Chapter I
Introduction

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

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

The riddle has been defined differently by many folklorists. Archer Taylor, one of the greatest riddle scholars of modern times, has struggled to define analytically
The structure of the riddle in terms of the ambiguity which seems to be the most common characteristic of the true riddle. He defines "the true riddle or the riddle in the strict sense compares an object to another entirely different object" (Taylor 1951:1). Later he improved his definition by saying that the essential structure of the riddle consists of two descriptive elements, one positive and one negative. Here the positive one is metaphorical and the negative one is literal.

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

All folklorists agreed that the riddle as a genre of folklore is a proper subject to be studied and analyzed. Scholars and folklorists from Aristotle to the present days have considered the riddle as an expression of traditional wit and wisdom. The form and contents of the riddle have been of special importance to the scholars from ancient times. The riddle usually has two aspects, the ritualistic and recreational. Perhaps James George Frazer was one of the first to study it.
Riddles are very closely related to jokes. Much that can be said of jokes can be said of riddles too. This is not because riddles are necessarily jokes. In modern culture, riddles tend to be jokes, but this congruence of the two genres is ethnographically the exception rather than the rule. It is not because riddles are a sub-class of jokes that some of the same concepts become relevant to both, but because both riddles and jokes frequently share the same tendency to depend upon some ambiguity or ambivalence, though the ways in which they exploit this differ.

The uses and functions of the riddle vary from one culture to another. But one of the common shared functions of the riddle is for entertainment and recreation. Riddles are also used to sharpen the mind, to test the knowledge and wit of the person. So they act as educational devices to exercise and train the intellect, to instill cultural values and attitudes to the participants. Riddles are also believed to develop or strengthen the ego of the riddler, the riddlee(s) and the audience present in any riddle contest. In certain cultures, however, riddling has various religious connotations as an activity during rituals. Other functions of riddles are also cited as verbal outlet for aggressive feelings and sexual desires. Riddles are used as devices for mediating conceptual ambiguity and stimulating cognitive re-examination.
In India, the tradition of riddles can be traced back to an age earlier than the Vedas (Bhagwat 1965: 3). Riddles in ancient India were used in the sacrificial rites, in marriage and death ceremonies. The ritualistic riddle is primarily religious, theological or speculative while the non-ritualistic is chiefly literary or at times, didactic.

Demographic and Cultural Profile of the Khasis

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Language and Linguistic Affinity**

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

**Traditional Administration**

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

**Religion**

The Khasis believe in God the Creator (*U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw*). He is represented by a goddess, *Ka blei Synshar*. The rooster (*U Syiar*) is the sacrificial
animal and stands as the symbol of the Khasi indigenous faith. Khasi religion is based on the ethics of right living and conduct. It is also based on the three commandments i.e. to earn righteousness (ban kamai ia ka hok), to know man and to know God (ban im tihbriw-tihblei) and to know one’s maternal and paternal relations (tipkur-tipkha). These are natural laws that had been inculcated in every Khasi’s consciousness that regulates his thought, words and actions.

**Matrilineal System**

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

**Kinship**

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

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

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

Dress and ornaments

The traditional dresses of the Khasi women are different from their neighbouring communities. The Khasi women used Ka Jainpien which is wrapped around their waist and loop down to the ankle over which Ka Jainkyrshah (a kind of apron) is tied from the left shoulder and looping down below the knees. On festive occasions they also wear their traditional dresses called Dhara made of silk. A
kind of shawl called *Ka Tapmoh* which covers the head and upper part of the body is worn by the women. A garment known as *Jainkup* is also worn by them. The Khasi men wear *Ka Jymphong* or a sleeveless coat mostly made of cotton with fringes stitching below the hem. Other items of men's dress consist of a waist girdle, a cap with earflaps and dhotis.

