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 Beitrage 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).

\begin{quote}
*U don shibun ki khmat, um dei u ksuid;*
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
*U shong halor ka khet bad u phong pansngiat, um dei u syiem.*
\end{quote}

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 khlu,*

*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 dangsamla, u shu khaprib 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 startd 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 khaprib 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 startd 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.

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Riddle referent: Head.

This is an oppositional riddle. The first descriptive element *u wei u syngkhlieh* (one pillow) is contradictory *ki thi ah 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 thi ah 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 mynnsngi* (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* (whene 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 wherever 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 pynhabriew 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 pynhabriew 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.

\[
\begin{align*}
Ka\ don\ ki\ kti\ &\ tangba\ kam\ lah\ ban\ bat, \\
Ka\ don\ ki\ bniat\ &\ tang\ ba\ kam\ lah\ ban\ dait, \\
Ka\ don\ ki\ kjat\ &\ tangba\ kam\ lah\ ban\ iaid, \\
Ka\ don\ ki\ khmat\ &\ tangba\ kam\ lah\ ban\ iohi.
\end{align*}
\]

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 \textit{ka don ki kti} (hands she has) is in opposition to \textit{tangba kam lah bat} (but cannot hold). In the second pair, \textit{ka don ki bniat} (teeth she has) is contradictory to the descriptive element \textit{tangba kam lah ban dait} (but she cannot bite). The third pair, \textit{ka don ki kjat} (feet she has) contradicts with the descriptive element \textit{tangba kam lah iaid} (she cannot walk). And in the final pair, the descriptive element, \textit{ka don ki khmat} (eyes she has) is in contradiction to \textit{tangba kam lah ban iohi} (but cannot see). A doll being an inanimate thing does not have life.
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 pymynsaw 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 miei lah kwah suh thliew.

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 pymnih 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.

\textit{Ka don tang kawei ka shkor baheh napdeng ka met jong ka.}

Riddle referent: \textit{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.

\textit{Ka ksiar najrong, ka rupa napoh.}

Riddle referent: \textit{U riewhadem.}

Translation

Golden outside, silver inside.

Riddle referent: The maize.

In this riddle, the covers of maize are referred to as \textit{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 nalor, shet ia kaba shapoh,  
Bam ia kaba nalor 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.

\[ U \text{ pynmih da u nampliang na idong ban ialeh ia ki nongshun jong u.} \]

Riddle referent: \textit{U ngap}.

Translation

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

Riddle referent: The bee.

This is a metaphorical riddle. \textit{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 \textit{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
(\textit{nampliang}) of the Khasis.

\[ Ka \text{ kup ia ka knup jong ka naduh dang rit haduh ban da iap.} \]

Riddle referent: \textit{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 thyilliej 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.

\[ Ka \text{ long ka ba shlur bha; ka don artylli ki kti kiba jrong. } \]
\[ Kam \text{ ju sheptieng ban tur sha ki nongshun jong ka. } \]

Riddle referent: \textit{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.

\[ Ar \text{ ngut ki khun synrap, ki ia knieh beit mano ban iaid sha khmat. } \]

Riddle referent: \textit{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.

\[ U \text{ tang } shu \text{ mih na kpoh } ka \text{ kmie, } u \text{ lah kura } ia \text{ ka.} \]

Riddle referent: \textit{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.

\[ Sanphew \text{ ngut ki khynnah ki phong ki tupia kiba } ia \text{ sryiem kumjuh.} \]

Riddle referent: \textit{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.
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.

\[
\text{Ka khlieh bad ki kjat kum ki jong ka sim,}
\]
\[
\text{Ka tdong kum ka tdong dohkha.}
\]

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.

\[
\text{U mih snuih na jrong.}
\]
\[
\text{Hapdeng don ka thliew kaba sma pyut haduh katta katta.}
\]

Riddle referent: U kwai pyut.
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 ker kut 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 lai 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 lai 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 raikho, 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 khyn dew 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.*

Translation

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.

\[\begin{align*}
Kynthei & \text{ ba } khraw \text{ bor} \\
Ba & \text{ phong tang da ki sopti nar} \\
Teng & \text{ teng ba saw} \\
Teng & \text{ teng ba rong soh} \\
Ha & \text{ ki kti ka rah ki nap nar} \\
Ban & \text{ ialeh ia ki nongshun.}
\end{align*}\]

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. In 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 sngaik kpo uialeh 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 tylly 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.

\textit{Ka rah ia ki lbong jong ka shajrong tang shu treikam.}

Riddle referent: \textit{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.

\textit{Ka tang shu tymmen ka lah kiew niangmong ki ngap.}

Riddle referent: \textit{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.
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.

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).
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 is inhales and exhales the smoke.

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 it 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.
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.

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.
*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 liuir 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, ham 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 khohshiew.*

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 *khohshiew* 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 ungaptung 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 straightforward. 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 startd.

_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 tympew.*

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
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 Jantias) 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 respects. 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 banisma ia ki dienjat jong ki mrad?*

Riddle referent: *Namar ba ki pohjat jong ki kiisma ‘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 lew 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 ‘*tung rymbai* 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 lew 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.

References


