men to avoid drinking excessively and use other intoxicants as it would only lead to misery and premature death.

U shrieh ba la ngat te sha iew u leit die;

U ba kyrkieh palat u ju don ka jingbabe.

Translation

A trapped monkey was taken to market for selling

One who is rash will regret his way.

This *phawar* when studied properly reveals its hidden meaning. The singer tells about a man who spent so much time in making a monkey trap as he did not want the monkey to get hurt in any way when he is trapped. After making the trap, he takes it to the jungle. Within no time a monkey who is always mischievous in nature started playing with the trap and is suddenly trapped inside it. The man later took the monkey to the market for selling it but nobody wants to buy a monkey. The man was so disappointed and regretted the time he spent for making a trap and for trapping a monkey. He realized that he should have inquired first whether selling monkey is a good business or not. The hidden meaning of the *phawar* is that one should always be cautious and not be rash in doing anything otherwise all his hard work and precious time would be wasted if he fails to achieve his goal in the end.

Pynthor I bakha ba ngan lur la dei samoi

Duwai ko mei ko pa, ngan pyniar ba ngan pynroi.

Translation

Cousin's field, it is time for me to plough

Pray mother and father, I will expand I will multiply.

This *phawar* talks about the young men and women who have attained marriageable age. Traditionally, young Khasi man when he likes someone tells his parents about it. His parents along with his maternal uncle would arrange to go to the girl's house to ask for her hand from the family. If both the families agree, engagement and marriage would follow. Here, in this *phawar*, the cousin's field refers to an eligible girl and to plough the field means that as the girl has attained marriageable age, the young man has the right to propose and marry her. According to Khasi culture, the groom has to come and stay with the girl. Being a matrilineal society, the children will take the mother's title. So, all the children belong to the mother's clan. A Khasi man, who marries a Khasi woman, is considered to be the one who brings prosperity to and multiplies the clan of his wife.

Kyllain ia ka spong, to ia peit da ka khor

U masi kyrtong, u la dei ban kit lyngkor.

Translation

Wrap the turban; see that it is a muslin cloth,

The bull, it is time to carry the plough.

Traditionally, a turban is a very important item of attire among the Khasi males. In the past every Khasi elder used to wear turban made either of cotton

or silk. During marriages also the turban plays a very important role as the groom has to wear one. In this *phawar*, asking a young man to wear a traditional turban (*spong*) signifies that the young man has reached the marriageable age and as such it is time for him to search for a bride and get married. Here an eligible bachelor is compared to a full grown bull that has to carry a plough as the young man now has grown up and would be able to take the responsibility of having a family of his own and of looking after his wife and children.

Mur mur u soh niamtra, ba la dei ka por ban kheit;

Arliang ki kur ki kha, ba la dap da ka jing iabeit.

Translation

Yellow is the orange, it is time to pluck;

Both sides the maternal and paternal relations, the consent has been given.

Khasi and Jaintia hills are native homes of oranges. It has been noted that oranges from the *War* areas (southern parts of the hills) are considered to be very tasty. During winter seasons when oranges are ripe and yellowish in colours, the orchards look so beautiful as if they have been bedecked with gold necklaces. In this *phawar* a ripe orange is a symbolic representation of a girl who has attained marriageable age. The young man who likes the young woman would want to marry her. In such a case his family would inform the girl's family. If the girl and her family agree, then the arrangement would be made by the respective families for the commencement of the marriage.

Ia u sdie da shut ban phyrnai ban itynnad;

Kut la ka jingmut sha iing khun da shong ryngkat.

Translation

Sharpen the axe, to make it shine and beautiful.

Have strong determination, at your children's house live together.

As mentioned earlier, Khasi culture is in contrast with other cultures when it comes to marriage. A man has to go and stay with his wife at his in-laws' place till he can construct his own house. In case he marries the youngest daughter of a family, he has to live in his in-laws' house as his wife is the custodian of her parents' property and has to take care of them in their old age. In this *phawar* the singer advises the groom to be good and intelligent, to have good character and to respect his wife's family as a man of good virtue would be loved and respect by all. He also urges the young groom to have strong determination as now he has to be responsible not only to his parents and his wife but to his in-laws as well.

Dohkha iba la ngat, ka jingbang ba sdieh kylla

Samla ba ia iapmat, ba la khang ki kmie ki kpa.

Translation

The fish that had been hooked, tasty when deep fried

A girl that he has fallen for, parents did not approve.

In this *phawar*, the singer talks about the young man and the young girl who have fallen in love. The young man is very happy as he has been able to make

the girl accept him as her beloved. The girl is full of fun and filled with love for her lover. The young man loves her and is so much affected by her love for him. He feels like she is an exotic delicious fish. But unfortunately his parents did not approve of his love and they become a stumbling block in his love life.

Bet ia u kba, ba la lur ia ka pynthor;

La biang la ka rta, leit iing khun ba la dei por.

Translation

Sow the paddy, the field has been ploughed;

The age is right, it is time to go to your children's house.

The Khasis never advocate child marriage. Usually, the parents always urge their children not to get married too young. Our elders always cautioned the young boys and girls not to be rash in choosing their life partners but to wait till they are strong enough to shoulder the responsibility of looking after their own family. This is seen in many songs and *phawar*. The above *phawar* also talks about the advantage of getting married when someone has attained marriageable age. Here the singer says that the young woman who has attained marriageable age and who has been betrothed to a young man is like a plough field that is ready for sowing paddy. Here paddy refers to the offsprings of a young man who after marriage would fill the house with children.

Iaishah ia jingsliang, bym pat dei la ka por;

Rangbah uba la biang, la ia id beit ka akor.

Translation

Bear the thirst, when it is not yet time;

The eligible bachelor knows how to behave.

Young boys and girls always want to imitate the older ones. They always tried to have love affairs when it is not yet time for them to do so. Being young and inexperienced, these youngsters did not know how to behave and could not think what is right and what is wrong for them. These kinds of affairs have many consequences in their lives. Being young, many of them could not control their passions and sexual urges and this many times leads to misery and regrets in life. So the singer in this *phawar* urges the young boys and girls to behave properly and to wait till the time is right for them to choose their beloved to avoid any misfortune and regrets in life and to listen to the advices of the elders.

Tiplut ki ba sngap, ia ka khoh jot ha surok;

Palat laingut ba la iap, ba la khot ka thei iap lok.

Translation

Everybody knows who listen, the broken conical basket on the road;

More than three had died, she is called a widow.

Amongst the Khasis the birth of a girl child in the family is considered to be an auspicious occasion. She is considered to be the custodian of the family and the clan. Polyandry is a taboo in the society. So a woman with many lovers or husbands is never respected and is scorned by all. Such women are considered to be of loose morals and a disgrace to the family and the society. Virginity of

a girl is one of her greatest virtues. An unmarried girl who had lost her virginity to her lovers is always referred to as a broken basket. There is a belief among the Khasis that a man who marries a widow, whose husband had died young, would suffer the same fate, if his fate is not stronger than her. Such woman who outlives her many husbands is called '*thei iap lok*' which literally means 'a woman whose husbands have died'. This is not a respectable term for a woman but a denigrating sobriquet.

Ynnai ia ka rong phong

Ba wan rah na Ri Phareng

I jong te la i jong

Lah u syiar bad ka pylleng.

Translation

No need for artificial things

Brought from foreign land

Our own our own is the best

The rooster and the egg are better.

The indigenous religion of the Khasis is known as *Ka Niam Khasi* in Khasi dialect or *Niam Tre* in *Pnar* and *Niam Chnong* in *War-Jaintia*. The symbolic representation of the Khasi religion is the Rooster. Christianity came to these hills in 1841, when the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission sent Thomas Jones I to start a Mission at Sohra (Cherapunjee). After this many Christian missionaries from different Christian denominations like the Catholic Church and others came to proselytize the Gospel and started their missions here. The

coming of Christianity and the waves of conversion from Khasi religion to Christianity had alarmed the leaders of the Khasi Religion in the 19th century. Babu Jeebon Roy Mairom, a prominent Khasi leader of that time saw the danger awaiting the Khasi Religion by the invasion of foreign religion. So, he along with other Khasi elders belonging to the indigenous religion started a Resistant Movement known as 'Seng Khasi Movement' on 23rd November 1899 to safeguard the interest of the Khasi Religion and to retain and revive the culture of the Khasis which was on the verge of disappearing. The Khasis refer to the rooster as *U Nongbahkhala* which means 'the one who will clean all their sins'. The rooster is considered to be a link between God and man. Even when someone dies, a rooster has to be sacrificed. This rooster is known as *U 'Iar Prat Lynti* or 'the one who paves the way'. Until this rooster is sacrificed it is believed that the dead will never be able to reach the house of God. Roosters are always sacrificed as offering to gods and goddesses worshipped by the Khasis. The Khasis also believe in egg divination. In this Phawar, the singer urged the Khasis to be true to themselves by not following the other religions brought from outside by white men. Instead, they are to safeguard and respect their own religion which was given to their ancestors by God.

Lyngdkhur i shibymdei

U khah bad ka pylleng

Ka dur Madhuri

Khohwah kum tieh 'pong deng.

Translation

Pigeon it is not so
The reed and the egg
Her face is like Madhuri
Her legs like a bow.

In this phawar, the singer sings about a girl who is very beautiful and he compares her to Madhuri Dixit, a famous Bollywood heroine of the '90s. Her beauty has fascinated many men and women alike. Many times she is referred to as the goddess of Bollywood by the media and her fans. Here the singer says that the beauty of the girl dazzles him but her legs are not beautiful like her face. He compares her leg to a taut bow as they are short and look crooked.

Tyngab bad ka sikei
U tyrkhang u sai 'muka.
Kynmaw ho kongthei
I'u 'rang Khadar lama.

Translation

A crow and a deer
A fern and a silver thread
Remember lass
The man with twelve flags.

In Khasi society, woman conceiving out of wedlock are not ostracized. This is because marriage as understood by modern day legalese was not an intrinsic part of Khasi culture. Cohabitation between a man and a woman constitutes a

perfectly legal union according to Khasi customary practice. Though the Khasis do not practice polygamy still there are some men who used to keep women at different villages or places they go. These women are considered as the legal wives of such a person. Such kind of person is called '*Rang Khatar Lama*' (a man with twelve flag). Flags here refer to women or the wives of such man. In this *phawar* the singer has observed, the plight of such women married to a womanizer and therefore warns the young girls not to be swept away by such kind of person.

Ong ke ma hen wen te hah u le

Beh de toh nge u jepryw iang lelet.

Translation

Mother says do not fall in love with that man

Because I knew he always traps parrots.

This song is in *War-Jiantia* dialect, a dialect spoken by the *War-Jaintia* a sub group of the Khasi community who live in the southern slopes of Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya bordering the plains of Bangladesh. This song was very popular in the late 1960. In 2010, the song was popularized again by some musicians of the area who recorded it on an audio cassette. Though the song became an instant hit with the youngsters yet, many of them do not realize the true meaning of the song. In *War-Jaintia* areas, trapping parrot is considered to be a hobby. The *War-Jaintias* are mostly cultivators of areca nuts and betel leaves. Parrots are usually trapped during the rainy season (around the months of May-June) when the people have nothing else to do due to heavy rain. On

such occasions, young men spent their leisure time by going to the jungle bordering the plains of Bangladesh (locally known as *Trai Pynthor*) to trap birds especially parrots. When the researcher was young, she could see that almost every household in the area had at least one or two pet parrots. In this song a person who traps parrots refers to a lazy man who wastes his time by being obsessed with this unprofitable chore. Such a person will have nothing to do for the rest of the year. That is why mothers in this area warn their daughters not to fall in love with such a worthless fellow.

De tai u jyprew ti ke pyrthai

Be ka hynthai, be u tyrmai

Wen eh te ju pyem shohmen

Khlem bi ke twia chyrngen.

Translation

Mankind has been kept on this earth

A man and a woman

No one can leave alone

Without a tree to provide shade.

In this *War-Jaintia* song, the singer talks about man-woman relationship. God made men and women in this world to give companionship and to love to each other. People of marriageable age are always expected to choose a life partner with whom they could spend their lives together to share their love and suffering and to comfort each other in times of need. A tree to provide shade

here means a person's life partner who would give him or her love and comfort in their marriage life.

Lah poi ke por heh mai heh pa

Hu hu dang ju eri

Beh ju shkia lang ryngkat be ke hunk e nii

Beh ju shkia lang ryngkat be u hunk e nii.

Translation

A time would come, our parents

Hu-hu would be left behind

To live together with the aunt's daughter.

To live together with the aunt's son.

In *War-Jaintia* culture, the children always live with their parents till they are married. After marriage, it depends on the couple's decision where to live. But the youngest daughter always has to live with her parents. In this song, the singer speaks about the young men and women who would have to leave their parents' home to stay together with their spouses. The *War-Jaintias* like the other sub-groups of the Khasi community practice clan exogamy and a person cannot marry a person from the same clan. *Nii* means aunt in English. But a person can use this term only to a lady whom there is no obstacle for the caller to marry her children.

Na jngai nga iohsngew hum hum jingsawa

Da ki sur myllung ha ki shkor jong nga

Da ki sur pang mynsiem ka da kynud

Ngi iohsngew- ngi iohsngew te ka da iam pangnud.

Translation

From far I heard the sound

Sad tunes in my ears

Tunes that break the heart she hums

We heard we heard she sadly moans.

La u shniuh pha da pynnoh rymphai

Ng da tip ngi da tip ba pha khuslai

Ki ummat rupa- ki kyan ki lyng-a

'Tiew dierpor bun rong ki pynkmen ia pha

Translation

Your hair you spread it down

We know we know that you are anxious

Your silvery tears they are restless

Late blooming flowers they make you happy.

Ha khap ki mawsiang pha sangeh pha shong

Ba phan khlad na ngi ka mynsiem ka mong

Nalor ki mawsiang phan ryngkoh pha tieng

Shisien pha la noh pham lah ban phaidien

Translation

Between the rocks you stop to sit

To part from us your heart is hurt

From the top of the rocks you are afraid to jump
Once you jump down you can not turn back.

Siem pyllieng bun rong bunsien ia pha u wan jngoh

U da jaw ummat shwa ban khlad noh

Pha da ieit shisha ia ri Khasi

Pha da sah nud kein- ah pham tip shano phan jngi.

Translation

Coulourful rainbow comes to visit you

He shed tears before parting

You really love the Khasi land

You regret- ah you do not know where you will swim.

In this song, the singer sings about the waterfall and personifies it with a sad woman who is filled with grief and sorrow. The hills of Khasi and Jaintia are filled with rivers, streams and waterfalls flowing in zig zag directions either towards the plains of Assam or Bangladesh. The water of these rivers and waterfalls are clear and silvery. Here, in this song, the singer says that the sound of the waterfall is like the sound of the woman filled with grief that moans and weeps with a broken heart. The waterfall is compared to the hair of a grieving woman and the waters of the fall to the silvery tears of the woman. It is to be noted that in Khasi culture, young girls are not encouraged to open their hair and let them down. This is because only grieving women who lost their husbands used to do so. This researcher remembers when she was young her grandmother and the elders in her family always reprimanded her and her

cousins if they left their long hair loose when they go out of their houses. The elders would explained to them that only a grieving woman who lost her husband used to let her hair loose and unkempt as she is filled with sorrow and pain and has completely neglected herself. The paths of rivers and waterfalls that flow towards the plain are full of rocks and big boulders. As such waters cannot flow smoothly. Here the singers compares the fall to a grieving woman who is afraid to jump down from the rock. It has also been observed that when rainbow appears in the sky it always used to drizzle. The Khasis believe that whenever a rainbow appears in the sky it means that the rain would stop.

Ther ther lap bah lap san

Ban dup pait ka maw ka dieng

Ban shong shit ka shnong ka thaw

Ban dup tad u khaw u kba

Ther ther lapbah lapsan.

Translation

Pour down, pour down heavy rain

So that the tree and rock will break

The village will be excited

So that the rice and paddy will be cheap

Pour down, pour down heavy rain.

This poem is very popular amongst the children. On closer examination it is found that this poem has sexual connotation. In the Khasi culture, the rocks

and trees usually fall under the masculine gender *u*, but in this poem, the rock and the tree are deliberately given a feminine gender *ka*. The rain is given a masculine gender. The pouring and the beating of the rain on the rock and the trees here also refers to sexual intercourse and the breakage of the tree and rock to the lost of virginity.

Part – B

Riddle Games

Another point taken up for study in this chapter is riddle games. Lee Haring calls these riddle games as dialogic game (Haring 1992:51). Such games are played by children in many parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills that involve the use of riddles or contain riddle elements in them. These games are very popular and the dialogue in these games is mostly imitation of formal conversation.

The Khasis since time immemorial are lovers of sports and games. Khasi children all over the hills used to play riddle game which are more or less conversational games. These games function as folk model for dialogue. Both boys and girls participate in these riddle games. Sometimes the children are divided into groups. Below is an example of riddle game collected from Jaintia hills. There are two versions of this game, one played in the upland Jaintia hills and the other which is played in the *War-Jaintia* areas around the villages of Sohka, Kudeng, Lamin, and others.

Ong kani 'e-ja bei,'

Ong kani 'cheiwon u ioh'

Ong kani 'panram panchah'

Ong kani 'myntlang mynrkhiang'

Ong kani 'rah ka wait wow u sdai'

Phet cha khloo pom dow sla pathoo.'

Translation

This one says 'mother give us food'

This one says 'from where we will get'?

This one says 'borrow from others'

This one says, 'winter and dry season'

This one says 'take a dao and a spade

Go to the jungle and cut the pumpkin leaves.'

This game is very old. No one knew its origin for sure. But there are speculations that this riddle game originated during the Anglo-Jaintia war (1860-63). During this war, a great famine took place in Jaintia Hills and the people suffered greatly due to scarcity of rice which is the staple food of the people. In order to survive people had to live on whatever they got like edible leaves of plants and wild vegetables. It is said that during this famine, many people survived on the leaves of pumpkin plants. Usually, the Khasis used pumpkin leaves for curry and it is considered to be a very delicious dish.

In this dialogic game, the children used to play by personifying the five fingers of their hand, with five hungry children. The small finger represented the youngest one who asked their mother to give them some food as they were very hungry. But being poor, the mother could not afford to give food to her

children. So, the ring finger which represented fourth daughter, told youngest sister who asked for food from where they would get as food was very scarce at that time. On hearing this, the third daughter represented by the middle finger asked her mother to borrow some food from others, so that they would be able to satisfy their hunger. The second daughter represented by the index finger said that their mother could not borrow some food from others as it is a dry season where people could not plant anything and so food is not plentiful. But the first daughter represented by the thumb, being the eldest one, understood the financial condition of their mother better than her other siblings, advised her sisters to take out a dao and a spade and go to the jungle to cut the tender leaves of pumpkin plants in order to fill their stomach.

There is another version of this dialogic game being played by the *War-Jaintias* who live on the southern slopes of Jaintia Hills. The text is reproduced as follows.

Ong kene 'ae ji mae'

Ong kene 'di ae ju ae?'

Ong ke ne 'shwiah ram shwiah chah'

Ong kene 'lah tlang lah rhiang'

Ong kene 'phet blar shaw.'

Translation

Said this one, 'mother give me food'

Said this one 'what to give?'

Said this one, 'borrow from others'

Said this one 'when its winter and dry season'

Said this one, 'I will run far away'.

