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 l kong, iba pyllon te ki khohwah.*

Translation

From head to heels, the gentleman likes

The girl with round calves.
**Ka Phawar Biria.** *(Entertainment Phawar)*

_Uksai 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 rytieh 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 came 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 kihangkii* (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 startd 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*

*la l 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.
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.

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 tics on the cow’s hide and this in turn pleased the cow very much as she was relief from the tics 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.
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*

*la l 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._

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Translation

Cousin’s field, it is time for me to plough
Pray mother and father, I will expand I will multiply.

This *phawar* talks bout 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.
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 iaid 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.

\[
\begin{align*}
Ynna\ ia\ ka\ rong\ phong \\
Ba\ wan\ rah\ na\ Ri\ Phareng \\
I\ jong\ te\ ia\ i\ jong \\
Lah\ u\ syiar\ bad\ ka\ pylleng.
\end{align*}
\]

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 startd 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 ‘lar 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 cum tieh ‘pongdeng.

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
Ngí iohsngew- ngí 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 khusiąai
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 unkept 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.

\[
\text{\textit{Ther ther lap bah lap san}} \\
\text{\textit{Ban dup pait ka maw ka dieng}} \\
\text{\textit{Ban shong shit ka shnong ka thaw}} \\
\text{\textit{Ban dup tad u khaw u kba}} \\
\text{\textit{Ther ther lapbah lapsan.}}
\]

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 Sohkha, 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 in 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
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 *Ihlen’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
dothli (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 menshohonoh 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
nongshohonoh also used to carry some rice with them called u khaw tyndep or
khaw rawai. U khaw tyndep, like ka Kyiad tangsnem, is a liqour 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 nongkhapthlen* or the cutters for *u thlen*. These *nongkhapthlen* used to snip off people’s hair and clothes in order to feed the *Thlen*. It is said that both the *nongshohnoh* and the *nongkhapthlen* 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 khunjong phi!

Ha-a-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-a ho!
Ha-a-u-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 ‘law Ab;*

*Kano kata ka ‘law 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**

*Siyar:* Ko pa Risang.

*Ale bylla bah khun*

*Risang:* Ko 'Yiar puh khun phan ai aiu?

*Siyar:* Ngan ai soh riew bam tlang

*Risang:* Hangno uta u sohriew bam tlang?

*Siyar:* Lah puh lui ka tyngab

*Risang:* Hangno kata ka tyngab?

*Siyar:* La siat da u khnam

*Risang:* Hangno uta u khnam?

*Siyar:* La thang hapoh ding

*Risang:* Hangno kata ka ding?

*Siyar:* La suit da ka um

*Risang:* Hangno kata ka um?

*Siyar:* 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 (Chyrmyw 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 Chyrmyw 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

Khadi 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 to 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 ‘rievekhlaw?*
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.

*Jeileh wom em wa sngawthuh iei klam War?*

Riddle referent: *Neibhah wa poi khatuh 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 footpaths 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?
The inhabitants of Laitumkhrah 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. Laitumkhrah 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 Laitumkhrah are considered to be educated and arrogant, while those from Mawlai, to be backward and ignorant. The residents of Laitumkhrah 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 Laitumkhrah as Laitmukhrah 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 *Laitumkhrah* 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 outskirt 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 Laitumkhrah 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 *Laitumkhrah* residents are ridiculed by the others about their way of life. The other localities always alleged that the people of *Laitumkhrah* 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 Laitumkhrah, 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 Laitumkhrah 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 Laitumkhrah 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 Laitumkhrah 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 pahu 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 pyrkhat 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 kyleng 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 contend 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 contend 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

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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
Girls ... 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 phuh samrkhie,l kumba phi rkhie iawbei,
Hui, hui, hui, hui, hui.

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

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.

References