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

**Position of Women in the society**

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

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

Khasi Riddles

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

Statement of the problem

The research work on Khasi riddles is motivated by different factors. It is a historical fact that the other genres of folk literature of the Khasi community such as narratives, folksongs, proverbs, maxims and others have been documented and studied by many collectors and scholars since the nineteenth century (Nongrum Kitbor 2000). The same however cannot be said of riddles. Till date not even a single booklet of riddles is in existence and the scanty mention that riddles received in printed form are part of larger texts such as tales, novels and plays.
There are strong indications that show that the riddle is a fairly dynamic genre capable of being generated and perpetuated through oral transmission but accountably, its diffusion especially, as an item of folk communication, is limited. The endeavour and scope of this research work is to make a study of the riddle as a genre of oral literature. Another point taken up for study is the Phawar which is a rhymed couplet and a good example of Khasi folk poetry. It appears that there are riddle elements in the Phawar in the versification system which reveals the metaphorical structure of the quintessential riddle. This also brings into focus the existence of the inter-genres such as riddle jokes, riddle poems and riddle games.

**Survey of Literature**

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

*Ki Jingsneng Tymmen* by Radhon Singh Berry is a collection of Khasi maxims. This can be regarded as proverbs which are obviously didactic.

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

*The Khasis* by P.T. Gurdon is one of the standard references in respect of the Khasi community.
Ki Dienjat Ki Longshuwa by J. Bacchiarello contains fascinating narratives and Khasi idioms which are imbued with riddle elements.

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

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

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

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

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

D. T. Laloo’s Ka Rongbiria U Hynniew Trep contains archery phawar which when analyzed are found to contain riddle elements in them.
In the books, *Ka Pariah ka Kot Jingphawar* and *Ka Kot Mei Pa*, Dhonsing Lyngdoh Nongbri talks about the different types of Khasi Phawar. The author gives a brief description of the phawar which are imbued with riddle elements.

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

**Objectives**

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

**Methodology**

The methodology applied in carrying out this research involves collection of data through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources have been generated from written documents, field work and Phawar compositions. This scholar has also employed direct interview method and non-participant observation method to
eliciting the required data. Data has also been collected from among youth, children and students. The scholar has visited villages and has been able to unearth valuable information through interactions with informants belonging to different age groups from Sohkha, Nongtalang, Dawki, Nongbareh Jowai, Rymbai, Umtra, Mawryngkang, Thadnongiaw, Pynursla, Smit, and Mairang villages. Data has also been collected from Mawlai, Laitumkhrah, Jaiaw, Nongthymmai and Mawkhar localities of Shillong.

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

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

Regarding library works, the scholar has visited and collected material for her research from NEHU Central Library, North Eastern Council Library, State Central Library, Shillong, Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Culture Library,
Indian council of Social Sciences, Shillong, Indian Council for Historical Research Library, Guahati and Sahitya Akademi Library Kolkata.
CHAPTER II
Folklore and Verbal Art

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

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

Folklorists have made attempts to define the term folklore. Their attempts to define folklore have contributed a lot to the domain of Folkloristics. It should be noted that the materials of folklore had been collected and studied with scholarly interest long before Thoms coined the term. The Grimm brothers published the first volume of their famous *Kinder und Housmarchen* in 1812 which was recognized by Thoms himself and which is very often used as evidence by Western scholars to trace the growth of folkloristic studies. Scholarly collections of folklore materials were also done in Asia, particularly in India where works
such as the Kathāsaritsāgar, Pañcatantra or Jātaka (Handoo 2000: 6) are believed to be much older than many folklore collections in the west.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1) Oral literature
2) Material culture
3) Social folk customs
4) Performing arts.
**Oral literature:** Oral literature is also called verbal art or expressive literature. They are spoken, sung and voiced of traditional utterances. Traditionally this sector is known as Folk literature.