In the past, this game was very popular. But today many have forgotten about it except for some old people. In this game, the five fingers represent the five daughters of a very poor woman. The youngest daughter represented by the small finger asked for food from her mother as she was very hungry. But her sister, the ring finger asked how her mother would give her food since there was no food in the house. The third daughter or the middle finger said that they should borrow from others. On hearing this, the second sister or the index finger said if they borrow some food from others, they could pay what they had borrowed when winter comes, since during winter they would be able to get some work. But the eldest being fed up with them for their complaints about food when there was nothing to eat at home, said she would run away from home. So it is said that only four sisters stay together after their eldest sister left and migrated to some other places to live separately far away from them. So the thumb represented the eldest one as it is a bit far from the other fingers.

It may be mentioned here that the third sister said that they could pay back what they borrow when winter comes. This may be due to the fact that winter is the busiest season in *War-Jaintia* areas as it is the season when the products in the region like areca nuts, betel leaves, bay leaves, oranges etc. have to be plucked and sold in the markets. During this time the owners of betel nut plantations and orchards have to engage many labourers in the process of

plucking and carrying these products to markets. It should be noted that *War-Jaintia* region lies in the steep slopes and terrains of Jaintia Hills. And till the late 1970s and early 1980s there were no approach roads in many areas of the region. So the products have to be taken to their destination through sheer physical labour.

The researcher in her investigation found out that this dialogic play has many versions. Two of the versions have been analyzed here. The difference in these versions may be due to the fact that the geographical locations, occupation and economic activities of the upland Jaintia and *War-Jaintia* people are different from one another. In the upland of Jaintia Hills cultivation of different varieties of paddy is the main occupation of the people. The people of both the areas are cultivators and it is found that rice culture is very prevalent among the upland Jaintias. But this is not the case with the *War-Jaintias*. They are mostly cultivators of areca nuts, betel leaves, citrus fruits (especially oranges), bay leaves etc. and in the past these products were exported to different parts of the land.

Another typical variant of dialogic game is given below which is very popular among the children. The sample of the text is reproduced below;

Khynnah: Ko Meirad phi leh aiu?

Tymmen: Nga suh ka pla

Khynnah: Phin leh aiu ka pla?

Tymmen: Ngan thep pisa

Khynnah: Phin leh aiu ka pisa?

Tymmen: Ngan thied kanshi.

Khynnah: Phin leh aiu ka kanshi?

Tymmen: Ngan khap u shniuh jong phi.

Khynnah: Shish! ka tymmen dakait.

Translation

Children: O grandmother what are you doing?

Old woman: I'm stitching my purse.

Children: What are you going to do with your purse?

Old woman: I will keep the money.

Children: What will you do with your money?

Old woman: I will buy a pair of scissors.

Children: What will you do with your scissors?

Old woman: I will snip off your hair.

Children: Oh! You wicked old woman.

This is more or less a dialogic game, in which the children play among themselves. Here many children can play. In this game, one of the children will take the role of an old woman. The children will ask correct questions to the old woman and she is supposed to give correct answer. At the end of that game, the old woman is supposed to answer that she will snip off the hair of the children with her scissors. This in turn will create panic among them. The reason is that the old woman now is suspected of being one to prey on children, a serpent worshipper. Along with riddles, children learn to imitate adult conversational devise as a game. Here it is seen that verbal imitation

accompanies the imitation of Khasi belief and customs in the above dialogic plays.

It is to be noted that the Khasis have a deep rooted belief in the pervading presence and evil power of a spirit called *u thlen* irrespective of their religious affiliation. The oral narratives of *u thlen*, tells us that his existence is perhaps as early as the period of human habitation on earth. According to the oral accounts, *uthlen*'s objective was to live of human life and to earn wealth. This in turn influenced all other creatures on earth. *U thlen*'s first residence was a deep hole beside the waterfall near *Rangjyrtieh* village (in Cherrapunjee area). This area is believed to be the exact spot where the final battle between *u thlen* and *Ki Hynniew Trep* (The Seven Huts) took place. *Rangjyrtieh* used to be a trading centre for many villages in the adjoining areas. The accounts told that this demon inflicted untold sufferings and death to people travelling by his lair. It is also told that people travelling in odd numbers risked losing one of them to *u thlen*. If people happened to travel in odd numbers, the demon by using his magical power would simply make one of them disappear. But if they travelled in even numbers, the demon would not be able to cast his spell on them. The people of *Ki Hynniew Trep* were in anguish and dilemma as they could not understand how a person would vanish into thin air every time they travelled on that path in odd numbers. So in the end they cried out to God to help and enlighten them on this matter and to find ways and means to overcome this threat to their lives. God already saw the evil intention of *u thlen* to wipe out humankind from the face of the earth. So he decided that *u thlen* should be eliminated. God, the Creator, then directed a righteous man

named *U Syrmoh* to help the people. After a thorough investigation it is found that *u thlen* indeed was the cause of the death and suffering of humankind on this earth. One day he went to the place where the demon resided and befriended him till he completely won his trust. Every market day *U Syrmoh* would buy a chunk of pork, a delectable variant of human flesh and fed it to *u thlen* who took the shape of a giant serpent. One day *Syrmoh* heated a big *narliang* (an iron rod) in a limestone furnace (*pajwa*) until it was very hot. He held the iron rod with tongs and greeted the demon as he usually did and said: *Ang um, ang! Kane ka kshong nga wan thied iaphi na iew.* (Open your mouth *um* open! I've brought for you this fatty pork from the market). *U thlen* opened his big mouth and *U Syrmoh* thrust the red-hot iron down his throat. *U thlen* thrashed himself on the ground in agony as the hot iron burnt and seared his throat and finally had a painful death. After his death, *U Syrmoh* sent words about the *thlen's* death to all people and everybody rejoiced at this news. Immediately after the death of *u thlen*, a big get-together was held where the Khasis and non-Khasis alike were asked to feast on the flesh of *u thlen*. *Syrmoh* had instructed everybody that every bit of *u thlen* was to be consumed otherwise he would come back to life. The carcass of *u thlen* was cut to pieces and cooked at *Dainthlen*. The non-Khasis finished their portion completely. But unfortunately one Khasi old lady kept a small portion of *u thlen* meat for her grandson as he could not come to the feast. On reaching home, she kept the meat on the wooden platform (*tyngir*) above the hearth. But everyday she kept on forgetting to give him the meat until one day when *u thlen* came back to life and demanded human sacrifices from her. *U thlen* told her that if she agreed to his demand, he would spare her life and in turn make

her prosper in wealth. The old woman bowed to his demand and she became the first *thlen* keeper.

It is believed that *u thlen* will bring prosperity to those who worship him if they can bring him sacrifices in the form of human blood. But if they cannot give him blood when he wants, he will punish by turning on the keepers and feed on their blood instead. It is said by the elders, that *u thlen* can change its appearance in the form of a serpent, a black cat, a big fish locally known as *U dohthli* (Daneo). In case his keepers failed to appease him with human sacrifices, he would disgrace them by publicly exhibiting himself on the rooftop of his keepers. The snake worshippers hire accomplices to help them find victims for *u thlen*. These hired killers are known as *menshohnoh* in Khasi dialect or as *chohnoh* or *ahrdang* in Jaintia dialect. The hired killers are usually given *ka kyiad tangsnem* (a special liquor which has been kept for a year and mixed with the drops of *u thlen*'s sweat) before he sets for his ghastly task. After drinking this liquor, the killer(s) would feel no compunction to kill his victims as they would appear to him very small like small animals or insects. Before setting out on their task (to find victims for *u thlen*), the *nongshohnoh* also used to carry some rice with them called *u khaw tyndep* or *khaw rawai*. *U khaw tyndep*, like *ka Kyiad tangsnem*, is a liquor which had been kept properly for years and mixed with the sweat of *u thlen*. It is said that those killers who went in search for victims used to lay in wait for them in quiet and lonely places. When they saw the victim, they would throw some of the rice on them. It is said that those people whom the killers threw *u khaw tyndep* on them would not be able to move and become hapless and would be

rooted to the spot. According to the Khasi belief, *u khaw tyndep* can cast spell only on those people whose *rngiew* (luck/fate) is not strong. The Khasis believe that rice is the essence of life. So in the past, the Khasis never go out of their house without keeping some rice in their bags or pockets. So when they chance to meet the *nongshohnoh* they can throw back some rice on them. If the rice is thrown on the *nongshohnoh*, it is said that he would be rooted to the spot.

The *nongshohnoh* after killing the victim, used to extract blood from the nostrils, ears of the victim and keep them in a bamboo tube. They also cut the finger and toe nails of the victim. Besides the *nongshohnoh*, there are also *ki nongkhaphthlen* or the cutters for *u thlen*. These *nongkhaphthlen* used to snip off people's hair and clothes in order to feed the *Thlen*. It is said that both the *nongshohnoh* and the *nongkhaphthlen* cannot use iron tools in their assigned task as this is not acceptable to *u thlen* as *Syrmoh* once killed him by using the iron rod (*narliang*). Only tools made of silver like scissors or lancets can be used. The hair or threads of clothes sniff off from someone will be turned into blood through some ritual. First, they will put the hair in bamboo tubes, and the tubes will then be kept under the rocks or stones in the streams. After a few months (most probably seven to eight months) the hair will turn into blood and the same will be offered to *u thlen* to drink. The rituals of feeding *u thlen* would be done in a room that is kept especially for it. It is said that there should be no electricity connection in this room as *u thlen* preferred to live in the dark. Only the keepers are usually allowed to enter in this room. The ritual of feeding *u thlen* usually takes place at midnight when the whole world

would be asleep. The blood of the victim would be poured on a brass plate and the ritual would begin with the beating of a small drum. If the *thlen* found the offering is acceptable he would come out of his lair. Then the miniature shape of the victim would appear on the plate and would start dancing and laughing. The demon would start swallowing the victim, feet first. The person whose blood is taken by *u thlen* would become sickly and grow weaker and weaker and if not treated by the traditional healers who have special power to free the victim from the spell of *u thlen* would ultimately die. According to tradition, *Ki syiem* (Syiem clan) have the power to do so. But in the *War-Jaintia* areas those traditional medicine men that do not belong to the *Syiem* clan also treat the victims of *u thlen* and free them from his evil clutches.

In the above conversation game, the children imitate the social reality in the Khasi culture; it is observed that the part of the old woman in the game is played by one of the children (most probably a girl) may refer to the old woman in the myth of *u thlen* who became the first keeper of *u thlen*. That is why the children called the old woman evil because they suspect that the old woman is a *thlen* keeper.

Another version of the riddle game is found in some parts of the hills. This version had been documented by (Late) Mr. Primrose Gatphoh in his book *Ki Phawar Sara* or Nursery Rhymes.

Ko 'men Jakoid phi leh aiu?

Wow! Khun kynrad,

Nga iit ia u thyrnia:

Phin lei ia u thyrnia?

Ba ngan suh ka pla:

Phin lei kata ka pla?

Ba ngan thep pisa:

Phin lei kata ka pisa?

Ba ngan thied khanshi:

Phin lei kata ka khanshi?

Ba ngan ot sniuh:

Phin lei uta u sniuh?

Ba ngan thain pankhyllong:

Phin lei kata ka pankhyllong?

Ba ngan sein syntiew ba ngan shad!

Phin lei ba phin shad?

Ba kin kmen ki khun jong phi!

Ha-a-a-a-a ho!

Ha-a-u-u-u-u-iaw!

Translation

O old toad what are you doing?

Wow! my dear children,

I am looking for a needle:

What will you do with a needle?

I will stitch a bag:

What will you do with a bag?

I will keep my money:

What will you do with the money?

I will buy a pair of scissors:

What will you do with a pair of scissors?

I will snip off some hair:

What will you do with the hair?

I will roll it into a hair bun:

What will you do with a hair bun?

I will keep a flower to dance:

Why are you going to dance?

So, your children will be happy.

Ha-a-a-a-a ho!

Ha-a-u-u-u-u-iaw!

The above dialogue play is just an entertainment game of the children. This version has no reference to the old wicked woman who is found in the other version. Here the wicked woman is replaced by an old toad. The children would ask question to the old toad who is usually represented by a girl. The questions and answers that are employed here are similar to the other version except for the queries and the answers in the last few lines. In the last lines the old toad tells the children that the hair she cuts would be used in making a kind of hair bun which she would use when dancing. It has been observed that during the traditional Khasi dances, the maiden used to style their hair into a bun and fasten some flowers known as *Lasubon* on their hair. In the last line, the old toad when asked why she would perform a dance, said that she would

do so to make the children happy. On such cases, the girl who represented the old toad would dance to the delight of other children.

Ku Pa Risang,
Ale bylla bah khon!
Ku 'Yiar Puh khon,
Phan ai bainong aiu?
Ngan ai Sohriew bam Tlang;
Uno uta u Sohriew
La puh noh ka 'Iaw Ab;
Kano kata ka 'Iaw Ab?
La siat pyniap u Khnam
Uno uta u Khnam?
La thang duh hapoh Ding;
Kano kata ka Ding?
La suit pynlip ka Um;
Kano kata ka Um?
Kathie -thie shapoh Thliew!
Kok, kok kok- kdog!
Kok, kok kok- kdog!
Kok kok kok-kdog!

Translation

Ku ku a sang
O Father Squirrel
Come and carry my child

O Mother Hen what will you give me?
 I will give you Job's tears to save for winter season
 Where are those Job's tears for the winter?
 The Old Aunt Crow had eaten them
 Where is that Old Aunt Crow?
 Shot by an Arrow.
 Where is the arrow?
 Burnt in the Fire
 Where is that Fire?
 Doused by Water
 Where is that Water?
 Down there, down there inside the pit.
Kok, kok kok- kdog!
Kok, kok kok- kdog!
Kok kok kok-kdog!

This dialogue game was very popular in the past, but the same cannot be said of today. It is sometimes used as a lullaby by mothers to put their children to sleep. Here, in this dialogic game, two participants are usually required, one of them to take the part of the Mother Hen and the other that of the Squirrel. It has been observed that in Khasi folklore we have come across many tales where human kinship terms and terms of endearment are applied to animals. For example, the female bear is often referred to as *Ka Mei 'Ngiem Lalu Bam Khun* (child devouring Mother Bear), *Koh 'Siang* (Old Man Fox) *'Um 'La* (Brother-in-law Tiger) etc. In the above dialogic game, the father figure is

given to the Squirrel. This dialogue game is also attributed to an exchange between the Mother Hen and a Squirrel where the Mother Hen says that she wants to hire the squirrel to carry her child. The participant who represents the Squirrel will ask the questions while the other who represents the Mother Hen will reply to the questions posed by the Squirrel. It is to be noted here, that the Squirrel is not the biological father of the offspring of the Hen as he is hired to do the job of carrying the children. The Hen here is a symbolic representation of a potential employer who offers to pay the Squirrel for his job in the form of Job's tears. Job's tears can be found all over the hills and in the rural areas fowls and ducks are sometimes fed with Job's tears. After the Hen promised to pay him with Job's tears, the Squirrel asked the where abouts of the same. The hen tells him that they have been eaten by the crow. '*Iaw Ab*' in the game refers to an old crow. '*Iaw*' is a short form of *Kiaw* in Khasi which means a mother-in-law. But the word also refers to old women where younger people used to call them as a sign of respect. Here the crow is shown as a thief who took away all the grains. When the Squirrel posed the next question, he is informed that the crow has been shot by an arrow and the same was burnt in the fire. But this answer is vague as it does not tell whether the crow is burnt or not along with the arrow in the fire. To the next question posed by the Squirrel, he was told that the fire was doused by water. In the end the Mother Hen's reply about water was clear as the Hen show the place from where the water is obtained. The Hen shows the squirrel that the water used for dousing the fire is taken from the pit.

Another version of this game is collected and reproduced below.

Ku Ku a sang

Syiar: Ko pa Risang.

Ale bylla bah khun

Risang: Ko 'Yiar puh khun phan ai aiu?

Syiar: Ngan ai soh riew bam tlang

Risang: Hangno uta u sohriew bam tlang?

Syiar: Lah puh lut ka tyngab

Risang: Hangno kata ka tyngab?

Syiar: La siat da u khnam

Risang: Hangno uta u khnam?

Syiar: La thang hapoh ding

Risang: Hangno kata ka ding?

Syiar: La suit da ka um

Risang: Hangno kata ka um?

Syiar: Katai... katei... katei... katei...

Translation

Ku ku a sang

Mother Hen: O Father Squirrel

Come and carry my child

Squirrel: O Mother Hen what will you give me?

Mother Hen: I will give you Job's tears to save for winter season

Squirrel: Where are those Job's tears for the winter?

Mother Hen: The Crow had eaten them

Squirrel: Where is that Crow?

Mother Hen: Shot by an Arrow.

Squirrel: Where is that Arrow?
 Mother Hen: Burnt in the Fire
 Squirrel: Where is that Fire?
 Mother Hen: Doused by Water
 Squirrel: Where is that Water?
 Mother Hen: there.... there.... there...there.

This version is very similar to the other one above. But here the Crow is not shown as an old woman but a thief. The reply given by the Mother Hen in the last line is not clear but vague because when the Squirrel asked about the source of the water used for dousing the fire, the Mother Hen did not reply directly but referred here and there. This may be to the reason that water is an abundant element that can be found everywhere in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. We can also detect that the replies of the Mother Hen to a series of questions posed by the Squirrel regarding his wages in the game are rather evasive. And in the end we see that the issue of paying the Squirrel for his hired job remained unresolved.

Balei ba u Bhut (Chyrmw kdoh) um lah ban rung sha poh iingtrep?

Riddle referent: *Namar ba um lah niew ia ki dieng jingkieng.*

Translation

Why the *Bhut* could not enter into the hut?

Riddle referent: Because he could not count the steps of the ladder.

This riddle is also sometimes played as a game by the children in the past. It is based on a folk tale about a spirit locally called *u Bhut* or *u Chyrmyw Kdoh* in *War-Jaintia* dialect and *u 'Suit Tynjang* in Khasi language. *U Bhut* is a spirit who usually dwells in the jungle especially in the dense part of the forest. Till today in the *War-Jaintia* area the researcher hears many stories about this spirit who carried people away while they were in the forest and took them to different places. But he never hurt the people whom he carried away. According to accounts of those who had been borne away by this spirit, when they were taken away by him, they just travelled to many places in the jungle. After taking them to different places, he usually brought them back to the same place, many times to the edge of the forest or near their villages. The time that he took them away varied from one person to another. There were people who went missing for three days or more and some just for a day or few hours. It is said if one realized that he or she has been carried away by the *Chyrmyw Kdoh* or *u Bhut*, then one should take out his clothes and wear them inside out. It is believed that if we wear our clothes inside out then the spirit has no power over us. *Chyrmyw* in *War-Jaintia* dialect means a wild creeper and *Kdoh* means to bind. So *Chyrmyw kdoh* literally means a creeper that binds people.

According to the folk tale it is said that one night *u Bhut*'s back was itching so much that he could not bear it any more. So, he went roaming in search of someone to help him scratch his back. After some times, he came across one hut (*ling bri*) in the middle of one plantation (*bri*). The hut was constructed in such a way that it was raised from the ground by a platform, so as to protect

the people who stay there from wild animals and reptiles. To enter into the hut one has to climb a ladder. That night only one woman stayed at that hut. *U Bhut* on seeing the ladder started to climb it and counted the steps of the ladder. It is said that there were eleven steps. But every time he reached the tenth step, he forgot how many steps he had counted and had to start again from the beginning. *U Chyrmymw Kdoh* or *u Bhut* counted like this -*ming, iang, doh, kiah, mywu, mywiak, khyrdop, khyrdiap, phlang, chiap- hei toh let nge* (*hei toh let nge* means Oh! I have forgotten how many steps I have counted). This went on till dawn and the woman inside was annoyed as she could not sleep the whole night due to his disturbance. The next night, the woman took out one of the steps. When *u Bhut* returned that night he was so happy that he could count the steps and reach the front part of the hut. He knocked on the door and when the woman opened it, he entered the house he asked her to relieve him of his suffering by scratching his back. The lady asked him to lie on his stomach on the floor but in the meantime, she heated a handle-less dao which had a pointed end. When the iron dao was red hot, she took it out of the fire and stabbed his back with it. The *Bhut* shrieked and ran away from the hut. In the morning the woman went back home and told the elders about it. On hearing it, all men went and searched for *u Bhut*. At last they found one creeper in the dense jungle with a dao embedded on its stalk. Red latex was oozing from the place where the dao was embedded. On seeing this, the people realized that the man who paid a visit to the woman at night was no one else but *u Bhut*.

