PREFACE

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

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

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

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