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

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

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

**Khasi Folklore Studies**

The growth and development of Khasi folklore studies can be roughly divided into four periods: the Missionary Period, the Seng Khasi Period, the Modern Period and the Post-Modern Period.
The Missionary Period (1841-1894)

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

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

The Seng Khasi Period (1895-1920)

The work of the missionaries led to the creation of the sense of identity among the Khasis. This period saw the emergence of writings by a host of Khasi writers like Jeebon Roy Mairom, Rabon Singh Kharsuka and Radhon Singh Kharwanlang.
who had not dispensed with their traditional narratives and folklore many of which are connected with traditional belief and rituals of the Khasis. These stalwarts founded the Seng Khasi Movement, a socio-cultural organization of the Khasis who adhered to the traditional Khasi religion in 1899. These Khasi scholars were firstly prompted by a genuine apprehension created by Christianity influence into Khasi traditional life and its culture. Secondly they reacted to the missionary as well as colonial portraiture of Khasi culture which regard the religious practices of the Khasis as demonic. The first generation of Khasi literary writers challenged and sought to correct this false presentation.

The Modern Period (1921-1970)

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

The Post Modern Period (1970s onwards)

The Post Modern period witnessed the growth of folklore studies through the writings and compilation done by college and university educated writers such as Donbok T. Laloo, M.P.R. Lyngdoh, D.L. Kharmawphlang, K.S. Nongkynrih etc. Laloo, a self taught folklorist, had greatly contributed to the enormous growth of folklore studies in Khasi and Jaintia hills. He had done an extensive work in
collecting folklore materials in the Bhoi area. His works give us an insight into the rich folklore heritage of the Khasis. Another noted Khasi folklorist who has raised the status of Khasi folklore studies to its present height is D.L. Kharmawphlang, the first trained folklorist among the Khasis whose name deserved to be mentioned here. He has collected and recorded many folktales especially those existed in the northern part of Khasi hills. He has also written books and articles on Khasi folklore and produced fascinating documentary films on the traditional customs, practices, and life of the Khasis.

**The Riddle as a Verbal Art**

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

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

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

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

The structural aspect of riddles have been competently dealt by Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes in their article entitled *Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle*, in which they distinguished categories of riddles on the basis of
whether the riddles are metaphorical or literal, oppositional or non-oppositional. Roger D. Abrahams (1968) and Abrahams and Dundes (1972) have pointed out techniques of confusion besides opposition and metaphor by which ‘the image’ (or Gestalt) presented in the riddle-question is impaired and therefore is, in most cases, undecipherable. In addition to opposition, they discuss incomplete detail, too much detail and false Gestalt in which the detail in the riddle image suggest an answer, often embarrassingly obscene, which is not the “right answer”.

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

**Oppositional Riddles**

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

*Ka khlaw khlem mrad.*

25
Ka bneng khlem khlur.

Ka pung khlem dohkha.

Riddle referent: U soh snepkor.

Translation

A jungle without wild animals,

A sky without stars,

A pond without fish.

Riddle referent: The coconut.

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

Non-oppositional Riddles

In non-oppositional riddles, the descriptive elements are not contradictory. The following sample of non-oppositional riddles is given and analyze below.
U shoh beit ia la ka kmie.

Riddle referent: U maw tyliat.

Translation
He always beat his mother.

Riddle referent: The grinding stone.

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

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

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

Riddle referent: Ka siej.
Translation

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

Riddle referent: The bamboo.

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

Mama bajrong ba pei jingshong.

Riddle referent: *U Thyrsia*.

Translation

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

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

**Conundrum**

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

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

Riddle referent: *Ka Khohsiew.*

Translation

It is a basket, but nobody can carry it.

Riddle referent: The knee.

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

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

*Ki shait kyrteng kumno ia ki biej tasngeng?*

Riddle referent: *Usniang.*

Translation

What do they name the fools?

Riddle referent: The pig.