Part – C

Riddle Jokes and Verbal Dueling

Khasi riddle jokes serve as a setup for the punchline answer. Some riddle jokes draw their sources from riddle conundrum as they depend on word play. Parody riddle jokes extend the nature of riddle joke and humour into absurdity and nonsense. They are acceptable for people as they provide tools for disputing ideas, social practices and making fun of all these conditions. Riddles offer appropriate linguistic means for transforming the people necessity to dispute into a linguistic play with words results in a purifying process through parody and laughter. Riddle jokes often occur in topical cycle. They explore a single topic develop as a fad; eventually, interest in that set of jokes declines and replaced by the next set of joke fad.

Traditionally, the Khasis used riddling as a mind game to sharpen the mind and test the wit of the people, especially the children. But sometimes it is also used as a joke or satiric commentary by the people of one village or region about the people of another village or region. Typically riddle jokes attribute a ludicrous and socially inappropriate trait to the people allegedly about whom the joke is told. Riddling, as part of evolving strategies sometimes turn into verbal dueling.

Contests, games and other phenomena such as insult and joke behaviors have been viewed by many scholars as symbolic forms, and are modeled upon and reveal aspects of the social systems in which they are found. Ritualized verbal dueling is found in all culture in the world and the description and analysis of

verbal dueling in several cultural and social settings have attracted scholarly attention. Hoebel noted that song duels are used among some Eskimo groups to work off grudges and disputes of all orders, save murder (Hoebel 1967:93). Scholars are of the view that verbal dueling is a substitute behavior for physical fight which is often engaged for entertainment and for the fun of insulting other members of the group in front of an appreciative audience. Roger D. Abraham studied verbal dueling among Black urban males and is of the opinion that these encounters are verbal battles in which teenage participants are trained for speech contests and build their reputations in the male community (Abraham 1962: 209-220).

Alan Dundes, Leach, and Ozkok (1972) did a study on verbal dueling among the teenage Turkish boys with in the conceptual framework of the ethnography of communication. They saw Turkish verbal dueling as having strong sexual connotations and were of the view that verbal dueling in this society is symbolic of the community's most deeply ingrained social taboo or notion of boundary (Dundes 1972:133). Most scholars see specific forms of ritualized verbal contest as being formed by human experience in the society in which it is performed and most have characterized this particular mode of social interactive behavior as being both a personal and social rituals. The themes reveal individual state of beings as well as the major concerns or pressure points of the society in which it is emerged. Verbal dueling is seen by many investigators as being a form of symbolic warfare among individuals which demonstrate some aspects of their power or weakness in relation to the rest of the groups. In many cultures, verbal dueling always occurs among male

groups. But it has been observed that verbal dueling among the Khasis occur among boys and girls as well.

The researcher in her field work has collected plenty of data on riddle jokes and verbal dueling in different parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills especially among the Khasi youth of different localities in Shillong. The typical data that have been collected are those riddle jokes and verbal dueling that one particular locality or region told about the other locality or region.

Katba ki nang thung siej katta ki nang khlain

Hynrei Katba ki nang leit sha skul, katta ki nang luin.

Riddle Referent: *Ki Nong Rimen.*

Translation

The more they grow bamboos, the more they become strong

But the more they go to school, the more they become dull.

Riddle referent: Rimens.

Rimens are Khasis settling under the *Hima* or the traditional state of *Nongkhlaw* located in the West Khasi hills District of Meghalaya. This riddle-joke was created by neighbouring villagers of Rimens' region. They ridicule the people of the Rimen region by saying that they are not fit be educated as they are not good at all in studies. But they are fit to work as cultivators and farmers as physical work make them stronger and physically fit.

Mano ki 'riewkhlaw?

Riddle referent: *Ki War*.

Translation

Who are the jungle people?

Riddle referent: The *Wars*.

The *War-Jaintias* and the *Pnars* are the two sub-groups of the Khasi community who live in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. The *Pnars* occupy the upland Jaintia hills while the *War-Jaintias* live on the southern slopes of Meghalaya bordering Bangladesh. These two sub-groups always tried to ridicule and insult each other whenever chances arise. These kinds of insults were gradually built into verbal dueling. The *War-Jaintias* area lies in the southern part of Meghalaya and the area is covered with rugged and precipitous terrains. Most parts of *War-Jaintias* are still covered with dense forest. That is why the upland *Pnars* especially those who live at the District Headquarter regard the people of *War-Jaintias* as backward and uncivilized.

Ieileh wom em wa sngawthuh iei klam War?

Riddle referent: *Neibhah wa poi khatduh ki cha U Blai*.

Translation

Why nobody understands the *War* dialect?

Riddle referent: Because they were the last one to come to God.

The dialect of the *War-Jaintias* is very different from other Khasi dialects. This dialect is not intelligible to most outside their range of habitation. So the upland *Pnars* used to ridicule the *War-Jaintias* by saying that on the appointed

day, when God asked all the Khasi sub-groups to come and collect their dialects from him, the *Wars* as they lived in the precipitous slopes covered with dense jungle, were the last to reach. When they reached God, they found that there was no more dialect left for them. So to pacify them God gave them some unintelligible dialect.

Mano ba shait eit ha lynti?

Riddle referent: *Ki Pnar*.

Translation

Who always shit on the pathways?

Riddle referent: *Pnars*.

In the past till the late 1950s and 1960s, the traders from *Jowai* used to go to *Dawki*, a border *haat* in *War-Jaintia* area on foot as there was no approach road to the area during that period. These traders had to pass through many *War-Jaintia* villages. On the way when they had to attend nature call, they always went to the sides of the pathways as they dare not ventured into the bushes due to the reason that the jungle was infested with insects, leeches, snakes etc. It is also said that in the past the paths in and around *Jowai* were always littered with human faeces as people always tend to use the sides of the foothpaths as open toilets.

Mano ba rah da u phlas haba leit thied umphniang sharak?

Riddle referent: *Ki Nong Laimu*.

Translation

Who takes a thermo-flask when going to buy kerosene?

Riddle referent: Laimus.

The inhabitants of *Laitumkhrach* and *Mawlai*, the two localities in Shillong, always love to ridicule and insult each other. The verbal dueling between these two localities is a known fact to everybody living in Shillong. *Laitumkhrach* is the educational hub of the city where many prestigious educational institutions of the state are located. On the other hand, the inhabitants of *Mawlai* mostly consist of people who migrate from different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. So the residents of *Laitumkhrach* are considered to be educated and arrogant, while those from *Mawlai*, to be backward and ignorant. The residents of *Laitumkhrach* are ridiculed by others, that since they considered themselves to be too high-class compared to the others, so when going to buy kerosene, they carry with them a thermo-flask instead of a kerosene container. It is to be noted here that the non-Khasis pronounced *Laitumkhrach* as *Laitmukhrach* and hence, the people of the locality are nicknamed as *Laimu*.

*Kumno ki Nong Laimu ki ong ia u nongdiedoh haba ki leit thied doh na
iew?*

Riddle referent: *Bah ai doh shi kilo tangba wat ai bone (bun)
mo.*

Translation

How did the Laimus ask the butcher when they went to buy meat from the market?

Riddle referent: Brother, give one kilogram of meat but please do not give bones (*bun*).

In this riddle joke, the *Laitumkhrach* people are shown as some of those people who always mix Khasi language with English when they speak. So, even when they go for marketing they do the same. But it is to be noted that the vendors and shop owners in the market always come from the outskirts of Shillong and from other parts of the State. As such, many of them are not educated and do not speak English. The English word bone when pronounced in English sounds similar to the Khasi word *bun* (plenty). So when the people of Laitumkhrach asked the butcher not to give bones, he being uneducated misunderstood the word bones for the Khasi word *bun* (plenty). This is a pun on the Khasi word *bun*.

Ki Nong Laimu ki khot kumno ia u muli?

Riddle referent: *Tube light*.

Translation

What do the Laimus call a radish?

Riddle referent: *Tube light*.

In this riddle joke the *Laitumkhrach* residents are ridiculed by the others about their way of life. The other localities always alleged that the people of *Laitumkhrach* considers themselves to be highly educated and more sophisticated than others and therefore they always look down upon the others especially those who come from villages. But being educated also makes them fool. Since they are living in such an environment, they are accused of losing touch with nature. So, they could not differentiate even between the radish which is long in shape, whitish in colour and an electric tube light.

Ki Nong Mawlai ki shait sympat khun da uei?

Riddle referent: *Da u tdong masi.*

Translation

What do the people of Mawlai use when they spank their children?

Riddle referent: A cow's tail.

Mawlai is the biggest locality in the city of Shillong. The residents of *Mawlai* are said to have come from different parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills. It is a locality resided only by Khasis as no non-Khasi is allowed to reside there. The people of *Mawlai* are engaged in different occupations. But one of the main occupations of the people is butchery, especially beef. *Mawlai* is well known as most of the beef butchers at *Jewduh*, the biggest market in Shillong, are from this locality. Many people of *Mawlai* are engaged in this trade in one way or the other. Due to this, a place has been set up in one corner of *Mawlai*, for the butchers to wash and clean their meat, especially beef before selling them in the market. It is joked that since many cows are slaughtered in a day at *Mawlai* to meet the demand of the consumers of Shillong, so the locality is littered with the tails of cows. In such situations, cow tails are available in plenty. So, the parents from *Mawlai*, when they need to discipline their children use the tails of cows for spanking instead of a stick.

Kumno ki khynnah Mawlai ki shait ong ynda don ba wan tied iing?

Riddle referent: *Mommy, mommy lah wan u brew.*

Translation

How did the children from Mawlai say when somebody came to knock at the door?

Riddle referent: Mommy, mommy somebody has come.

This is a typical joke created by the people from other localities of Shillong about the people of *Mawlai*. The residents of *Mawlai* do not speak the standard Khasi language. They speak one of the variants of the Khasi language while the residents of other localities such as *Laitumkhrach*, *Jaiaw*, *Mawkhar*, etc. speak the standard language of Khasi. So, the others used to taunt and ridicule the *Mawlai* children who are educated enough today about the way they try to use and imitate the English language by mixing English word (mother) and the *Mawlai* dialect in the sentence. This kind of riddle joke tries to show how the *Mawlai* children of today generation being educated are still not sophisticated enough compared with the others as they still use the *Mawlai* dialect instead of the standard language.

*Kumno ki samla kynthei Mawlai ki shait ong haba kim mon ia u ba
byrsia samla ia ki?*

Riddle referent: *Ka bike ruh em, ka jaket snieh uh em, shu kol
shi kol ia nga.*

Translation

What did the young girls of Mawlai say when they did not like the person who tried to court them?

Riddle different: No bike and no leather jacket, but he kept calling me.

This riddle joke was very much in circulation in Shillong during the late 1980s and 1990s when leather jackets were very popular among the young men in Shillong during that period. The youth used to wear their leather jackets especially while riding bikes. Such young men with bikes and leather jackets attracted the eyes of young girls so much that there were instances where girls would fall for them very easily. In this riddle joke, the young girls from *Mawlai* locality were ridiculed as foolish and empty headed girls who would fall in love only with those guys who own bikes or wear leather jackets. Even if a noble and good man proposed to them they would never accept him as to them, a guy without a bike or a leather jacket was not as stylish and hot as those with bikes and leather jackets.

Ki nong Laitumkhrach ki shait khot kunno ia ka 'tungrymbai?

Riddle referent: *Black substance.*

Translation

What do the Laimus called '*tungrymbai* (fermented soya beans)?

Riddle referent: *Black substance.*

'Tung rymbai or fermented soya beans mixed and cooked with black sesame seeds, ginger, garlic, chillies, water, etc. is an indigenous food of the Khasis. Actually there is no English equivalent to the word '*tung rymbai*. This is considered to be a very delicious dish by the Khasis and other communities of North East India. '*Tung rymbai* is black in colour after cooking as it is mixed with black sesame seeds. As the inhabitants of *Laitumkhrach* considered themselves to be highly educated and more advanced than the others, so the

people of Mawlai created this kind of joke, by joking that the resident of *Laitumkhrach* being speakers of 'Khalish' (a mixture of Khasi and English languages) preferred to call this traditional dish as 'black substance' instead of its original name.

There are songs composed in such a way that the words sound like song duels between young boys and girls in the community. These songs are mostly sung during community works when the boys and girls take a break from their work. Young people from both sexes participate in singing and through these songs they tease and ridicule each other. The songs are full of banter and humour and both sides try to outdo each other by teasing and ridiculing the others. Two of such songs are collected and reproduced here.

Kynthei ... O ngi im pahuh pahai

Ha la I trep ha 'nongkyndong ngi ioh 'erbatemon

O ka beh ryngkat bad ka aiom.

Shynrang ... Ym dei (3) ymdei kumta te thei.

To wan bad ngi sha sor Shillong

Jingstad phin biang ngi ong

Oh! Balei phin sah biej ha nongkyndong?

Kynthei ... Kynjai (3) balei ko bah phi shu kren sat

Balei phim da pyrkhath sha?

Phi la ioh mad ia sor Shillong

Phi klet noh iala shnong

Wow ko bah sah biej te phin ong.

Kynjai. (3)

Shynrang ... Ym dei ko thei ba ngi bishni

Jingim palei jong phi mo

Haba phi don jingstad jingnang

Ka shnong kan iaid shaphrang

Balei- balei phi sngewthuh bakla ianga.

Kynthei ... Ynnai- ynnai ko bah jingim sor jong phi ngim kwah

Ani ki shat ki rong ka sngi

Ba wan shoh naphang sepngi

Ki wan rah ki bah na sor te phi.

Shynrang ... Ym dei

Kynthei ... Ka dei.

Shynrang ... Balei phi kren pharshi wat shu kynnoh ia ngi

Ngi shu ia kdew ngi shu ia pynni lada phi sngap ia ngi

Ia-ia leit sha sor phin sa iohi.

Kynjai3

Kynthei ... Kum shnong jong ngi phin ioh naei

Khie wad kylleng pyrthei bah

Ha ka aiom bap huh ba phieng

Ki pah ki niang kongwieng

Oh! ban mih na shnong hi te ngi tieng

Kynjai3 balei phi sngap noh bah?

Translation

Girls ... O we live in abundance

In our own huts in the country side we breathe the sweet breeze

O it blows along with the season.

Boys ... No (3) no it is not like that girls

Come with us to Shillong

Education you will get we say

Oh! Why will you remain ignorant in the country side?

Girls ... Softly (3) why guys you say like that

Why don't you think properly?

You have tasted Shillong City

You have forgotten your own village.

Softly. (3)

Boys ... Girls it is not that we are jealous

Of your good and calm life

When you are educated

The village will progress

Why-why you did misunderstand me.

Girls ... No-no guys your city life we do not want

The rays of the sun reflect

They reflect from the western side

Brought by the brothers from the city.

Boys ... It is not so.

Girls ... It is so.

Boys ... Why are you insulting us do not blame us

We are just telling you advising you if you listen to us

Come on let us go to the city you will see.

Softly (3)

Girls ... Like our village where will you get?

Go and seek all over the world

In the exciting season

The cicadas are chirping

Oh! to go away from the village we are afraid

Softly why are you silent guys?

This song is an example of a verbal duel between the young boys and girls. Here, in this song the boys are shown as the educated ones who have left their village to study in Shillong city, while the girls are uneducated who live in their village. The song opens with the girls telling the boys that they lead a

simple and contented life in the village where they breathe the fresh breeze that blows all seasons. But in the second stanza the boys contradict the girls asking them to come to study in the city where they would get good education because if they continue to live in the village they would remain illiterate and ignorant.

In the third and the fourth stanzas the girls reply back and asked the boys why they have to insult them. To the girls their village is the best and they did not want to leave it. They reprimand the boys who just because they are living in the city have forgotten about the wonderful and contented life that the people in the village have led. Life in the village is very different from that of the city. People in the village always lead a laid back life where there is no rush and free from pollution and the humdrum of city life. The girls in this song tried to make the boys understand about the carefree life they lead at home. But the boys countered them by saying that the boys are not jealous of them in any way but only trying to tell them that without education their village would never progress as uneducated people are ignorant of various issues pertaining to the development and prosperity of their village. In the remaining stanzas the girls ridiculed the boys about the city lifestyle that is quite different from those of simple villagers and said that they did not want to follow new lifestyle as this would affect the manners and simple lifestyles of the village folks. But the boys not wanting to be defeated by the girls in this verbal duel tries to soften the feelings of the girls by telling them that actually they just want to suggest to them to go to the city to get educated and not for anything else. And they also promise to take them to the city if they want to do so, so that they could

see with their own eyes about the benefits of being educated. To this, the girls retort back and told the boys that their village is the happiest place on earth and even if they go all over the world they would never find a place as beautiful and as good as their village which lies in the midst of natural beauty. But in the end the girls confessed that the reason that they did not want to go out of their village is because they are scared of the outside world.

Another song duel that had been collected is given below;

(Kynthei bad Shynrang); Hui....Hui..... Hui....Hui.....hui.

Kynthei ... Ngi da iohi

Ngi da iohi, ha iing pata, ko rang samla

Ba phi hylla, la kum u khla,

Ngi da iohi- ngi da iohi ha iing pata.

Shynrang ... Wat kren seh thei kumta

Wat shu kren sat ia nga

Ngam banse mo ban phla

Nga leit shim I papa

Hui, hui, hui, hui, hui.

Translation

(Boys and girls together); Hui...Hui....Hui....Hui...Hui.

Girls ... We saw

We saw, we saw, you young man at the tavern

You shout like a tiger

We saw, we saw at the tavern

Boys ... Girl, do not talk like that

Do not insult me like that

I have no choice but to confess

I went to fetch my father.

Hui, hui, hui, hui, hui.

This is another example of verbal dueling between the young boys and girls in the form of a song. Here, the girls tease the boys and ridicule them about their rowdy behavior when they were intoxicated. The girls tease the boys by saying that they saw them at the liquor den and how they shouted and behave like roaring tiger. It is to be noted that liquor dens that sell country liquor and some times foreign liquor can be found in many localities and villages in Khasi and Jaintia hills. Tiger is a very ferocious animal and here we see the comparison between a drunk and a tiger. But the boys refuted the allegation of the girls and tried to convince them that they are innocent saying that the boy went to the liquor den not to drink but to bring his drunken father back home as he was too drunk to come back by himself. This song also reflects the social ills in the society where the father who is the head of the family fall prey to the menace of liquor and how the mother and children have to suffer and endure hardship because of this.

Kynthei ... Kein noh, kein noh, wat wan pynbiej

*Ngi da iohi phi tan biri,
Phi tang shu i, phi rieh ia ngi
Kein noh kein noh wat wan pynbiej.*

Translation

Girls ... No, no don't come and fool us
We saw you smoking bidi
You hid yourself when you saw us
No no, do not fool us.

In the above stanza, the girls asked the boy not to fool them by putting the blame on his father. They said they have seen the young men's vice like consuming liquor and smoking which are very bad habits and how they hid themselves when they saw the girls. The young men hid themselves maybe due to the reason that they do not want to be seen smoking or that they felt embarrassed to be caught smoking bidi instead of cigarettes. Bidi is a smoking item made of dry leaves and is cheap compared to cigarettes. It is affordable to the poor and unemployed youth.

