CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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

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

The riddle has been defined differently by many folklorists. Archer Taylor, one of the greatest riddle scholars of modern times, has struggled to define analytically the structure of the riddle in terms of the ambiguity which seems to be the most commonly characteristic of the true riddle. He felt that there
was inadequacy in the description of the norms of the riddle. He defines “the true riddle or the riddle in the strict sense compares an object to another entirely different object” (Taylor 1951:1). Later he improved his definition by saying that the essential structure of the riddle consists of two descriptive elements, one positive and one negative. Here the positive one is metaphorical and the negative one is literal. Alan Dundes and Roger D. Abraham define riddles as “questions that are framed with the purpose of confusing or testing the wit of those who do not know the answer” (Dundes 1965: 130).

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

The riddle appears to be a contest in which one central person competes with another or others for the possession of the role of arbitrary authority. Riddling is not a game of strategy because victory is not achieved by rational choice. It is rather a game of rhetoric or arbitrary power in which victory is achieved by prior access to arcane knowledge.
The concept of the riddle is universal. Aristotle was probably one of the earliest thinkers to give attention to the riddle by associating it with metaphor. Riddles are an ancient and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. This could be seen in Sphinx riddles where Oedipus killed the Sphinx by grasping the answer to the riddle it posed. Samson outwitted the Philistines by posing a riddle about the lion and the beehive. In both cases, riddles, far from being mere child's play, are made to decide matters of life and death. Archer Taylor says in his book *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*, that riddling is a universal art and cites examples of riddles from hundreds of different cultures including the Finnish, Hungarian, American, Indian, Chinese, Russian, Dutch and Filipino sources among others (Taylor 1951). The practice of riddling can be traced back to the dawn of literary expression.

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

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

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

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

**Demographic and Cultural Profile of the Khasis**

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

**Geographical description**

Meghalaya is a hilly region and is well-known for its picturesque landscapes and natural beauty. The Khasis inhabit the eastern part of Meghalaya which is
generally known as Khasi and Jaintia hills. This region lies approximately between $25^\circ$ N and $26^\circ$ N latitude and $85^\circ$ 49 E and $92^\circ$ 52 E longitude. The area is bounded by Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagoan and Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam on the north, Cachar and Dima Hasao district on the east, on the west by East and South Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya and on the south by Bangladesh.

The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills are situated on an imposing plateau known as the Shillong Plateau or the Meghalaya plateau. The Khasi and Jaintia hills form the central and eastern parts of the plateau. These hills covered an area of 14,754Km and are characterized by rough topography, and grassland, hills and river valleys are found in this region. This plateau is formed of the oldest rock formation, the Achaean system. Towards the Northern plateau, the hills are rising almost to the same height, extending northward and gradually gently slope towards the plain of Assam. This submontane region is known as Ri Bhoi area. The northern area has an average elevation of about 170-820 meters and slope toward the north. Toward the Southern section of the plateau, the hills are rather steep, precipitous and marked by deep gorges and the valleys are deep and beautiful. The narrow strip of land at the foot of these slopes formed the natural boundary with the plain of Bangladesh. The central part of Khasi and Jaintia Hills running east to west hovers around 1500meters and the highest peak, the Shillong peak is about 1965mtrs above the sea level. The land consists largely of rolling uplands that are dissected by river valleys and abounds in streams, rivers and waterfalls. Most of the rivers originate from the central platue and flow towards the north and south. Rivers like Umngot,
Umiam Mawphlang and Kynshi in Khasi hills and Lukha, Myntdu, Prang and others in Jaintia hills flow towards Bangladesh. Umiam Khwan, Umtrew, Myntang, Kupli, etc. flow towards Brahmaputra. The central upland is characterized by a diversity of relief. Its highest area is dominated by the Mawphlang upland on the west. The steepest part of this central upland is in the southern side. The climate of shillong plateau is influenced by elevation and distribution of physical relief. The Khasi and Jaintia hills experience a moderate climate. But the sub-montane region in the north and the foothills in the south experience hot and humid climate in the summer and cool in the winter while in the central plateau, it remains cool throughout the year. The land is rich in mineral deposits like coal, lime stones, sillimanite and uranium etc. The land receives heavy rainfalls during summer and cold in winter. Mawsynram and Sohra (Cherrepunjee) are known as wettest places on earth, with a rainfall of about 14,000mm annually. On the whole, the Khasi and Jaintia hills receive an average of 7700mm of rainfall.