In this riddle parody, a fool or a naive person is always called a pig. This is because in Khasi culture a pig is considered to be the dullest and the most foolish among all the animals. This riddle is believed to have originated from a folk tale about the pig and the dog. The story says that in the olden days the pig and dog offered their services to man in return for shelter in his home. Both the dog and the pig wanted to stay inside his house and to eat the same food that he took. One day, man took both the pig and the dog to the field and asked them to plough the field. He also told them that the one who did most of the work would be allowed to live in the house while the one who worked less would be put outside. After the master left, the pig ploughed the land the whole day while the dog did nothing but slept. In the evening, when the dog woke up, he saw that the whole field was ploughed by the pig. The dog went to the ploughed field and danced on it till only...
his foot prints could be seen. When the master came, the pig complained that the
dog did nothing the whole day and he alone ploughed the field. But when the
master inspected the field he found only the footprints of the dog. He chided the
pig and called him a liar. The pig tried to tell the truth but man would not believe
him. In the end, the pig was asked to live outside the house and the dog with man.
But it has been observed that even in Western culture too, the pig is always
considered not to be an intelligent animal. This can be seen even in English
phrase like the one which goes, ‘to throw precious stones in front of swine’.

*Balei u ngaptung u rwai eh?*

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

Translation

Why does a drone sing so loud?

Riddle referent: To fool the young female bees.

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

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

Part A
Phawar and Riddle Poems

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

Phawar tradition obviously shows the presence of riddle element in the versification system which reveals the metaphorical structure of the quintessential riddle. The scholar’s intention here is to make a study and analyze the content of
phawar and poems which contain riddle elements. These phawar when analyzed reveal hidden meanings of the text. Examples of phawar and riddle poems which contain some elements of riddles are given below.

**Tik ho lih baiong**

_Ia I mem shiliang lbong._

Translation

Shake, you black man,

Hit the one-legged white woman.

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

*Dohkha ha nanpolok ki ia biej ia u shana*

_Da peit ho parari ioh phi biej ia u mama._

Translation

Fish at Ward’s lake are crazy of chanas

Look my compatriots lest you are crazy of uncle.

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

Riddle Games

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

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

_Ong kani ‘e-ja bei,’_

_Ong kani ‘cheiwon u ioh’_

_Ong kani ‘panram panchah’_

_Ong kani ‘myntlang mynrkhiang’_

_Ong kani’ rah ka wait wow u sdai_

_Phent cha khloo pom dow sla pathoo’.

Translation

This one says ‘mother give us food’

This one says ‘from where we will get’?
This one says 'borrow from others'

This one says, 'winter and dry season'

This one says 'take a big knife and a spade

Go to the jungle and cut the pumpkin leaves.'

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

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

\[
\begin{align*}
Ong \text{kene } & 'ae \text{ ji mae}' \\
Ong \text{kene } & 'di \text{ ae ju ae}?' \\
Ong \text{ke ne } & 'shwiah \text{ ram shwiah chah}' \\
Ong \text{kene } & 'lah \text{ tlang lah rhiang}' \\
Ong \text{kene } & 'phet \text{ blar shaw}'.
\end{align*}
\]

Translation

Said this one, ‘mother give me food’
Said this one ‘what to give’?
Said this one, ‘borrow from others’
Said this one ‘when its winter and dry season’
Said this one, ‘I will run far away’.

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

It may be mentioned here that the third sister says that they could pay back what they borrow when winter comes. This may be due the fact that winter is the busiest season in War-Jaintia areas as it is a season when the products in the region like areca nuts, betel leaves, bay leaves, oranges etc have to be plucked and sold in the markets. During this time the owners of betel nut plantations and orchards have to engage many labourers in the process of plucking and carrying these products to markets. It should be noted that War-Jaintia region lies in the steep slopes and terrains of Jaintia Hills and till the late 1970s and early ‘80s there were no approach roads in many areas of the region. So the products have to be taken to their destination through physical labour.
The difference in these versions may be due to the fact that the geographical locations, occupation and economic activities of the upland Jaintia and War-Jaintia people are different from one another. In the upland of Jaintia Hills cultivation of different varieties of paddy is the main occupation of the people. The people of both the areas are cultivators and it is found that rice culture is very prevalent among the upland Jaintias. But this is not the case with the War-Jaintias. They are mostly cultivators of areca nuts, betel leaves, citrus fruits (especially oranges), bay leaves etc. and in the past these products were exported to different parts of the land.