*Shynrang ... Ka dur jong phi te kong
La kum I puri blei
Ha ba phi puh samrkhie, I kumba phi rkhie iawbei,
Hui, hui, hui, hui, hui.*

*Kynthei ... Ka dur jong phi te bah
Pyllun la kum u pdung*

Ani, wow, wow, wow, wow,

Tang shi klat phi sdang ban thnum.

Hajan phi shu iabud, ha jngai phi shu iasiaw,

Ngan nai, ngan nai, ngan nai, ban pynrit la kum I khnai.

Translation

Boys ... Your face oh girl

Is like a fairy

When you smile

Your smile is like a baby's.

Girls ... Your face oh guy

Is round like a winnowing flat basket

Ani, wow, wow, wow wow

Just one glass and you start muttering

When you are near us, you follow us, from afar you whistle

No, no no, I will never be frightened like a mouse.

Here it is seen that the boys would start flattering the girls by praising their beauty and likened them to faeries. But this could not fool the girls who are not susceptible to the boys' praises and charms. Instead they taunted at the physical appearance and behaviours of the boys. Here, the girls show their maturity and intelligence. They taunted the boys about their rowdy behavior when they started drinking. Such kind of behavior would not make them ideal husband. So the girls said they would not choose such kind of persons as their

husband. This is because to live with such a husband is like a mouse that always lives in fear of a cat.

Shynrang ... Ko thei balei phi shu pasiaw

Ka dur, ka dur la shu saphiaw

Wow uba ngat te u la jew slew

Hui, hui, hui, hui, hui.

Kynthei ... Phi ong iangi ba ngi saphiaw,

Hynrei mano sha kito kiba siaw.

Shynrang ... Wat kren sarong ho thei, wat tang hanga-mei

Namar haba ngi khwai ma ngi, phin ngat kum u dohthli.

Translation

Boys ... Girls why are you whispering

Your facial expression, your facial expression has changed

Wow the one you trapped, would feel like eating sour fruit

Hui, hui, hui, hui hui.

Girls ... You told us about our facial expression

But really who is whistling

Boys ... Do not be proud, do not be arrogant

Because when we fish, you will be hooked like a fish (daneo).

In the above stanzas the duel between the two sides continues. When the flattering words failed to captivate the hearts of the girls, the boys start to change their tune from flattering to taunting them about their undesirable looks. The guys went on to say that they are lucky to escape from the clutches of the girls for any unlucky boy who happens to marry them would be miserable for the rest of his life. But the girls not to be outdone retort back that it is the young men who start flirting with the girls first and when the girls refused their advance, they start abusing them about their looks. To this the young men replied by asking the girls not to be proud and arrogant because if the boys really want them they would be like small fish who were lured and hooked by a bait.

Kynthei ... Dei (6) kein (2) ko rang kynsai namar nga shu biria kai

Ban sah khana ban ia bang ja.

Shynrang – Kynthei ... To khie kata da ia leit suk, to khie kata da ia

leit biang

Ngin sa da iashem biang ban bteng ia ki khana.

Kynthei-shynrang ... Ka sngi ruh ka la sep! ngin leitphai noh sha la

trep.

Translation

Girls ... Of course it is, virtuous young men, because we are just

joking with you,

To remember and to have a good appetite for our meal

Boys-Girls ... Okay then go home in peace, go carefully

We will meet again to continue our stories.

Girls-Boys ... The sun too has set! We will return to our huts.

In the remaining stanzas of the song duel, the girls tell the boys in jest that they just want to tease and play with them. The song ends with both the groups promising to meet again in the near future to continue their fight through song duels.

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Chapter V

Modern Khasi Riddles

This chapter is in two parts. The first part deals with riddles that have evolved during the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia hills by the British and the second part deals with those riddles that have evolved with the advent of modern technology. In the course of her research, this researcher has also found out that during the last part of the 20th century, there are riddles that have evolved with the coming of modern technology especially those riddles created through mobile phones (Short Message Service) and the internet. These are very popular especially among the educated Khasis, youth and the student community.

Part – I

Historical Riddles

The Acquisition of the Diwani of Bengal in 1765 by the East India Company had ushered in the first contact between the company and the Khasi Hills. When they came into contact with the Khasis, they lost no time in realizing the rich mineral potentialities and other items of trade that Khasi hills could provide (Giri 1998: 34). David Scott, the British political agent in the then North East Frontier was undoubtedly the main architect of the British colonial and imperial dominance over the Khasi and Jaintia states. The Khasi ruler that first came into contact with the British was *U Ram Singh* of Jaintia. In 1824, David Scott managed to convince *Ram Singh* to enter into an agreement with the company on the 10th, March 1824 by which *Ram Singh* acknowledged

allegiance to the company. After this in the same fashion, he approached *Tirot Sing Syiem* the Chief of *Hima Nongkhlaw*, the traditional state in Khasi hills and convinced him to enter into agreements with the company and to allow the British to construct a road from Assam to Sylhet through the territory of *ka Hima Nongkhlaw*. *Tirot Sing Syiem* gave his consent for the road to go through his territory. But later the British soldiers clashed with the locals and this in turn led to a struggle between the Confederation of the Khasi states and the British. In this war, the British defeated the Khasis and ultimately established their supremacy in these hills. After the defeat of the Khasi chiefs by the British, the latter chose *Sohra* (Cherrapunjee) as their station from where they administered the hills. With the annexation of the Khasi and Jaintia hills to the British Empire, the hills were swarmed by white men, other people from the plains of India came to work as soldiers and administrators for the colonial masters.

It has been observed that there are plenty of Khasi riddles which do not fall under the traditional category. Rather, these riddles may be put under the category of modern riddles. Historically, many riddles were found to have evolved during the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia Hills by the British. In this category of riddles, the researcher observes that there are descriptive elements which reflect colonial influences in the day to day life of the community. Prior to the coming of the British to these hills, it has been observed that traditional riddles derived mostly from close observation of nature and things around them. With the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia Hills by the British, the local people came into contact with others from other

parts of the world like the white and the black men. It should be noted that before the coming of the British, the Khasis had always lived in isolation in these hills. And the stationing of the British troops at *Sohra* by David Scott led to the Khasis being exposed to the western culture and modern technology. This in turn led to the evolution of new sets of riddles whose descriptive elements come from observation of the western culture and which showed impact of foreign culture on the Khasi culture as well.

The researcher while going to different villages in Khasi and Jaintia hills has collected riddles in which the descriptive elements refers to white men and even men of African origin. The bearing of the white men's influences in the daily life of the Khasis is also seen through the creation of many new riddles. Some of the riddle texts will be reproduced and analysed below:

*Ka don kawei ka pung, don arngut ki briew ki ba wan sum, uwei u dei
u dkhar iong bad uwei pat u phareng. U tang shu ryrngkoh u dkhar iong
shapoh um, ka um ka lah iong ngain, hynrei tang shu ryrngkoh u
phareng pat, ka um ka lah lieh phar.*

Riddle referent: *Ka sha*.

Translation

There is a pond; two people, the Adivasi and the white man came to bathe in the pond. The moment the Adivasi jumped into the pond, the water turns black, but the moment the white man jumps into the pond the water turns white.

Riddle referent: Tea.

In this riddle, the pond refers to the tea kettle where the water is boiled for brewing tea; the Adivasi refers to tea leaves and the white man to milk. It is seen that when tea leaves is added to boiling water, the colour of the water will turn black. But when milk is added to black tea, the colour will turn to off-white. It is to be noted here that the Khasis did not have any concept of tea and never drink milk before the British came to these hills. So we may assume that this riddle was created only after the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia hills by the British.

*U Phareng, u Khasi bad u Dkhar ki iashoh hapoh kawei ka kper haduh
ba kin da mih snam, katba u Negro pat u nang peit na shabar ka kper.*

Riddle referent: *Bam kwai, tympew, shun bad u дума sla.*

Translation

The white man, the Khasi and the non-tribal are fighting till they are covered in blood inside a fence, while the African is watching from outside.

Riddle referent: Chewing of areca nut, betel leaf, lime and tobacco.

In this riddle the descriptive elements refer to white men and Africans. The white man refers to lime which is white in colour, the *Kwai* (areca nut) to a Khasi and a *Tympew* (betel leaf) to a non-tribal. The Khasis are very fond of chewing areca nuts along with betel leaf and lime. Areca nuts and betel leaves play a very significant role in the life and culture of the Khasis. The Khasis always show their hospitality and welcome guests to their homes by offering

Kwai and *Tympew* (areca nut and betel leaves) to the visitors to chew. So areca nuts and betel leaves along with lime is a symbol of hospitality and goodwill in Khasi culture. Along with areca nut and betel leaf, there are some people who also chew tobacco leaves by putting the same in the outer part of the gums. Chewing of areca nut along with betel leaf and lime will turn the saliva in the mouth to red in colour. So the act of chewing areca nut and betel leaf along with lime is compared to three persons from different races fighting with one another till they shed blood, the red saliva in the mouth likened to blood and the African who watches the three people fighting inside the fence refers to the tobacco leaf.

*Ka don ka wei ka krem bah, tang ki phadar ki shong hangta ki ap ia
uwe i mawsiang ba mih ka umpohlieu natrai jong u.*

Riddle referent: *Ka shyntur, ki bniat bad uthylliej.*

Translation

There is a big cave, only the Catholic priests live there to guard a big rock from where an everlasting spring originates.

Riddle referent: Mouth, teeth and tongue

This riddle was created after the colonization of Khasi and Jaintia hills by the British. The colonization of these hills opened the door for many Christian missionaries from both the Catholic and Protestant denominations to come and evangelize among the Khasis. The first Catholic missionaries landed in Khasi hills in the year 1890 and started their mission at Lumtyngkong, Laitumkhrah. They belonged to the German Salvatorian Mission. Before that, the Khasis

who lived in isolation have no contact with the Catholics. When they came into contact with them, the people observed that the priest always wear white cassocks. In this riddle the Catholic priests refer to the teeth as they are whitish in colour, the tongue to a rock and the saliva to an everlasting spring that originates from the bottom of the big rock. The Catholic priests in these hills are always addressed as *Phadar*, a corrupted form of the word 'Father'. This word was readily accepted into the Khasi language and literature.

U loit tupia tang shu trei kam.

Riddle referent: *U khulom.*

Translation

He takes out his cap as soon as he starts working.

Riddle referent: The pen.

In this riddle the cover of the pen is compared to a person's cap. The act of taking out the cover of a pen before writing is compared to a person taking out his cap before doing any work. The Khasis were not literate society before the coming of the British. It was the British who introduced the art of writing and the use of the pen to them.

U bam tang shisien bam bad u eit pat lynter baroh shi bnai.

Riddle referent: *U rifil.*

Translation

He eats only once but he can defecate the whole month.

Riddle referent: The refill of a pen.

This riddle falls under modern category. A refill can be used for a long time till the ink is finished. The refill of a pen here is compared to someone who eats only once but can defecate the whole month. This riddle reflects the influence of Western culture in our daily life as a refill of a pen is a very significant item in our everyday life.

U bam na poh bad u eit pat na jrong.

Riddle referent: *U atoskhana*.

Translation

He eats from the bottom and defecates from the top.

Riddle referent: The chimney.

Traditional Khasi houses is oval-shape and do not have any chimney. A traditional Khasi house is usually divided into the following compartments; *ka Shyngkup* or *kyndur*, *ka Nympei*, *Kyrdein*, *Ing Kyndong* and *Rympei*. In this riddle, the act of lighting the hearth with fire is compared to somebody eating food from his bottom instead of the mouth, and the smoke that escapes outside through the chimney as somebody defecates from the top of his head. This riddle also falls under the oppositional category as well.

Hapdeng ka don ka pung ba heh bha,

Harud pung ki shong ki phareng,

La kerkut ia ki da ka khlaw bah.

Riddle referent: *U soh snepkor*.

Translation

In the middle there is a lake,
The whites live around the lake
Surrounded by dense jungle.

Riddle referent: The coconut.

The above riddle is an example of a modern riddle. The descriptive element 'lake' here refers to the coconut milk, the 'white men' to the white and edible kernel of the coconut and the 'dense jungle' to the outer non-edible shell of the coconut.

U wei u rishot u kyrshan ia khatar tylli ki bim.

Riddle referent: *Ka shatri.*

Translation

One pillar which supports twelve beams.

Riddle referent: The umbrella.

This is a modern riddle as the Khasis never used umbrella before they came into contact with the British. The Khasis use traditional rain shields like *ka trap* and *ka knup* to shelter themselves from the rain and excessive heat of the sun. These two traditional items now can be found only in the rural areas as they are used only by farmers when they go to work in their fields. In this riddle, the long handle of an umbrella that holds and supports the frame of an umbrella is compared to a pillars and the frame which support the cover cloth of the umbrella as beams.

Kaei kata ka ba kiew sha jrong tang shu slap?

Riddle referent: *Ka shatri*.

Translation

What goes up when it rains?

Riddle referent: The umbrella.

In the past, the Khasis never used the umbrella. But after the coming of the British, the umbrellas came to be used by many in imitation of the colonial masters. Today the umbrella has become part and parcel of the Khasi culture. This has been observed by the researcher even in Khasi traditional death ceremonies, where decorated umbrellas are used as one of the accessories and items for the dead person, instead of the traditional rain shields. The umbrella is kept by families as an item to be used by the dead in his/her journey to another world.

Kaei kata tang shu kshih na ryndang bad thap na kpoh ka lah iam?

Riddle reference: *Ka kaitar*.

Translation

What is it as soon as you strangle its neck and slaps its stomach it will cry?

Riddle referent: The guitar.

In this riddle the guitar which is a musical instrument introduced to us by the British is the answer. When a guitar is played, a person has to use both his hands, one for manipulating the keys and the other for strumming the strings.

So the act of playing a guitar here is compared to physical assault on somebody and the sound of the guitar to someone's cry. Before the coming of the British the Khasis had their own musical instruments like the stringed, wind and membrane instruments. But with the coming of the British, the hills were also invaded by western musical instruments which within no time started replacing the traditional ones. Today, the guitar is the most popular western musical instruments among the young and the old alike.

*Ka iing ba don shibun ki pulit, ha ki pulit la shong tang da ki nong
Africa.*

Riddle referent: *U sohprew.*

Translation

A house with many rooms, only the Africans live in these rooms.

Riddle referent: Sponge gourd.

This riddle falls under the modern category as it is believed that it evolved only after the British invaded Khasi and Jaintia hills. It is to be noted here that along with the whites, there were also people from other races like blacks and others who came to these hills especially during the World War I and II periods. In this riddle a house with many rooms refers to the sponge gourd (*Luffa cylindrica*) which has many compartments like cavities inside when it is matured. The Africans here refers to the black seeds of the sponge gourd.

U phareng shiliang kjat.

Riddle referent: *U tit lieh.*

Translation

A one legged white man.

Riddle referent: The white mushroom.

In this modern riddle, a white man with one leg refers to white mushrooms that can be found in the wild in Khasi and Jaintia hills and that are edible.

U phareng ba phong tupia rong iong.

Riddle referent: *U kyndok jingpruid.*

Translation

The white man with a black hat.

Riddle referent: The match-stick.

This is an example of modern riddle where a white man refers to a match-stick and the black hat worn by the white man to the sulphur that covers the head of a match-stick. It should be noted here that in the past, it is mandatory for all Khasi males to wear turbans especially in religious and social ceremonies. But after the coming of the British to these hills, Khasi men took to wearing hats.

Ka mem ba jaw ummat man ka por.

Riddle referent: *Mombati.*

Translation

A white woman who shed tears all the time.

Riddle referent: The white candle.

In this modern riddle, the white woman referred to as *mem* which is used to denote a British woman, refers who weeps copiously and the tears to the melting wax that fall off and is collected at the bottom of a candle stand. It is to be noted that when the British came to these hills some of them especially the Protestant Missionaries brought their wives along with them to live here. The sight of the British women who are very fair skin made some Khasis to create riddles like this type which likened them to a white candle.

I parad iba ritmet ba kyrteng i Peter

I phong ka patlun rong lieh.

Ka khmut jong I ka saw

Katba nang slem I ieng,

Katta I nang lyngkot.

Riddle referent: *Mombati*.

Translation

Little grandpa Peter

In a white trouser

His nose is red

The longer he stands,

The shorter he grows.

Riddle referent: The candle.

This is a modern riddle because here we see the descriptive elements refer to trousers and English name. It was the British who introduced the trousers to the Khasis. Before coming into contact with the British; the Khasis used loin

clothes and dhoti to cover the lower parts of their bodies. But today no one is using the dhoti or loin clothes any more except in some traditional ceremonial dances. All Khasi males irrespective of their religious affiliation are wearing only pants now. Many men have also no knowledge in using and wearing the dhoti or loin cloth any more. The Khasis are very fond of English names and they even name their children after English words. This is observed as one of the greatest influences of the British culture on the people of these hills. It is also to be noted that this riddle has its source from one English riddle. But in the Khasi riddle, Granny Etticoat is replaced by Grandpa Peter.

Ka ei ka ta ka ba niad ia ka durkhmat jong ka baroh shi sngi?

Riddle referent: *Ka baje iing.*

Translation

What is it that wipes its face with two hands all day?

Riddle referent: The clock.

This is a modern riddle as clocks were introduced to us by the colonial masters. In this riddle, the clock is compared to someone having a face, and the two hands that wiped its face refer to the two hands of the clock, the minute and second that indicate the time of the day. Before the coming of the British, the Khasis all over the hills did not have the concept of hours, minutes or seconds. The Khasis in the past, measured the time by gazing at the position of the sun in the sky. According to the scholar's mother, when they were young (in the 1940s and 1950s) they did not have any watch or clock at home (in the rural area). But in the evening they always knew the time to start

cooking for dinner by looking at one particular flower called *Khleo ro smit* in *War-Jaintia* dialect or *Tiewpor* in Khasi language. This flower is known as Four o'clock flower or the Marvel of Peru in English. This particular flower would bloom only in the late afternoon and during the day the petals would close. *Khleo ro smit* in *War-Jaintia* dialect means the flower that bloom only in the evening and *Tiewpor* in Khasi it means the flower that tells the time.

Ka lah ban mareh, tangba kam lah ban iaid

Ka lah ban rwai tangba kam lah ban kren.

Riddle referent: *Ka baje.*

Translation

She can run but cannot walk

She can sing but cannot talk.

Riddle referent: The clock.

In this modern riddle, the clock is the riddle referent. Here a clock which is compared to some one that has the ability to run and sing but not to walk and talk which is quite contradictory. Usually a child would first know how to walk and talk before he could run or sing. So, this riddle also falls under the oppositional category.

U don shibun ki khmat tangba um lah ban iohi

Baroh shiryenieng ka sniehnoh jong u ka jaing.

Riddle referent: *U phan.*

Translation

He has many eyes, but he cannot see

His skin is always dirty.

Riddle referent: Potato.

Potatoes are not indigenous to Khasi and Jaintia hills. They were first brought to these hills and introduced to the Khasis by David Scott, the political agent of the British. David Scott saw that the climatic condition of Khasi Hills was similar to Britain and therefore favourable for potato planting, so he brought them here to the hills and started planting them. David Scott was known as the arch enemy of the Khasi people but at the same time it cannot be denied that he was also a benefactor by introducing potatoes as one of the main crops that sustain the people of these hills.

Nga khlain bha ha ba nga pyllun

Nga lah ban kylla dur

Nga lah ban tan ia ka duriaw da ka bor jingkhlain jong nga

U briew uba ka kyrteng jong u ka mut Ki kti ba khlain

U iuh kjat nyngkong halor jong nga.

Riddle referent: *U Bnai.*

Translation

I am strongest when I am round

I can change my appearance

I can pull the sea with my tremendous strength

A man with a name like powerful bicep

Was the first one to tread on me.

Riddle referent: The moon.

This riddle can be kept in modern category because it was created only in the early 1970s after Neil Armstrong of America became the first person to walk on the moon. Here the moon is compared to somebody who has mighty strength as he can lift and drop the tides every day. A man with name like ‘powerful biceps’ here refers to Neil Armstrong the first man in the world to walk on the moon on July 20th, 1969.

Nga shah kyndang napoh iing jong nga. La die ia nga ha iew. Uta uba thied ia nga u ot noh ia u tdong jong nga bad loit ia ki sopti sut rusom jong nga. Ynda u pynmysaw ia nga u iam pynban ma u ha syndah jong nga.

Riddle referent: *U Piat*.

Translation

I was taken out of my home and sold in the market. He that buys me cut my tail and takes out my suit of silk. After hurting me, he weeps besides me.

Riddle referent: The onion.

In this riddle, the home of onion means underground where it is planted. The suit of silk refers to the pinkish layers that cover the flesh of the onion. The Khasi traditional male attires consist of a sleeveless shirt called *ka Jymphong* and a loin cloth or dhoti. But after the coming of the British, the Khasi

traditional dress was replaced by the western clothes like trousers, collar shirts, blazers, jackets and suits of European patterns.

Ka iing kaba ka tnum da ki nar, ki kynroh da ki iit,

Ka pluh shi pluh hynrei kam ju hap.

Riddle referent: *Ka lynten.*

Translation

A house with iron roof and glass walls,

Always burning but never falls.

Riddle referent: The lantern.

Traditionally, the Khasis used bamboo torches and earthen lamps to light their houses at night. Fats of animals were used as oil to make the lamp burn. But the British brought with them lanterns, candles etc. that immediately appealed to the Khasis of that time. Here, in this riddle the top of the lantern is either made of tin or other metals while the walls are always made of glass. Till today lantern can still be seen in many parts of the hills especially in the rural and remote areas where there is no electricity connection and where electric power is very erratic and often cut off especially in the rainy season. The word *lynten* in Khasi is a corrupted word of lantern in English.

Ngim don doh, lane ki sner lane ki sniehdoh lane ki shyieng

Hynrei ngi don ki shympriahkti bad ki'tikmie.

Riddle referent: *Ki jingsopkti.*

Translation

We have no flesh, nor feathers, nor scales nor bones
Yet we have fingers and thumbs of our own.

Riddle referent: Gloves.

Gloves are another items introduced to us by the western culture. Here in this riddle, the descriptive elements seem to point out to some living beings but when in reality the riddle referent is an item of clothing. Khasi hills are very cold especially during the winter seasons. So when the British came here, they brought and used gloves to prevent their hands from cold. Seeing the British using gloves, the educated Khasis of that time also started using them to warm up their hands. Today gloves are important items among the Khasis especially during the winter and amongst the bikers who have to prevent their hands from the biting cold while riding their two wheelers.

Ki sim balieh ba khlem sner

Ki wan her na Paradise

Ki her lyngba ka duriaw bad ryngkew

Ki iap pat ha kti jong nga.

Riddle referent: *Ka ior.*

Translation

Featherless white birds

Flying out of Paradise

Flying over sea and land

Dying in my hands.

Riddle referent: The snow flake.

This is a modern riddle because Paradise is a Christian concept. Before 1841, the Khasis had no idea of the concept of Paradise. But the Christian Missionaries from the West introduced this concept of Paradise to the Khasis through their religious teaching and education. The Khasis did not know about Heaven or Paradise and these concepts never featured in the philosophy of their indigenous religion. They believe that they came down to this earth from above (sky) which is the abode of God, the creator. They also believe that when one dies, if he fulfilled the commands given by God to them while living on earth, he or she will be able to go and eat betel nuts in the courtyard of God (*Bam kwai ha dwar U Blei*). While those who have not fulfilled God's command will be sent to *Ka Myngkoi U Jom* a place in the subterranean. It has been observed that similar version of this riddle could be found in English tradition and it was collected by Archer Taylor in his famous book *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*.

Ka sur jong nga ka ba jem jaijai

I syngkai jong nga iba rit.

Kat shaba nga leit nga hap ban rah ia I saijem jong nga

Lym kumta ngan ym lah ban rwai.

Riddle referent: *Ka bela*.

Translation

My voice is very tender

My waist is slim

Wherever I go I must take my bow

Or else I cannot sing.

Riddle referent: The violin.

Violin is one of the Western classical musical instruments. When the Khasis were introduced to Western music by the missionaries and others, they were so taken up by the western music and their musical instruments and within no time they started forgetting their own traditional musical instruments. Violin is one of the western musical instruments that the Khasis have accepted as one of their own. This has been observed in many rural places where violins are used in church orchestra especially during church services and weddings. It is to be noted that Khasis are great lovers of Western music and Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya located in East Khasi Hills is globally known as the 'Rock Capital of India.' On Sundays churches all over the hills are filled with music and hymns greatly influenced by Italian and Welsh tunes.

Ngi dei ar ngut shipara ki khun synrap

Baroh shi sngi ngi hap kit jingkit ba khia bad ngi shah ban

Tang mynmiet, ynda u Kynrad jong ngi u thiah

Ngi ioh ban shong thait.

Riddle referent: *Shijur ki Juti.*

Translation

Two twin brothers we are

All day great burdens we bear and we are pressed

Only at night when our master sleeps

We can take rest.

Riddle referent: A pair of shoes.

Shoes are another necessity introduced to us by the British. In this modern riddle the pair of twins refers to the pair of shoes that a person uses. Shoes are a daily necessity that people of all ages wear. Before the coming of the British, the Khasis never used shoes and they walked barefoot. It has been told to this researcher by her mother and other people from her area that even in the late 1960s and early 1970s people rarely use shoes and slippers except when they come to the city. The Vice-Principal of the school where this researcher works has told her once that the first time she wore slippers while going to school was only when she was in class IX in the early 1970s. In those days slippers and shoes were a luxury and that even those children whose parents could afford to buy slippers and shoes for them also never wore them to schools as they felt out of place if they wore slippers or shoes as almost all others walked barefoot.

U phong patlun dang khynnah, loit pat ynda lah rangbah.

Riddle referent: *U siej*.

Translation

He wears his trousers when he is young, takes them off when he grows up.

Riddle Referent: Bamboo.

This riddle is collected from the Bhoi area of Khasi hills, where the bamboo is given a masculine gender (*U*). In this riddle, the brown cover of the bamboo which covers the tender shoot is referred to as trousers. This is due to the reason that the Khasis usually associated trousers with men.

Ka lah ba ryngkoh bad mareh

Tangba kam don kjat.

Riddle referent: *Ka bol.*

Translation

It can leap and run

Yet it has no feet.

Riddle referent: The football.

The Khasis are lovers of sports. They have many traditional games and sports. When the British came to these hills, football is one of the games introduced by them to the Khasis. Here in this riddle, the football is compared to some one that can jump and run all around even though it has no feet. Today football game is the most popular in these hills and has over shadowed all the other traditional sports and games. It has been observed that even in the remote parts of the land, the first game that the children learn to play when they start playing football.

Ka lah ban kren namar ka don u thylliej uba eh

Tangba kam lah ban ring mynsiem

Namar ba kam don tor.

Riddle referent: *Ka baje iingmane.*

Translation

She can speak, for she has a hard tongue

But she cannot breathe, for she has no lungs.

Riddle referent: The church bell.

In this riddle the metal pendulum that produces sound when the bell is rings is compared to a tongue. Church bells can be found all over the hills and the sound that they produce when someone rings them can be heard everywhere especially on Sundays. The ringing of bells are signals to the people especially in the rural areas where most people do not use watches to go and attend church service. The sound produced by church bells of various denominations in these hills has produced numerous jokes.

Nga don ka shyntur kaba heh bad nga shait hylla bha

Hynrei ngam dei ka lorni

Tangba ia shait iadon bynta ha ki kam jaboh jong ki briew.

Riddle referent: *Ka mashin pynkhuid iing.*

Translation

I have a big mouth and I am quite noisy

And I am not a gossipmonger

But I get involved in every dirty business.

Riddle referent: The vacuum cleaner.

This is a modern riddle. The advance of science and technology especially in the last twentieth century led to the invention of many things that gave comfort and luxury to man. Here, the vacuum cleaner is compared to some loud mouthed and noisy woman who loves to gossip and interfere in everybody personal business. Vacuum cleaners are not a common sight in Khasi and Jaintia hills except in some houses in Shillong. When somebody

uses vacuum cleaner for cleaning the rooms, it make so much noise that those who observed the way how vacuum cleaners work create this kind of riddle.

Nga iong ngain ngain haba nga khuid

Bad lieh pat haba nga jaing

Riddle referent: *Ka black board.*

Translation

I am black when I am clean

And white when dirty

Riddle referent: The black board.

The riddle referent in this riddle is the black board. It is believed that black boards were first introduced to Khasi and Jaintia Hills by Thomas Jones I, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary who had established the first school in Khasi Hills in the year 1842. A black board is always used by teachers for writing the important parts of their teaching in schools. It is still a very important medium in teaching–learning activity. Till today black board are still considered to be one of the main traditional teaching aid in many schools all over the hills.

Pyrkhat kloi. Ka rel ba pyndonkam da ka lait ka iaid shaphang shathie.

Ka lyer ka beh shaphang shatei lam sepngi. Shano ka tdem ba mih na ka rel kan her?

Riddle referent: *Ka rel ba iaid da ka lait kan ym pynmih tdem.*

Translation

Think fast. There is an electric train travelling south. The wind blows from north-west in which direction would the smoke from the train be blowing?

Riddle referent: An electric train does not emit smoke.

In this kind of riddle, as the children were asked to answer very fast, many get stumped and could not give the right answer except those who are witty and intelligent. There is no train service in Meghalaya. People from here have to go to Guwahati the nearest station to avail train service. But even though it is so, almost all children can identify trains due to mass media especially electronic media and globalization.

Haei phin shem ki surok khlem kali, ki khlaw khlem dieng bad ki sor khlem iing?

Riddle referent: *Ha ka map.*

Translation

Where will you find roads without cars, forests without trees and cities without houses?

Riddle referent: On the map.

Maps are important items as educational and scientific tools and are most useful especially to travelers. There are different types of maps and they are used for different purposes. Maps especially meant for directing and guiding tourists in many places show the connecting roads of a particular country or

places and other important locations to help people find their ways in an unknown place or area.

Ngam don sur hynrei nga lah ban kren ia phi.

Nga iathuh lut ha phi ia ki ei ba ki briew ki leh sawdong ka pyrthei

Nga don sla tangba ngam dei u dieng

Nga don ka ingdong bad ki kopja tangba ngam dei ka briew lane ka jingkhang,

Nga dei kaei?

Riddle referent: *Ka kot.*

Translation

I have no voice yet I can speak to you

I tell you all things that people all over the world do

I have leaves but I am not a tree

I have a spine and hinges but I am not a woman or a door

What am I?

Riddle referent: The book.

In this riddle, the book is referred to someone without a voice but who can give us all relevant information about everything happen all over the world. Thomas Jones was the first one to establish schools in Khasi Hills in 1841 at Mawsmat. He prepared school curriculum of studies based on the models imported from the West. He adopted the Cherra or Sohra dialect as a standard Khasi dialect, adopted the Roman orthography for Khasi script and started writing and publishing books for studying in school. With his tireless efforts

some Khasi books came into existence within a few years after he adopted the Roman script for Khasi language. For this Thomas Jones I was known as the Father of the Khasi Alphabets. As books were introduced to us for the first time by the British, so this riddle falls under the modern category.

Uta uba shna ia ka um ju iathuh iano iano ruh

Uta uba don ia ka ruh um tip

Uta pat uba ioh pdiang ia ka um kwah ia ka.

Riddle referent: *Ka pisa thok.*

Translation

Whoever makes it tells no one

Whoever has it knows it not and whoever gets it wants it not.

Riddle referent: Fake currency.

Before Khasi and Jaintia Hills was annexed to the British Empire, the Khasis never used paper money. Prior to that, the Khasi traders who came into contact with the other people from the plains of Assam and the present day Bangladesh might have come across coins used in the kingdoms in the plains of the Indian sub-continent. After independence, India started using its own currency and today fake currency is very much in circulation all over the country. This is done by anti-Indian elements for their own interest and to cripple the economy and security of the country. The North-Eastern part of the country is especially vulnerable to the circulation of fake currency as it shares its boundary with many neighbouring countries and is often used as a transit route for circulation of the same. Even in Shillong, many people have fallen

prey to fake currency and it is alleged that people sometimes received fake currency even from Automatic Teller Machines (ATM) operated in the city. Illegal circulation of fake currency in the state has become the menace, so people are always warned by bank authorities to be alert while receiving money from others especially Rupees five hundred and one thousand notes, as these two fake notes are widely circulated by unscrupulous individuals.

I ieng shilliang kjat

Ia la u dohnud I buh ha khlieh.

Riddle referent: *U kubi.*

Translation

It stands on one leg

With its heart on its head.

Riddle referent: The cabbage.

Prior to their contact with the whites, the Khasis mostly lived on wild and semi-wild vegetables which they planted such as pumpkin, cucumber, yam etc. But the coming of the British to the hills brought a drastic change in the food habits of these hill people. The Khasis were introduced to many new vegetables brought by the colonial masters. One such species of vegetables is the cabbage. Today cabbages are grown all over the hills and have become one of the most popular vegetables in every market in these hills. The heart of the cabbage here refers to the inner most layers of the vegetable.

Haba nga kdew shajrong ka shai kdar,

Hynrei haba nga kdew shapoh ka dum ngain.

Riddle referent: *U switch pynmeh lait.*

Translation

When I point up its bright

But when I point down, it's dark.

Riddle referent: The light switch.

The coming of the British to India led to the Khasis being exposed to the electricity. In the year 1921, the British engineers constructed a mini Hydro Electric Project at the stream locally known as *Suna Pani* near *Mawprem* locality in Shillong. The construction of the Hydro Electric Project led to the Khasis being exposed to electricity for the first time. To many common people of that time, electricity was one of the great wonder gifted to them by the British. Usually when a switch is on, the room will be flooded with light but when it is switched off the room will be dark.

Shipai ki ienglain da ka jingsarong

Arliang ki ieng marsyndah

Kawei ka liang ki hap ban pyrkhath

La kin ia kynduh ne em baroh ia kawei pat kaliang.

Riddle referent: *U chain*

Translation

Soldiers line up with pride

In two rows side by side

One row will decide

Whether they will meet the other row or not.

Riddle referent: The zipper.

Traditionally, the Khasis never used any zipper in their clothes as the designs never call for using buttons or zippers. But when the British landed in the Khasi land, the indigenous people were exposed to western attires and within no time they were so much influenced by it that at presents no Khasi males can be seen without pants or jackets where zipper is an important item in such attires. Today, zippers are seen as accessories in both men and women clothes.

Lah ban thew ia ka, tangba kam don lynter ne pynkiang ne jingjylliew.

Riddle referent: *Ka jingshit-jingkhriat.*

Translation

It can be measured, but it has no length or breadth or depth.

Riddle referent: Temperature.

In the past, the Khasis did not have any idea regarding the measurement of temperature. But after the year 1833, when the Khasi and Jaintia hills was under the rule of the British, the latter brought many new instruments and equipments to make use of them here. One such instrument is the thermometer for measuring the degree of temperature in these hills. Usually measurement is used to determine the quality of any physical objects. But temperature is not a physical object. So it does not have any length or breadth or depth at all. The clinical thermometer was invented by Thomas Clifford Allbutt in 1866. Most probably, the first person to use the thermometer among the Khasi patients

was Dr. H. Gordon Robert a Welsh missionary and a physician, who founded the Welsh Mission Hospital at Jaiaw, Shillong on 25th March, 1922. It was rechristened as Dr. H. Gordon Robert KJP Assembly Hospital. This hospital is the oldest one in the North-Eastern region of India.

Nga dei ka umpohliew ka ba ym don ba lah ban dih ianga

Nga dei ka nongiarap ia ki nongleit jingleit

Kum ka ksiar ki shait wad bad iashoh na ka bynta jongnga.

Referent: *Ka umphniang kali.*

Translation

I am a fountain from which no one can drink

I used to help the travelers

Like gold I am sought after and fought for.

Riddle referent: Fuel.

In this riddle, the answer is fuel (petrol and diesel). Vehicles were first used in the hills only in the beginning of the 20th century. The first vehicle was brought to Shillong through the Guwahati-Shillong road. But today the roads of Shillong and even in the rural areas are choking with the pollution emitted from the vehicles. Fuel is very important for vehicles as they can not function without it. Many wars have been fought all over the world for control of oil fields and monopoly of oil trade all over the world.

Artylli ki kali ki hap ban ai pass ha kawei ka surok rit ha kaba tang

kawei ka kali ka lah ban iaid lyngba ha ka juh ka por. Baroh arngut ki

nongniah ki kwah ban iaid shwa ha kajuh ka por. Ha kaba khatduh baroh arngut ki iaid lang ha kajuh ka por. Kumno kata ka lah ban long?

Riddle referent: *Baroh ar ngut ki nongniah ki iaid da ka kjat.*

Translation

Two vehicles have to pass each other on a very narrow road where only one vehicle can pass at a given time. Both the drivers wanted to be the one to pass first. But none agree as to who would pass first. In the end both passed at the same time...

How is this possible?

Riddle referent: Both the drivers came out of their respective vehicles, and walked on foot.

This is a very tricky riddle. This is a modern riddle because as mentioned above, vehicles are brought to this part of the world by the British in the early part of the twentieth Century.

Part – II

Riddles Evolved through Modern Communication Technology

In this chapter a study has also been carried out on riddles that have evolved with the coming of modern technology especially those created through the internet and short message service (SMS) in the present day. These riddles are considered as genuine items of folklore because they are anonymous, circulated and popular within groups sharing common factors thereby qualifying them as folk group.

It is a general fact that the emergence of electronic technologies has caused important, radical and drastic changes to oral and literary practices. New forms of communication system like the internet and mobile phones have fundamentally changed our every day life. The use of internet and mobile phones for generating folklore has been observed very closely by folklorists and they have cited instances how traditional narrative structures of certain genres have undergone a dramatic transformation in presenting text and context.

The cold war tension between the Communist Block and the Western Block in the mid twentieth century led to the formulation of the World Wide Web. The launching of the Sputnik by the Soviet Union on October, 4th, 1957 led to the formulation of the advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) by the U.S. Department of Defense. Beginning in 1958, ARPANET served the military and academic researchers as a means of communication and as a common tool for defense operation. E-mail technology was created in 1970. By the 1980s people started interacting online through bulletin boards (discussion groups), MUD (multi-user dungeons) and the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link). WELL is a social network composed of internet users from all parts of the world. Later, it was followed by Internet Relay Chat. The internet in its modern form emerged with the creation of the World Wide Web in the year 1989 by English computer scientist Timothy Berners-Lee. The development of Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) and Web browser technology allowed the internet to expand from an exclusive academic forum into the world wide phenomenon it is today. The internet was open to the

public domain only in the year 1992. In India, internet service for public access was first introduced on August 14th, 1995 by Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL), a public sector company. In Meghalaya internet service was introduced in September, 2001.