Part - C

Riddle Jokes and Verbal Dueling

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

Sometimes riddles are also used as a satiric commentary by the people of one village or region about the people of another village or region. Typically riddle
jokes attribute a ludicrous and socially inappropriate trait to the people allegedly about whom the joke is told. Riddling, as part of evolving strategies sometimes turn into verbal dueling.

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

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

*leileh wom em wa sngawthuh iei klam War?*

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

*Translation*

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

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

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

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

**Riddle referent:** *Ki Nong Laimu.*

*Translation*

Who takes a thermo flask when going to buy kerosene?

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

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

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

*Shymrang.... Ym dei (3) ymdεi 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
Girls... O we live in abundance

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

O it blows along with the season.

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

Come with us to Shillong

Education you will get we say

Oh! Why will you remain ignorant in the country side?
Girls... Softly (3) why boys you say like that

Why don’t you think properly?
You have tasted Shillong City
You have forgotten your own village.
Softly. (3)

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

Of your good and calm life
When you are educated
The village will progress
Why- why you did misunderstand me.

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

The rays of the sun reflect
They reflect from the western side
Brought by the brothers from the city.

Boys... It is not so.

Girls... It is so.

Boys... Why are you insulting us do not blame us
Girls... Like our village where will you get?

Go and seek all over the world

In the exciting season

The cicadas are chirping

Oh! to go away from the village we are afraid

(Softly) why are you silent guys?

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

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

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

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

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

Riddle referent: _Bam kwai, tympew, shun bad u duma sla._

Translation

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

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

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

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

Riddle referent: *Ka baje iing.*
Translation

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

Riddle referent: The clock.

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

Riddles Evolved through Modern Communication Technology

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

Riddle Jokes

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

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

It has been observed by many teachers that those students who always study for their exams only at the eleventh hour tend to forget many important parts of their answers during exams. They always complained that their minds became blank and could not recall what they have learned. Some of these students even resort to many unfair means. One of the most common ways of cheating is that students usually write important gist of the answer they expect to be asked during exams on their body especially on their palms, arms and thighs. In the Hindi movie Ghajini, Amir Khan, the protagonist of the movie suffers from amnesia as he was
struck on the head by his assailants. To remember the important events that occurred during this period of his life, Amir Khan also wrote whatever he remembers on his body. He tattooed the name of the persons who killed his girlfriend etc. so that he could remember what had happened to him while suffering from short term memory loss.

Which state in India has the largest English speaking population?

Riddle referent: Day time ... Kerala

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

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

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

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

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

Who am I?

Riddle referent: The Toothbrush.

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

**Real Obscene Riddles**

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

What do a hooker and 108 have in common?

Riddle referent: Both open all the time.

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

The study of Khasi riddles reveals that the Khasi community, despite having a good repertoire of riddles generally believes that they do not have a good collection of the same. This belief has been responsible for not attracting any scholarly attention to this genre and therefore the documentation and scholarly study of this genre is negligible. Moreover as riddles are very short in form and are often perceived to be used for entertainment only, the people tend to believe that they do not serve any purpose save that of being a juvenile form of recreation. Because of this, the popularity of Khasi riddles cannot be compared with the other genres of folk literature such as the tale and proverb.
The scholar has also observed that unlike the other communities where riddles have religious connotation, among the Khasis, riddles are used purely as a form of entertainment and contest among the youth and children to amuse themselves. No evidence has been unearthed to show otherwise that riddles are used for any serious purposes.

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

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

The present study on riddles also reveal that Khasi riddles are closely related to other genres of folk literature such as folk poetry, dialogic games, jokes and verbal dueling. Another finding is that the traditional practice of riddling as a conventional verbal art is dwindling but riddling through the internet and short message service is growing vigorously.
It has been found out that the study of the internet and SMS riddles that are in circulation among the Khasis do not confine only to those typical riddles that are related to the community, but also those concerning other culture and events that occur throughout the globe.

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