In addition to being a telephone, modern mobile phones also support many additional services and accessories such as SMS or text messages, e-mail, internet access, gaming etc. The invention of the first handheld mobile phone by Dr. Martin Cooper in 1973 has brought a fundamental change in our means of communication. This first hand held mobile phone weighed 2 kilograms. From then onwards, researchers have tried in their race to make the most convenient handheld mobile phones. In 1979, NTT in Japan launched the first commercially automated cellular network called the 1G generation. At first it was initially launched only in the metropolitan area of Tokyo But within five years, the NTT network had been expanded to cover the whole population of Japan and became the first nationwide 1G network. In the early to mid 1980s many countries followed Japan's footsteps. The first modern network technology on digital 2G (second generation) cellular technology was launched by Radiolinja in 1991 in Finland on the GSM standard, which also marked the introduction of competition in mobile telecoms. In 2001, the first commercial launch of 3G (Third Generation) was again launched in Japan by NTT DoCoMo. The first Subscriber Identity module or SIM card was made in 1991 by Munich Smart card maker Giesecke & Devrient for the Finnish wireless operator Radiolinja.

In India the first mobile telephone service was started on non-commercial basis on August 15th, 1995 in Delhi. Mobile phones in Meghalay emerged at first as symbol of status and prestige. But with the passage of time, they have become widespread practical mass products. The demand for telephones was ever increasing. The reforms in telecommunication policies of the country in the 2000s have allowed people from all walks of life to afford phone services. In Meghalaya the first mobile phone services was started in 1998 by Reliance mobile company. Since then the users of mobile phones have been increasing and the mobile phone has become very popular especially among the youth.

Many folklorists have lamented on the future of folkloristics as an academic discipline since the early part of the 20th century. Ben Dan Amos in his famous essay *Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context* asserts: "If the initial assumption of folklore research is based on the disappearance of its subject matter, there is no way to prevent the science from following the same road" (Dan Ben 1982:15). In 2004 in his presidential plenary address to the American society, Alan Dundes was worried about the future of the discipline by contending that the state of folkloristics at the beginning of the twenty-first century is depressingly worrisome (Dundes 2005:385). Such kinds of statements need our scholarly attention. But the fact is that this is not new but a recurring assertion within the academic discipline for quite sometimes. Even Richard Dorson in 1972 had lamented about the future of folkloristics. He said that in a few years, there will be no more folklorists but he himself responded to his own statement by looking somewhere else like in urban areas and media and found out that city and other urban settlements are a good breeding place

for contemporary folklore which subsequently led to the emergence of urban folklore and modern technology folklore. Speculations on the future of folkloristics have always been there within the academic discipline. Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs have noted that tradition “has been report on the verge of dying for more than three centuries, (yet) ... continues to provide useful means of producing and legitimizing new modernist projects, sets of legislators and schemes of inequality” (Bauman 2003:306). But despite all of the doom and gloom folklore continues to be alive and thriving in the modern world. Toward the middle part of the twentieth century, traditional folklore genres and other new forms have started to emerge through a new medium, the modern communication technology. The internet and mobile phone are very popular contemporary devices of information and communication technology. The internet and SMS through mobile phones is an important part of new narrative culture based on electronic literacy. Mobile phones through short message service and the internet have aided in the rapid transmission of specific types of folklore, especially jokes, riddle jokes and chain letters. Short messaging via mobile phone started characteristically as a youth custom. The emergence and widespread practice of sending messages enmasse made SMS and the internet typical vehicles of contemporary folklore. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that most of the folkloric texts are anonymous and collective products.

Modern communication system especially the internet and mobile phone technology has brought a very interesting mode of information exchange by means of SMS and the e-mail which reveals that there is a text which can be

developed and used. It has been found out that there are certain e-mail and SMS texts that constitute folklore genres. SMS and e-mail are new media of folklore and for this reason the use of the methods of folkloristics for their study may yield relevant result. The most common genres that can be found in the internet and SMS texts are urban legends, jokes, proverbs, wise sayings, reduced chain letters, riddles etc. Riddles evolved through the internet and SMS have been used and studied in this chapter.

The researcher has observed that riddle jokes are a very popular genre among the Khasi youth and the student community. Internet and SMS riddles typically use pun and double entendre for humorous effect rather than to puzzle. Another characteristic of these riddles is that most of circulated riddles are found to fall under the purported obscene riddles. Riddles created through internet and SMS will be put under three categories. 1) Riddle jokes 2) Purported obscene riddles 3) Real obscene riddle

Riddle jokes

A woman shot her husband, and then she holds him for over five minutes under water. Finally she hangs him. But five minutes later, they went out together and enjoyed a wonderful dinner together. How could this happen?

Riddle referent: The woman is a photographer.

The first part of the descriptive elements in the above riddle seems to suggest that the woman was a murderer who killed her husband mercilessly. But

actually, the woman being a photographer, shot the picture of her husband, developed it and then hung it up to dry.

What is a girl friend?

Riddle referent: Addition of problem, subtraction of money and division of friends.

This is a riddle joke where the males ridicule the females. This riddle serves as a satiric commentary on the nature and general behaviour of girls. Here the girl is seen as a burden instead of good partner to a man. She is also depicted as an opportunist and a spendthrift and the cause of a man's alienation from his friends.

What is the difference between the woman and a magnet?

Riddle referent: Magnets have a positive side.

This riddle jokes shows the comparison between the magnet and the woman where the magnets are seen as more favorable than women. Here the women are shown as someone wicked and cruel who have no positive qualities but only negative ones where as magnets have positive as well as negative sides. These kinds of riddles are aimed to ridicule women and to make them look stupid.

How dogs and women are alike?

Riddle referent: Neither believes that silence is golden.

Neither can balance a checkbook

Both put too much value on kissing

This riddle is a male-oriented joke to ridicule the female population by putting them in the same category with dogs. Women are always considered by men to be too talkative, annoying, irritating, gossipy, and who do not know when to shut up even for their own good. Women are also portrayed in this riddle as spendthrifts who do not know how to run their family's finances. Lastly women are also shown to be very stupid as they put too much value on kissing. To them a kiss from their husbands or lovers is a demonstration of love and affection. But to men it may mean different things. According to this riddle joke, women also think that kissing can solve all fights and differences that might crop up among couples.

Why love is like a glass?

Riddle referent: If you break it, it is hard to fix and even if you managed to fix it, it will never be the same.

In this riddle joke, the creator shows the similarity between a glass and love. Love means loving and promising someone to be a good and faithful partner. But if one breaks his/her promises and becomes unfaithful, then his/her love life will not be the same anymore. Most couples split or lost their love because of not fulfilling the above reasons. Sometimes even though if the couple reconciles, their love would not be truly completed as the scars of hurt and betrayal would never be erased completely from the heart of someone who had

been hurt by the other. In the same way if a glass is broken, it would be very difficult to fix it and make it whole again. Sometimes even if we managed to fix it, cracks could always be seen on its surface.

Why is love like a rose?

Riddle referent: Because both blossom and then die slowly.

This is another riddle about love where it is compared to a rose. Rose is always regarded as the monarch of all flowers and a red rose is considered by lovers all over the world as a symbol of love. Natural roses are very beautiful to look at and always attract the eyes of people young and old alike. As mentioned above rose is always associated with love. But this kind of riddle joke is created by those who ridicule this kind of feeling and ridicule that love is associated with a rose because like roses, love is not lasting. At the beginning it will bloom and the lovers be passionate but the flame of love will die out slowly just like a wilting rose.

What is the hardest thing to do?

Riddle referent: Watching someone you love, loves somebody else.

This riddle talks about the pain and sorrow one has to undergo when he/she loves someone but the person being loved does not reciprocate the love. In such cases, the lover becomes the victim especially if that person happens to love someone else. In such a situation it becomes very painful and sad for that

person to see with his/her own eyes that the person he/she loves give her heart to another person.

Why is a mobile like women?

Riddle referent: They talk nonstop, cost a fortune, disturbs when you are busy, when you need them urgently they have no service.

This is another riddle where women are likened to a modern communication device. In this riddle women are portrayed as talkative, gossiping types who are very expensive to take care of. A woman is also shown in a very bad light here whose mission is only to create trouble and disturb men and who has no value to him.

Why are women like computer?

Riddle referent: Because no one really understands them, all your mistakes are stored in their memories and you will find yourself spending all your money on accessories for them.

In this riddle joke, women are likened to computers. Here, men alleged women as people who are very difficult to understand their moods and feelings. Women are also branded as unforgiving creatures who never fail to remind men of their mistakes whenever opportunities arise. They also accused women of being spendthrift whom their men have to waste all their money on

buying trivial things for them. This riddle also shows women only as decorated or trophy wives.

Why do girls get married and go to a stranger's home?

Riddle referent: Because they are blessed angels of the Almighty. After filling their home with colours of happiness they go away to colour other homes.

This riddle is believed to have been created by females themselves as it glorifies the girls' virtues. In the Khasi culture, the birth of a girl is considered to be a blessing in the family. This is because the Khasis are a matrilineal society where women are held in high esteem and considered equal with their male counterparts. Women are also considered to be the pride of the family and clan as they are supposed to be the ones who will increase the numbers of the clan as their children take their mothers' surname. According to Khasi culture a husband has to come and stay in his mother-in-law's home. But today because of the influence of the Western culture and education many women went to live with their husbands after marriage instead of following the age-old tradition. That is why in the above riddle, girls are shown as those who will bring life and happiness not only to their parents' home but even in their husband's.

Why did God create you before me?

Riddle referent: Because he wanted to make a rough sketch before making a masterpiece.

This is a very popular riddle jokes among the youngsters especially teenagers. The youngsters always like to irritate and tease their friends about their appearance. A person who usually sends this message considers himself/herself to be better looking than the receiver.

How to keep an idiot entertained?

Riddle referent: Press down ...

How to keep an idiot entertained?

Riddle referent: Press up ...

In this riddle joke, when the receivers receive it through SMS on their mobile phones, the first thing that most of the receivers do is to scroll down as they are curious to read the whole message. But only upon reading the whole message they realize that the joke was directed at them.

Why do not men often show their feelings?

Riddle referent: Because they do not have any.

The above riddle joke is probably created by females in response to many riddle jokes created at their expense. Here men are shown as those who do not have any emotion or feelings. According to the riddles, because of their lack of feelings and emotions, men are always very insensitive and behave like animals.

Why men are like computers?

Riddle referent: They are useless unless you turn them on.

They have lots of data but are still clueless

As soon as you pick one, a better model comes to the market.

This riddle referent is created as a result of verbal fights and duels between young boys and girls. Here men are portrayed as worthless fellows and inefficient who become useful to women only for physical relationship. They are portrayed as stupid who do not understand women intention at all even though they have been given enough chances. In this riddles the girls also said that as soon as they accept some men's proposal they will meet some one else who is better looking and have better prospective.

Why men are like toilet?

Riddle referent: Because they are always out of order, they stink, the nice one are always engaged and they consume large amount of liquids.

In the above riddle jokes women make fun of men by comparing to a toilet. Here the men are alleged to be unorganized, lazy etc who do not care for their physical hygiene and well being. And the few who happen to be good, efficient and desirable are always either married or are in a relationship with some other girls. It has also been observed that in Shillong and in other parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills, men are very fond of drinking alcohol which make the girls/women compare them to toilets which require large amounts of water to flush and clean them.

Why bachelors are like used cars?

Riddle referent: They are easy to find, cheap and unreliable.

In the above riddle, bachelors are ridiculed as people whom girl should not trust. Here, bachelors are said to be very easy to meet since there are plenty of unmarried men everywhere. The reason that there are many bachelors is that they are not husband material and unreliable. As such no woman wants to marry them.

Have you ever stood on one leg for an important work? Guess when?

Riddle referent: After bath, you stood on one leg to put on your underwear.

It is a common task for everybody to put on fresh underwear after bath. But many do not realize that they usually have to stand on one leg to put on their underwear.

How does a Sardarji teach his children the spelling of assassination?

Riddle referent: An ass behind another ass, behind that I and behind me the whole nation.

It has been observed by people all over the country that Sardarjis have always been made fun of and ridiculed by others. Many jokes have been created and even circulated through writing and modern communication system at the expense of this community. Sardarjis are always portrayed as stupid, inept,

and foolish. Sardarjis are originally from Punjab, but they can also be found all over the country. Even in Shillong many Sardarji families can be found to have settled here. There is even one locality known as Punjabi colony in Shillong. Those who have observed and have read about the jokes aimed at the socially inappropriate traits of this community create this riddle about the Sardarjis of Shillong.

As a boy, Sardarji went to school every day with his dog. But later they had to separate and Sardar went to school alone. Why?

Riddle referent: Because the dog graduated.

There are many reasons behind the Sadarjis jokes. Many people from other communities like to create jokes about this community. In the above riddle joke, the Sardar boy is shown as dull, unintelligent, that even his dog is more intelligent than him. But it should also be noted that the Sardarjis are very brilliant and rich, hard working and successful in their business and enterprises. Because of this many people from other communities are jealous of them. So people always tried to undermine the Sardarjis by making them look stupid and dumb through the joke they create about them.

Why did the Sardarji professor asked the plumber to come to his college?

Riddle referent: Because he wanted to check where the question paper is leaking.

This is yet another riddle joke about Sardarji teachers. Here, the Sardarjis are portrayed as very stupid who would call the plumber instead of a criminal investigator to look into the crime.

What frustrated the Sardarji when his wife delivered twins?

Riddle referent: He wonders who the father of the second child is.

Numerous jokes about Sardarjis can be found everywhere, like in books, newspapers, magazines, and today even through modern communication technology like in the internet and the mobile phones. In this riddle joke the Sardarjis were again portrayed as stupid men who cannot think logically that a woman can deliver twins.

What is Heaven and Hell on this earth?

Riddle referent: Heaven is when you have a German car, American salary, Chinese food and Indian wife. Hell is when your car is Chinese, food is German, wife is American and salary Indian.

German cars are always considered to be the best in the world. They hardly give any trouble to their owners. Compared to Indian currency, the rate of American dollar is much higher. Chinese food is very tasty and cheap and easy to prepare compared to continental dishes. Indian wife are considered to be good in housekeeping and in taking care of their family. On the other hand,

Chinese cars are cheap but unreliable, one or the other parts always get broken and are not lasting. German food is very expensive. An American wife is always considered to be expensive as she always wants the best facilities, comfort and luxury being born and brought up in a developed country. To have such a wife with an Indian salary is like hell because one cannot afford to give her all the comfort and luxury in life.

Chocolaty and crunchy outside ...

Creamy and whitish inside ...

Guess what is it?

Riddle referent: Cockroach.

The above riddle seems to refer to some delicious eatables when in reality it talks about some pests. Cockroaches are creatures that can be found everywhere and that can live on anything. The colour of the cockroach is similar to chocolates. Its body is a bit hard and crunchy. The inside of the cockroach is creamy and soft. That is why those who saw the similarity in the colour of the cockroach and the chocolate created this riddle.

What is the height of globalization?

Riddle referent: The death of Princess Diana.

The death of Princess Diana is joked by some as the height of globalization because Lady Diana was an English princess whose boyfriend was an Egyptian. According to the story, they crashed in a French tunnel, driving a

German car with a Dutch engine, driven by a Belgian who was high on Scottish whisky, followed closely by Italian paparazzi on Japanese motor cycles, treated by an American doctor, using Brazilian medicines. So according to those who create this riddle the death of Princess Diana is the height Globalization.

When Graham Bell invented the telephone, what was the first thing that he found?

Riddle referent: He had two miscalls from Rajnikant.

Rajnikant is an Indian film actor, media personality, and cultural icon. He made his debut as an actor in the National Film Award-winning motion picture *Apoorva Raagangal* (1975). He is one of the finest Indian actors and the Super Star from the South. He is the highest paid actor in Asia after Jackie Chan. He acted in Tamil, Telegu, Hindi, and English movies as well. His fans especially in the South India idolized him so much and are crazy about his movies. His mannerisms and stylized delivery of dialogue in films contribute to his mass popularity and appeal. Many also cite reasons for Rajinikanth's popularity as coming from his larger-than-life super-hero appearance in many films, supported by gravity-defying stunts and charismatic expressions, all while attempting to maintain modesty in real-life. Some of his fans even floated a political party in his name which Rajnikant later asked them to dissolve. It is said that in the South his fans are always ready even to die for him. This in turn led to the creation and circulation of many jokes about Rajnikant and his super power. After the release of his movie *Robot* in October 2010, Rajnikant

jokes replace the Santa jokes in popularity everywhere in India. Even in Shillong riddle jokes about Rajnikant are very much in circulation. It is said that eight of ten jokes are based on Rajnikant. In the above riddle, it is joked that even the telephone actually was not invented by Graham Bell but by Rajnikant. This is a satiric comment on the super star status of Rajnikant who is known as the King of cinema in the Southern States of India.

Why did the earthquake occur?

Riddle referent: Because Rajnikant was charging his mobile.

The fame and sway that Rajnikant has over his fan is so great that in their eyes he can never do anything wrong. To them he is an extraordinary man with super power. On 2011 especially during the month of September and October many tremors occurred in Shillong and other parts of the North-Eastern India. It has been joked the tremors were due to the reasons that Rajnikant was charging his mobile and kept it on vibration mode while doing so.

I need you....

I love you....

I can't go anywhere without you...

Riddle referent: My lovely shoes.

Shoes are a necessity in today's world as nobody can go out his house without them. These day people in the urban as well as in the rural areas wear shoes for comfort not for style anymore. Here in this riddle, shoes are referred to as someone's beloved whose lover totally depends on him/her for everything.

Why do Muslims hate pigs?

Riddle referent: Because pigs produce more babies than Muslims.

This riddle joke is aimed to ridicule the Muslim population. Traditionally Muslims do not eat pork as their religion prohibits them to do so. But those anti-Muslims groups created this riddle to make fun of their religious belief. It is said that Muslims never eat pork as they consider pork meat to be unclean. This belief that pork is unclean is derived from biblical story where it is recorded in Matthew Chapter eight verses twenty-eight to thirty-four, when Jesus commanded the evil spirits which resided inside two men to go away and leave those two, the evil spirits came out and entered into the bodies of a herd of swine. The evil spirits inside the swine made them to commit suicide by jumping off the cliff into the sea. Muslims are the biggest population in the world and their religion allow them to have many wives. Many people make fun of their increasing population. The Muslims are alleged of breeding like animals and numerous jokes about them have been generated by the anti-Muslim groups.

Who rules India now?

Riddle referent: India now ruled by...

Amma in the South,

Didi in the East,

Behenji in the north,

Aunty in the capital,

Madam at the centre

And wife at home.

It's a women's world

India is known as one country where gender bias is very much present in all spheres of life. According to many people this gender bias is evident even in the political system as well. But today it has been observed that women are trying to make their marks everywhere especially in the political arena. India these days witnesses many changes in the politics for some women have become heavyweight politicians and even leaders of their political parties. This can be seen in recent times where many states are ruled by women politicians. *Amma* in this riddle joke refers to Jayalalitha the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu whose party gained landslide victory in the recently concluded election in the state. *Didi* refers to Mamta Banerjee the leader of Trinamul congress in West Bengal. Mamta Banerjee's party was the one who wrested power from the Communist party who ruled the state of West Bengal for about thirty-four years in the last election. Mayawati, the present Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh is always addressed as *Behenji* by everybody. Sheila Dixshit, the chief Minister of Delhi is always referred to as *aunty* because of her old age. Sonia Gandhi is always sarcastically referred to as *Madam* by her rivals and the media as well. She is the leader of the Congress party and the chair person of United Progressive Alliance (UPA). But many of her rivals used to ridicule her by accusing her to be the one who calls all the shots in the government and that the Prime Minister is just a puppet in her hands. Even in many families now women become sole bread earners for their family and

have to shoulder all the responsibilities at home. Those who see these changing trends in politics, create this riddle to make fun at women empowerment in general and women politicians in particular.

What is the difference between a beautiful and a horror night?

Riddle referent: Beautiful night is when you sleep and hug your teddy bear and horror night is when it hugs you back.

This riddle joke is created to make fun of those people who always like teddy bears. These kinds of people always hug their teddy bears while going to sleep. Teddy bears are always considered as children's toys, but it has been observed that many grown up especially young women are still keeping teddy bears in their bed rooms. A woman still keeping teddy bear and hugging it to sleep is considered as being childish and immature.

What do fat woman do in summer?

Riddle referent: They stink.

The above riddle seems to suggest as if fat women do something interesting or disgusting during summer. But it has been observed that fat people perspire more during hot season than thin ones. Fat people because of their excess sweating, their bodies produce strong odour which if they do not take bath regularly, will stink of sweat due to bacteria. But this riddle targeted only fat women even though there are many fat men as well whose bodies always stink because of their unhygienic habits.

Why is marriage like a bath?

Riddle referent: Once you get used to it isn't hot anymore.

In the above riddle, marriage is likened to the hot bath. When one use hot water for bathing, at first the water will be very hot but after sometimes, it will become cool. In the same way when somebody gets married, at first the couple will be so passionate and hot for each other. But as the time passes by, the passion also seems to evaporate and become cool.

Why is marriage like a cage?

Riddle referent: Because one sees the birds outside desperate to get in and those inside desperate to get out.

In this riddle joke marriage is compared to a cage where birds are kept and marriage couples to birds. It has been observed by many that people who have attained marriageable age are always eager and want to get marriage very fast. But after marriage, when the passion started wearing off, especially if a person happened to have a wrong spouse, many people want to end their marriage and enjoy their single status again.

Why money does not grow on trees?

Riddle referent: The reason that money does not grow on trees is that banks own all the branches.

Banks like trees have branches. Banks always have their branches everywhere to help people to have easy access to them. Branches of different banks are

opened up mainly for money transaction. But only leaves can be found on the branches of trees.

What do you call a wife who is hot, sweet, intelligent, understanding, caring, never get jealous and a great cook?

Riddle referent: An Illusion.

The above riddle is created to ridicule women. It is believed that no woman can have all the qualities mentioned above as no one is perfect. Women are always projected by men as annoying, quarrelsome, dumb, irritating, jealous types etc. So it is said that a person who possesses all the qualities mentioned above cannot be a woman but just an illusion created by man for his own fantasy.

What is the similarity between students during exams and Amir Khan in Ghajini?

Riddle referent: Both suffer from short term memory loss and wrote answers on their bodies.

It has been observed by many teachers that those students who always study for their exams only at the eleventh hour tend to forget many important parts of their answers during exams. They always complained that their minds became blank and could not recall what they have learned. Some of these students even resort to many unfair means. One of the most common ways of cheating is that students usually write important gist of the answer they expect

to be asked during exams on their body especially on their palms, arms and thighs. In the Hindi movie *Ghajini*, Amir Khan, the main lead of the movie also suffered from amnesia as he was struck on the head by his assailants. To remember the important events that occur during this period of his life, Amir Khan also wrote whatever he remembers on his body. He tattooed the name of the persons who killed his girlfriend etc so that he could remember what had happened to him while suffering from short term memory loss.

What did the students in Bangalore, Delhi and Shillong say after coming out of exam halls?

Riddle referent: Bangalore students - Good.

Delhi students - Okay.

Shillong students - The chick sitting in front of me is so hot.

In this riddle jokes, the students in Shillong are portrayed as stupid and fickle minded who even while writing for their answers during their exams were not serious enough. While the students in Bangalore and Delhi are portrayed as serious, studious and intelligent, the students in Shillong are ridiculed as stupid and vain here because instead of concentrating on writing their answers during exams, they waste their precious time by admiring and ogling at girls sitting near them in the examination halls.

What is Obama's latest nightmare?

Riddle referent: Osama Bin Laden's body seen floating near the

Statue of Liberty, singing ... *Saat Samundar paar mein tere*

peeche peeche agaya. (Seven oceans I cross and followed you to reach here).

After Osama Bin Laden the most feared terrorist in the world was killed by the U.S. Elite Forces on May 2nd, 2011 at his hiding place at Abbottabad in Pakistan, many people all over the world especially in the United States of America shouted and danced in joy. It is said that his body was buried at sea. Many jokes about him have been created and circulated everywhere by anti-Al-Qaida groups. Even in Khasi and Jaintia hills also numerous riddle jokes about the death of Bin Laden had been circulated among the people. But one exception is the above riddle where the anonymous creator of this joke was poking fun at Barak Obama, the President of the U.S.A. In this riddle joke, Obama was ridiculed as having a nightmare seeing the corpse of Bin Laden floating around the water near the Statue of Liberty in New York singing the song *Saat Samundar paar mein tere peeche peeche agaya.* (Seven oceans I cross and followed you to reach here). This song is taken from the famous Hindi Movie *Vishwatma* that was released in the year 1992.

What is the similarity and difference between love and rain?

Riddle referent: Love and Rain are similar as both give us happiness. But the basic difference is that rain wets our body while love wets our eyes.

Rain is considered by many young people as romantic. This kind of feeling has also been observed even in Hindi and Khasi Movies where the couples in

movies are seen singing and dancing happily in the rain. In the same way love also makes people happy and filled them with joy. But according to the creator(s) of this riddle, when rain comes and if we have no shelter to protect us from it, our body and clothes will be fully wet. On the other hand love sometimes makes a person cries especially if they received so much happiness from their loved ones.

What is a mixed feeling?

Riddle referent: When you see your mother-in-law backing off a cliff in your new car.

Mother-in-laws are always considered by everybody to be scheming, interfering and intimidating. They always like to intervene in their children's personal affairs, even though they are not welcome to do so. They are also sometimes called monster-in-laws because of the authority and fear they yield and cause on their son-in-laws and daughter-in-laws as well. Even in cinema in Bollywood, Hollywood as well as in the Khasi films there are many movies that portrayed mothers-in-laws as fearsome, manipulating and intimidating persons. One such movie is *The Monster-in-law*, an English movie directed by Robert Luketic in 2005. The above riddle-joke aims to ridicule mother-in-law who are scary and intimidating and who like to poke their noses into everybody's affairs.

What is the reason behind the bulk SMS ban?

Riddle referent: The reason behind the bulk SMS ban is to stop Kalmadi Jokes.

When India hosted the Common Wealth Games (CWG) which held from 2nd to 30th October, 2010 at Delhi, the chairman of the Organizing committee of the Common Wealth Games, Suresh Kalmadi, an MP from Pune Constituency may have set a record of sorts not only for allegation of frauds and corruption but being the butt of many jokes. These jokes were spreading like wild fire across India and especially here in Shillong through the internet and SMS. A few days before the passing of the historical verdict on Ayodhya dispute on September 30th, 2010, the government of India banned the sending of bulk SMS all over country to prevent any instigating messages that could lead to communal clashes that may arise out of the Verdict. But this ban on bulk SMS has given rise to many humorous dig at Kalmadi and his groups in Shillong for their alleged involvement in various scams related to the Commonwealth Games.

How many contractors are required to a light bulb in a Delhi Common Wealth Games stadium?

Riddle referent: One million, one to change the bulb, and the rest nine lakhs ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine (999,999) to hold the ceiling.

This is another riddle joke relating to the Common Wealth Games, 2010 held in Delhi. In the above riddle jokes, contractors in Delhi are shown as stupid

and dumb. But the real reason for creating this joke was because just a few days before the opening ceremony of the common Wealth Games, the false ceiling in the area where VIPs are meant to seat caved in due to negligence and poor quality of work done by the contractors who were awarded contracts to construct the stadium.

Why did terrorists set to skip the CWG 2010?

Riddle referent: Terrorists set to skip CWG 2010 citing unlivable conditions and fear for their safety.

During the Common Wealth Games 2010 in Delhi, Intelligence agencies in India had warned the Government about the possible attacks during the Mega Games by Islamic terrorists. For this reason India had to deploy heavy security for the safety of all participants and officials who came from different parts of the erstwhile British Empire. Many countries like England, Australia, New Zealand and others had threatened to pull out of the Games just two weeks before the commencement of the Game due security problems and due to the dirty and unhygienic conditions of the Game village where the participants are supposed to stay. Even snakes were said to have been found in the bedrooms of one participant and the quality of the furniture were also alleged to be very poor that one participant was injured because his bed broke while he was sleeping. Because of many disasters due to the poor quality of work in many structures and facilities, the person(s) who created this riddle, sarcastically joke that even the terrorists who were likely to attack during the Game dare

not come and do so due poor living conditions and due to fear for their own safety.

Why did Prince Charles convince the Queen to come to Delhi for the opening ceremony?

Riddle referent: Prince Charles actively convinced the Queen to come to Delhi because this may be his last chance to become the King.

This riddle joke aims to poke fun at Prince Charles of Wales, the first in line to the throne of England. During the opening ceremony of the Common Wealth Games, Queen Elizabeth was supposed to inaugurate the Game. But she could not come to India due to ill health. So she sent her eldest son, Prince Charles to represent her instead. Around that time, Delhi was hit by dengue disease. So it is joked by many that Prince Charles tried to convince his mother to come to India, as he thought that if she get sick with dengue, she might never recover from it and ultimately dies. In such a case he would be able to succeed her to the throne. People are also making fun of Prince Charles that he is tired of waiting for his mother to die so that he could become the King of England.

What should the next edition of CWG be called?

Riddle referent: The next edition of the CWG will be called KWG or Kalmadi Wealth Games

The organization of the Common Wealth Games 2010 in India has led to embarrassment on the part of the Government and the Congress party.

Kalmadi and his fellow organizers have been accused of corruption and fraud to the tune of hundred crores of rupees. Kalmadi and his aides were arrested by the investigating agencies for their parts on corruption that left the Government with red face. Many of Kalmadi's rivals and enemies created and circulated many jokes about him; one is the above in which they said that the next edition of the Common Wealth Games should be called Kamaldi Wealth Games was circulated all around Khasi and Jaintia hills. They said that Kamaldi and his accomplices have been able to make themselves wealthy by misusing the money meant for the Games.

What is the difference between the Meghalaya Government and the Mafia?

Riddle referent: At least the Mafia is doing organized crimes.

In this riddle, anti-congress people are making fun of the Meghalaya United Alliance in the state. The Government comprises of the Indian National Congress party, its ally, the United Democratic Party and some independent MLAs. The present government led by the Congress party is besieged by many scams and allegations of corruption against the ministers and their alledged links to many coal mafia and militant groups especially in Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. This accusation against the Government has led to the creation and circulation of such riddle jokes all over the hills where the state Government is compared to the Mafia organization and they joked that the Mafia is a more organized group than the Government.

What are three things a woman can do that a man can't?

Riddle referent: Have a baby, have her periods and get laid when she is dead.

The physiology of man is very different from that of woman. This riddle joke is a kind of satire on men. Women are perceived as a life giver, and created to satisfy the needs of men. The riddle referent in the above riddle also reflects on how a woman's role is perceived in the society. The acknowledgment of a woman being an equal partner to man is made only in the substandard role such as only giving birth to a baby. It has also been observed that there were instances reported about women who were raped even after they had been murdered.

Which is the longest toilet in the world?

Riddle referent: Indian Railway Tracks.

The railways tracks in India are joked to be longest toilet in the world. Anybody travelling by train has to relieve himself/herself inside the train's toilet through a commode which releases the human excretion on the railway tracks itself. Due to this reason, the railway tracks all over the country are very dirty and smell of urine and human excretion. Even railway stations are not free from this. That is why people who have observed the unhygienic condition of the railways tracks said that the railway track is the longest toilet in the world since we can use it from Kanya Kumari in the southern tip of India to Jammu and Kashmir in the northern most part of India.

Tell me is it going in?

Yeah... is it hurt?

Oh... yeah...ouch!! It hurts

Ok I will put it slowly now...

Still hurts?

Yeah... yeah... it's painful.

Then I'll try another one.

Guess what is it?

Riddle referent: Try the other shoe now.

In the above riddle joke the descriptive elements seems to refer to something risqué. But the riddle referent is a person trying on shoes but which is a little smaller in size before buying. It has been observed that in Shillong the sales persons are always very courteous. They always help the customers when they try on new shoes by putting the shoes on the feet of the customers.

What is the height of competition?

Riddle referent: A guy peeing beside a waterfall.

The guy peeing beside the waterfall is said to be the height of competition. This is because a man always has to stand while peeing and when a man pees while standing, it looks like a miniature waterfall. Those who saw this similarity create this riddle to poke fun at men.

What is the difference between a Demand Draft and a Cheque?

Riddle referent: Demand Draft is like a wife who is being trusted but Cheque is like girlfriend which can bounce at any time.

Demand Draft is one of the most reliable modes of money transfer. The cheque however cannot be fully trusted as it can be misused and sometimes even bounce. Wife like a Demand Draft can be fully trusted by her husband. He always takes her for granted. But a man cannot trust his girlfriend fully like he trusts his wife and she cannot be taken for granted. A wife being married to her husband does not have the liberty to just walk away from him any time she wants. But a girlfriend can leave him high and dry any time she wishes when she did not want to continue the relationship anymore.

Who are the biggest guns in most corporations?

Riddle referent: Those who have never been fired.

In almost all corporations, those employees who are good, efficient and hard working always climb the ladder of success fast and steadily. But many whom the bosses considered being lazy and not up to the mark always got fired and their services terminated. So those who used to get fired from their jobs are compared to smaller guns but those who always remain in their jobs and get promotion are compared to big guns.

What are calories?

Riddle referent: Calories are those little bastards which get into our wardrobes at night and sew our clothes tighter.

In today's world physical appearance is given utmost importance and the size zero figures are idolized especially among girls. Being fat is considered unappealing and repulsive by both men and women. Excessive intake of calories leads to the fattening of the body. This is the reason why many girls who are conscious of their appearance resort to unhealthy dieting and other methods which are not good for them. Bastards as we know are not accepted in the society. People always tend to look down upon them. In this riddle, calories are compared to bastards as many girls never want to eat food that is rich in calories as they are afraid to gain weight. This trend of consuming less calories food or nothing at all leads to malnutrition and other diseases like anorexia or bulimia.

Which state in India has the largest English speaking population?

Riddle referent: Day time ... Kerala

Night time after two pegs ... Meghalaya.

This is an ethnic riddle joke which makes fun of the two communities in India. Kerala is a state where Malayalees are the original settlers of the state and the Khasis live in Meghalaya. Kerala has the highest literacy rate in the country. But it has been observed that the natives even though literate many cannot speak English. In Meghalaya, English is the official language of the state and the medium of instruction in schools. English is also the link language

between the different communities living in the state. Like any other ethnic community in the North East India, Khasi men are very fond of liquor. At night after drinking alcohol every drunkard started showing off his knowledge of English language by talking in broken English. Those who have observed this incident created this riddle to ridicule both the communities.

If you have three apples and four oranges in one hand and four apples and three oranges in the other hand, what would you have?

Riddle referent: Very big hands.

This is a very tricky riddle parody. Because it seems to talk about what a person holds in his hands. But the answer is very much unexpected. In the above riddle, the descriptive elements seem to refer to the fruits held in one's hand. But the actual answer is that if a person can hold these many apples and oranges in each hand, then the person would be having very big hands.

Why there are no Raymond's show rooms in Pakistan?

Riddle referent: Because there is no complete man!!!!

This riddle joke is targeting the Pakistani male population. Raymond Company manufactures and sells men clothing especially fabric for suits. The company often markets its brand through advertisements where a man wearing Raymond brand suit is referred to as a complete man. *Raymond the complete man* is the theme of the company to market its brand. It is said that the Raymond Company does not have any showrooms or outlets in Pakistan to

sell its brand. So Pakistani men have been ridiculed and become the butt of many jokes about being incomplete men. Indians are creating this kind of riddle which explains that as there is no *complete man* in Pakistan, so Raymond Company could not open its store there. Unlike in India where you can find complete men everywhere wearing Raymond suits.

Purported Obscene riddles

Many riddles circulated through Short Message Service by people are found to fall under a special subtype called the purported obscene riddles. In this category, the descriptive element(s) suggests something risqué, usually having sexual connotation, but the answer is quite innocent and tame.

When skin meets skin

Hair meets hair

And balls disappear?

Riddle referent: It's when you blink your eyes.

This is a very popular riddle among the Khasi youth. The description in the riddle seems to suggest something very risqué and to have sexual connotation, but in fact the answer is very innocent. When we blink our eyes, our eye lashes and the skin that cover our eyes come into contact and the eyeballs are not seen.

I am 7 inches long; I have hair at my base.

When I move in and out of the hole, white fluids come out.

Who am I?

Riddle referent: The Toothbrush.

The above riddle falls under the purported obscene riddle category. Here in this riddle the descriptive elements seem to refer to the private part of a male. But in fact, it refers to a toiletry item, a toothbrush. The hole in this riddle refers to the mouth of a person and the white fluids to the saliva mixed with toothpaste. The simple act of brushing one's teeth here seems to refer to sexual intercourse.

Hey can we romance tonight?

I am in the mood today....

Let's get wild....

Lots of kissing and biting

Interested?

Want to know who am I?

Riddle referent: The mosquito.

In this riddle, the mosquito is compared to somebody who is in the mood to get intimate with some girls. A mosquito biting someone at night is being compared to a man kissing and giving love bites to a girl during their love making.

He came at night

Explored my body

Got on top of me

Touched and bit me
He sucked and swallowed
When he is satisfied
He left
I was hurt.

Riddle referent: The bloody mosquito.

Mosquito riddles are very popular among the Khasi youth. This may be due to the reason that mosquitoes can be found everywhere in the hills. In this riddle, the mosquito is compared to a sadistic lover who comes to his partner only at night to satisfy his sexual urge. But once he is satisfied he leave his partner alone and never bother to see whether he has hurt her physically or emotionally by his callousness or not.

Is there a place for me in your heart?
I am coming tonight and I'll make you excited
We will enjoy by dancing and jumping together
Are you ready to take me into your heart?

Riddle referent: Heart attack.

This riddle joke seems to talk about a lover who wants to propose to his beloved and to make her happy. He promised to make her night an excited one by dancing and jumping around with her. But the descriptive elements of this riddle actually refer to a person having a heart attack.

I have one, you have one
Your mother uses your father's one
A married lady would acquire one
But a divorce lady would lose her one
The Pope does not use his one
Lord Krishna has a long one
Arnold has a longer one
Michael J. Fox has shorter one
How long is your one?
Which one is your preferred one?

Riddle referent: Your surname.

The above riddle sounds very sexual and risqué as it seem to refer to the male private part. But actually it answer is very tame as it refers to the surname of a person. This riddle talks about those who belong to the patriarchal society. And it is to be noted that the Khasis are a matrilineal society. But it has been observed that this riddle is very popular in Shillong especially among the Khasis. This is due to the reason that Shillong is a melting pot and the educational hub of North Eastern India where people from different communities come to live here. Because of this intermingling between the Khasis and the other people from different parts of the country, the riddle has become very popular even among the Khasis.

What four letter word of English start with *f* and ends with *k*?

And if a man cannot use it he uses his hands?

Riddle referent: The Fork.

In the above riddle, the descriptive elements seem to be very sexual as it seems to refer to sexual intercourse. But the answer is very innocent as it refers to fork which people usually use for eating food. In Khasi and Jaintia hills people always use to eat with their hands. But today we have seen many people especially young people in imitation to the Western culture started using spoon and fork while eating instead of their hands.

The word that start with *f* and end with *k* and all the young boys and girls are getting hook to it.

Riddle referent: Facebook.

This is another riddle joke that has been very much in circulation among many Khasi youngsters. The descriptive element in the above riddle seems to suggest to some sexual activities. But in fact it refers to the most popular social network site among the Khasi youth that is, the Facebook. With the launching of the 3G network by many mobile phone companies in Meghalaya, internet facilities have become accessible to everybody even in the remote parts of the state. Due to this now all the young people have access to the internet and especially Social Network sites for chatting and connecting with friends.

What does a guy have that is six inches long and proves that he is a man?

Riddle referent: His birth certificate.

The descriptive elements of this riddle seem to suggest something obscene and sexual. It seems to refer to the male genitals. But in reality it refers to his birth certificate. A birth certificate usually printed on a paper that is about six inches long and it is a proof to a person's gender. Today in Meghalaya birth certificate is a must especially for applying jobs and for other purposes as well. It has been observed that there are always long queues in the Deputy Commissioners' offices in the state where people stand for applying birth certificate.

She is sweet....

She is hot.....

She always needs a lip kiss

Who is she?

Riddle referent: The Morning tea

The above riddle seems to refer to a sweet, sexy and passionate woman who always needed to be kissed by her man. But the answer to the riddle is quite simple. Everybody likes to have a cup of tea in the morning after getting up from bed. It has been observed that there are many people who cannot function properly without their morning tea.

To make it straight, she pulls it.

To make it stands she rubs it

To make it stiff she licks it

To let it in she pushes it.....

Riddle referent: The woman threading needle.

This riddle joke falls under the Purported Obscene category. Here, this riddle seems to suggest something very vulgar and sexual as in a woman making love to a man. The descriptive elements of this riddle seem to refer to something indecent. But in reality, the riddle talks about a person most probably a seamstress who tries to put the thread into the eye of a needle for stitching purposes.

In which place men and women both have curly hair?

Riddle referent: Chi ... chi ... your thought is so vulgar ... It is in Africa.

The descriptive element in this riddle sounds risqué and seems to suggest to the sexual organs of both men and women but the answer to this riddle is Africa. The African hairs are very distinctive as all of them have thick and curly hair.

I want to suck you....

Want to move my tongue all over you...

Want to feel you in my mouth....

Riddle referent: That is how you eat an ice cream.

The above riddle falls under the purported obscene riddle. The descriptive elements seem to suggest to some love making scenes between two persons.

When in reality, it talks about the way how we usually eat the ice cream. Ice cream is very popular in Shillong and other parts of the state as well especially during summer.

It goes in dry and comes out wet
The longer it is in, the stronger it gets
We can have it in bed just you and me
It is not what you think. What is it?

Riddle referent: It is the tea bag.

Tea was introduced to us by the British. But today it has become part and parcel of our culture. Khasi people always offer tea to their guests as a sign of hospitality and goodwill. Tea is made by putting tea leaves in the hot water. Today teabags are also very popular among the Khasis. Brewing tea and having bed tea seem to suggest to some sexual acts.

Real Obscene Riddles

In real obscene riddles the riddle referent always have sexual connotation.

What is the height of laziness?

Riddle referent: The couple adopting a child.

The above riddle falls under the real obscene category. Here, the childless couple who adopt a child is ridiculed as those who are the laziest people on earth as they are alleged to be so lazy even to get intimate to conceive a child of their own.

What is the definition of suspicion?

Riddle referent: A nun doing press up in the cucumber field.

This riddle aims at making fun of nuns. It is a common knowledge that nuns have to observe vows of celibacy. But it is believed that all human being have their own sexual urges which they need to release. In such cases even those who lead a celibate life also have the same sexual urges which they need to control in accordance with their vows. In almost every culture, cucumber is a symbolic representation of phallus. So a nun doing press up in the cucumber field is a riddle which is allegedly aim to show the nun in poor light and suspicious manner.

Why is a good teacher like Shakira's short skirt?

Riddle referent: Because a good teacher will not cover the whole of syllabus but only the most important portion.

This is a riddle joke created by those who have watched and seen that Shakira, one of the most popular singers today always wear very short skirts. During the last World Cup Football that was held from 11th June to 11th July 2010 in South Africa, Shakira, a Columbian singer, was chosen to sing the theme song at the Opening ceremony of the World Cup Football. While singing she was wearing a short skirt designed with strings like material which split apart and rode up when she danced and jumped. Those who created this riddle compare good teachers to Shakira's short skirt that barely covered her decency. As to them a good teacher is the one who teaches only the important portions of the syllabus and leaves the irrelevant and unimportant ones.

What is the similarity between a woman's breast and a park?

Riddle referent: Actually both were designed for children but enjoyed by adults.

This riddle joke actually targets the male population. Women are always encouraged to breastfeed their baby, as a mother's milk is considered to be healthy for children. Scientists have also proved that women who breastfeed their children have less risk of getting breast cancer. A woman's bosom is meant for nourishing and feeding the baby. Parks also are usually constructed to amuse children. However it is a universal fact that the woman's breasts always capture man's fantasy. In the same way even though parks are mainly meant for children, still it has been observed that men also like to visit and spend quality time sitting with their dates or just ogling at girls who come to the parks. This could be seen here in Shillong like in Lady Hyder Park and Ward's Lake, where you can find more adults in these parks than children.

What did the elephant say to the naked man?

Riddle referent: How do you breathe through that thing?

This obscene riddle joke compares man's genital to the trunk of the elephant. It is said that the sexual organ of man is similar to the trunk of an elephant. Those who saw the similarity create this riddle to ridicule men.

Why is a salesman so jealous of prostitutes?

Riddle referent: You got it, you sell it, and you still get it.

In this riddle joke, salespersons are making fun of by the others. When a salesman sells his merchandise, he would never be able to keep it back with him. But a prostitute can sell herself to any man to perform sexual services for a certain period. After the expiry of the fixed time, she can sell her service to another person.

What do ugly girls wear in their lockets?

Riddle referent: A picture of a candle.

This riddle joke ridiculed and targeted the girls, especially those who are not pretty and who have passed their prime but still unmarried. A candle has always been identified as a symbolic representation of the male sexual organ. Usually people especially girls used to keep pictures of their boyfriends or husbands inside the locks of their lockets. But in the case of the sexually frustrated women, they are ridiculed that they put the picture of the candle instead of their lovers as no men want to have them.

Why did the Indian Government not make the postal stamps of Bipasha Basu?

Riddle referent: Because they fear that men would start licking on the wrong side.

Bipasha Basu is a former super model of India and a famous Bollywood actress. She is considered to one of the sexiest women in India and is known for taking up bold roles in the Hindi movies. She has captured the fantasy of many men in India and abroad as well. With her good looks, well toned body

and sex appeal as it is common with many celebrities like Rajnikant and others, many jokes about Bipasha Basu also circulate through the internet and SMS. The above riddle is a joke with sexual connotation related to Bipasha Basu. It is joked that the reason why the Government of India did not make postal stamps in honour of Bipasha is because with her sex appeal, many men would go crazy seeing her picture on the postal stamp and it would encourage inappropriate behaviour.

What do a hooker and 108 have in common?

Riddle referent: Both are opened all the time.

In this riddle joke, a hooker is compared to 108 services rendered by Emergency Management and Research Institute (EMRI). Hookers can be found everywhere especially in towns and cities across the country. Even in Shillong and other places in Meghalaya, there were many instances where the operation of flesh trade has been reported in newspapers and in electronic media as well. 108 Emergency services have been launched in the state of Meghalaya since 15th November, 2008. The service rendered by the EMRI all over Meghalaya is laudable. EMRI centres are opened to the public twenty four hours a day, in order to be able to help those who are in need of their help. Hookers are also said to offer their services to their customers at any time of the day. So those who see this similarity about the time of their services, create this riddle joke.

Which boy is allowed to get into the girl's bath room and touches her everywhere while she is taking bath?

Riddle referent: Lifebuoy.

This riddle has sexual connotation, where Lifebuoy soap is compared to a boy who gets the opportunity to touch the different parts of the girl's body.

Why was Kate disappointed on her wedding night?

Riddle referent: Because she thought that William had twelve inches.

The wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton that was solemnized on April 29th, 2011 was one of the most talked about wedding all over the world. Many people from across the world gathered at London to witness the Royal wedding with their own eyes. But there are also many anti-Royal people who tried to make fun of the newlywed royal couple by creating and circulating many jokes about them. One such riddle joke is given above that was circulated in Shillong which says that on her wedding night Kate, the new bride was not happy because she thought that William being of royal blood, his sexual organ would be bigger than the common men. But to her disappointment, she found out that his too is the same like any ordinary man.

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Chapter VI

Conclusion

It is obvious from the preceding chapters that verbal art of the Khasis continues to exist in the oral tradition and in the context of Khasi folklore; only a small portion of folklore materials has been documented or written down. A large chunk of the materials are still to be unearthed and documented in a scholarly way. In the course of investigation, it is found out that the collection and documentation of Khasi folklore materials were first carried out by missionaries, colonial civil servants and the early educated Khasi elites. The works of the early collectors have paved the way and contributed tremendously to the growth of Khasi folklore studies.

The previous chapters have also been concerned with showing how Khasi riddles have undergone a gradual but significant change. The investigation has brought to light the position of the riddle among the Khasis. It has provided evidence that the Khasis do have a good repertoire of traditional riddles a corpus of which have been slowly replaced by modern ones. The conventional art and practice of riddling also has declined considerably. There are many factors that have been responsible for the decline in the practice and creating of Khasi traditional riddles and the emergence of newer and modern ones.

The study of Khasi riddles reveals that the Khasi community, despite having a good repertoire of riddles generally believes that they do not have a good collection of the same. This belief has been responsible for not attracting any

scholarly attention to this genre and therefore the documentation and study of this genre is negligible. This in turn has largely convinced the collectors and researchers that riddles are not worthy of serious collection and study. Moreover as riddles are very short in form and are often perceived to be used for entertainment only among the Khasis, so the people tend to believe that they do not serve any purpose save that of being a juvenile form of recreation. The people do not acknowledge that riddles though they are very brief in structure, yet they can act as a catalyst to sharpen the mind and test the wit and creativity of an individual.

The other genres of Khasi oral literature have been documented since the nineteenth century by many scholars but the same cannot be said to be true of the riddle. So the popularity of riddles cannot be compared with the other genres of folk literature such as the tale and proverb. For instance proverbs are commonly shared in the sense that their applicability is more or less appreciated and understood. Riddles in many cases are idiosyncratic and arbitrary often being coined, used, applied and improved through the individual agency. Therefore a limited applicability does not open up the scope for a shared experience and in this manner an idiosyncratic and arbitrary riddle dies out quickly and is abandoned.

In this study, the scholar has also observed that riddles constitute a universal art. But unlike the other communities where riddles have religious connotation, among the Khasis, riddles are used purely as a form of entertainment and contest among the youth and children to amuse themselves

and to test their wit and previous knowledge to the answers of riddles that are put to them. No evidence has been unearthed to show otherwise that riddles are used for any serious purposes except as a kind of amusement and a pastime among the youngsters and children.

Traditionally Khasi riddles derived from close observation of nature and things around them. This we may assume is due to the fact that the Khasis in the past lived in the midst of nature. They adored and treated nature with respect and reverence and were so intimate with nature and it was always a source of inspiration for them. But with the advent of modern science and technology, there has been rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization all over Khasi and Jaintia hills which greatly affect the use of riddling as a verbal art. Due to urbanization many people have lost touch with nature and this in turn led to the dwindling of the practice of riddling and creation of riddles that are related to nature.

Most Khasi traditional riddles are also found to refer to bodily function. This shows that those creators of Khasi traditional riddles always compared things found in nature and those around them and with bodily functions. Riddles are also found to derive from close observation of the habits, customs and tradition of the Khasis. The study also shows that there are riddles whose origin could be traced back to many Khasi folktales. Another finding is that Khasi riddles are mostly oppositional and metaphorical in nature.

In the course of investigation it has been found out that apart from traditional riddles, there are many riddles which do not fit into what is called the

traditional category. The contact of the Khasis with the outsiders especially the British in the nineteenth century had ushered in tremendous changes in their lives. For the first time the Khasis came into direct contact with outside forces which brought drastic changes with regards to their lifestyle, religious and cultural practices. The bearing of the western influences on the Khasis could be seen in all spheres of life. Even riddles that the Khasis have created since their first contact with the colonial powers bear testimony to this. It has been observed that there are scores of riddles that have evolved after the colonization of these hills by the British. This can be called modern riddles as they have been created only after the British came to the Khasi hills and the descriptive elements of such riddles reflect the colonial influences in the day to day life of the Khasis.

The present study on riddles also reveals that Khasi riddles are closely related to other genres of folk literature such as folk poetry, dialogic games, jokes and verbal dueling. Khasi folk poetry especially *phawar* are full of metaphors. *Phawar* which are a good example of Khasi poetry, play a very significant role in the religious, socio and cultural life of the Khasis. *Phawar* sung during archery competitions are not only sung to entertain the audience but to forward cogent argument to the Mother Decree in order to triumph over their rivals. It has been observed that many of these *phawars* on closer examination do contain riddle elements in the versification system which on deeper analysis reveals the metaphorical structure of the typical riddle. The study of dialogic folk games that have been found to be played by children in the past as well as at present brings out an interesting link between riddles and dialogic games. In

most of the dialogic games that has been studied, it is seen that traces of riddle element could be found in them. This study also brings into focus the existence of the inter-genre such as riddle jokes and verbal dueling. These verbal dueling and riddle jokes are found to take place mostly among people belonging to different regions or villages and among youth of opposite sexes who were trying to ridicule and out do each other.

The practice of riddling usually happens to take place among children and youngsters. Riddling among children particularly used to take place in social gatherings, playground and sometimes even in schools among friends and classmates. The researcher has witnessed such practices among students in the *War-Jaintia* areas as well as among children in Shillong, where she conducted investigations. It has been observed that in many cases the children in the rural areas can still connect with nature as many of the riddles they have asked and in some cases, created are related to nature. It has also been observed that many of the riddles the youth and children use these days are what we called modern or contemporary riddles as they reflect the Western influence in their day to day life and related to contemporary issues and modern technology.

The advent of the electronic technology has brought radical and drastic changes to the life of the Khasis. Modern communication system like the internet and the mobile phones has led to the emergence of a new medium for the spread of folklore. Some folklorists were of the opinion that technology tends to eliminate certain types of folklore, but their fears and doubts turned out to be baseless as the internet and mobile phones (SMS) in general have

proved to be a fertile ground for the spread and development of folklore. During the research it has been observed, that many traditional genres of folklore like urban legends, jokes, chain letters, rhymes and riddles especially riddles jokes and sexual riddles continue to thrive through modern communication system. Today the traditional practice of riddling as a conventional verbal art is dwindling but riddling through the internet and short message service is growing vigorously as this has piqued the curiosity and interest of the people. This in turn plays a very important role in the transformation of this genre.

Today most of what we called riddles are not true riddles in the strict sense of the term. But they do contain elements of riddles in them. What we know as riddles today are usually conundrums, riddle jokes and riddle parodies. Short message service and internet riddles can also be called contemporary riddles. These riddles are very popular among the youth and student community who are more tech savvy compared to older generations. The riddle texts that are circulated through the internet and SMS are considered to be genuine items of folklore because they are anonymous and collective products, and even if we can check the sender of these texts, it does not necessarily mean that the sender is the author or creator of the riddle text in question. And in the course of transmission of these riddle texts, some alteration always take place in most of the texts before the same is transmitted to others. This in turn led to existence of different variants which is one of the characteristics of folklore.

It has been observed that the study of the internet and SMS riddles that are in circulation among the Khasis do not confine only to those typical riddles that

are related to the community, but also those concerning other cultures and events that occur through out the globe. Most of the riddles circulated through modern communication system are collected from Khasis belonging to different professions and different age groups. They are mostly what we called riddle jokes which were mainly created to ridicule and tease people from opposite sexes or individuals. Pretended and real sexual riddles are also found to be very popular and mind boggling.

Khasi riddles have undergone a significant change not only in their forms but also in their contents. Khasi traditional riddles are different from modern ones in many ways. One of the differences is the mode of transmission. Traditionally up to the last decade of the twentieth century, Khasi riddles are transmitted orally. There was no evidence that Khasi riddles have seen the light of the day in print. But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, riddles are mostly transmitted through the modern communication system, namely the internet and mobile phone technology. Messaging through e-mail and mobile phone started characteristically as a youth custom. The emergence and widespread practice of sending message enmasse made the internet and mobile phone technology a new medium for the spread and popularity of riddles.

Today the practice of riddling as a conventional verbal art is dwindling considerably. The popularity of traditional riddles also can not be compared to those of modern ones especially those created and circulated through modern communication devices. Modern riddles especially those which are funny and

tricky in forms and content appeal to the youth greatly as they are more identified with them and can understand the metaphors and messages in them better than those traditional ones. But still we can see that riddling as a verbal art still subsists as an oral tradition among the Khasis. The invasion of modern technology has greatly affected the conventional practice of this verbal art, but it cannot stamp it out altogether.

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2. Promises are Meant to be Broken: An Oicotype Study of Two Tales, in *Orality and Beyond: A North-East Indian Perspective*, published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2008.
3. Working the Ravines: Bamboo Drip Irrigation System in Betel Leaf Plantation. *Annual Journal of Society for Education, Tradition and Unity (SETU) Sambalpur University, Orissa, India.*2009.
4. Chief Becomes the King: Importing the Feudal Paradigm, *Journal of Indian Folkloristics*, Vol. IX. No. 1/2. 2007 (N.S.), published by Zooni Publications, Mysore.
5. Traditional and Modern Khasi Riddles: An Analytical Study, paper to be published by E-Journal *Folklore and Folkloristics*.

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1. *Promises are meant to be Broken: An Oicotype Study of Two Tales*, paper presented, at the National Seminar on *Orality and Beyond: A North-East Indian Perspective* organized by the Sahitya Academy, 2005.
2. *From Chief to King: The Discourse of Homogeny*, paper presented at the National Seminar on *Oral Discourse and Ancient Knowledge Systems of North-East India*, organized by Indian Folklore Congress, North- Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India, 20th-22nd September 2006.

3. *Working the Ravines: Bamboo Drip Irrigation System in Betel Leaf Plantation*, paper presented at the National Seminar organized by the Indian Folklore Congress, Sambalpur University, Orissa, India, 17th-19th December 2007
4. *The Interface of History and Orality: An Analytical Study of Chohnia of War-Jaintias*, paper presented at the National Seminar on *Folklore and Indian social Discourse*, organized by Indian Folklore Congress, Kuppam University, Andhra Pradesh, India. 18th-20th December, 2008.
5. *Traditional and Modern Khasi Riddles: A Study in Transition*, paper presented at the National Seminar on *Folklore of North-East India*, organized by Indian Folklore Congress, Manipur University, Manipur, India, 16th-18th November, 2009.
6. *Chohnia and Historical Traces: The Case of an Erstwhile Jaintiapur Kingdom* paper presented at the National seminar on *Doing Ethno History in North-east India: New approaches and Perspectives*, organized by the Indian Council for Historical Research, at Gauhati University, Assam, India, 19th-20th February, 2010.
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I hereby declare that all the information furnished above is true to the best of my knowledge.


Rimika Lanong

To,

Date: 11.02.2012

Rimika Lanong
DCCS,
NEHU,
Shillong.

Dear Rimika Lanong,

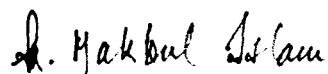
I am to inform you that your article, titled "*Traditional and Modern Khasi Riddles: An Analytical Study*" is accepted for the e-journal FOLKLORE AND FOLKLORISTICS. This will be uploaded in December 2011 issue.

The journal is uploaded by National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai. The CD of the said issue of the journal has already been sent to NFSC. They will upload it very soon.

Thanks for your valuable contribution to FOLKLORE AND FOLKLORISTICS.

You can use this letter for official purpose.

Best wishes.



Dr. Sk. Makbul Islam

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