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

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

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

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

J.R Logan is of the opinion that the Khasis have a close relationship with the Mons or Talaings of Pegu and Tenasserim, the Khmer of Cambodia and Anams. He also identifies a tribe known as Palaungs who inhabits the Shan state of Myanmar, as the closest kinsmen of the Khasis (Rana 1989: 65). Modern research scholars like Walter G. Griffith and others are of the opinion that the Mundas were the ancestors of the Khasis. They also hold the view that the Khasis belong to the Mon-Khmer group of Indonesia and that
linguistically they are related to the Mundas who are located in the Chotanagpur area (Gurdon 1907: 21-22).

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

**Language and Linguistic Affinity**

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

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

**Traditional Administration**

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

Religion

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

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

Ka Leh Niam lap (Death Ceremony) is another element of the Khasi religion. The Khasis glorify their dead as they believe that after death, they have become supernatural beings and were ordained to bless the living ones. The Khasis invoke the name of their first ancestral mother (Iawbei), Father (Thawlang) and the maternal uncle (Suidnia) to obtain their blessings. Respect and love for the dead is very important. All religious performances such as sacrifices, offering of food to the dead, prayers and invocations are strictly observed. At the death of a person, a cock is sacrificed, because the Khasis believe that the cock acts as a guide to the departed soul to reach the court yard of God (Dwar u Blei). They call the cock 'U 'Jar Nongprat Lynti' (a cock that clears the path). It is said that if a cock is not sacrificed, the deceased will not reach the court yard of God, the Creator. It is believed that souls that earned righteous life leave this world and go to join the company of their
ancestors. While bad souls go to *Khyndai pateng niambor Mynkoi U Jum* (a subterranean world where the evil spirits assembled). Another important ceremony that is related to *ka Leh Niam Iap* is the Bone deposition ceremony. After the deceased is cremated, the bones are collected and kept in a permanent family ossuary. But for those who died a tragic death, their bones are kept in a separate place.

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

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

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

Kinship

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

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

According to Gurdon there are three types of marriage ceremonies prevalent amongst the Khasis. These are 1) *Ka pynhiar synjat*, 2) *Lam doh* and 3) *Ka ladih Kyiad or la suit* (Gurdon 1907:127). There are certain forms of marriage ceremonies among the Khasis. Marriage usually takes place at the bride’s house. The boy of marriageable age selects a girl he loves and after some association with her, they inform their families about their wish to marry. If there is no taboo and obstacles between the families and if both sides agree, the marriage is fixed. Marriages are preceded by betrothals in which the man
along with his close relatives from both the parents’ sides would go to the
girl’s house to ask for her hand by performing a ceremony called *ka lateh
ktien*. Three days before the marriage the groom usually avoids visiting the
bride’s home. On the morning of the wedding day, the bride’s family sends
food like rice and boiled meat locally know as *ka doh Jynlar* to the groom’s
house in baskets and vessels. On the day of the marriage, the groom along
with his marriage party consisting of his maternal uncles, his father and his
brothers, other relations and friends wearing their best attires go to the bride’s
place after having a feast in the groom’s house. On the way they would be
received by the representatives of the bride’s side to welcome them. An
exchange of *Kwai* (areca-nuts along with betel leaves and lime) takes place
amongst them. The *Ksiang* (Negotiator) leads the groom and his party to the
bride’s house. In the bride’s house also there is a *Ksiang* representing the
bride’s side. A dialogue between the *Ksiang* marks the start of the ceremony.
The marriage centers round the citation of contracts among the *Ksiang* of the
two sides and the pouring of libation from two *klong* (gourds). The priest will
take three pieces of dry *khapiah* (fish) as a symbol of solemnization of the
marriage. Rings are exchange and the priest declared before all the elders and
all who present that they all bear witness to the union of the two as husband
and wife. After the ceremony is over, the dry fish will be placed over the roof
of the house. The female clan members of the groom never go with him to the
bride’s house on the wedding day. After the feast, the relatives and friends of
the groom go back to their respective places while the groom remains in the
bride’s house.
Three or four days after the marriage, the bride along with her husband and relatives pay a visit to her husband’s home and have the blessing of her mother-in-law. The mother of the bride is not allowed to go to her son-in-law’s place during this visit. After this formal introduction, the wife and her family can freely visit them.

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

In accordance with their tradition, the Jaintia’s house is divided into five parts, namely, the Dhari, Trethlong, Dpai, Chlur and Cherakut. On the marriage day, the groom along with the marriage party goes to the bride’s house taking with them bamboo or wood pine torches. Some selected persons from the bride’s side come to the groom’s place to escort the marriage party. When the groom’s party arrives, they are accommodated in a separate row in front of the house called Dhari (a kind of porch) and are served with food. The groom’s
feet are washed, dried and applied with mustard oil by the bride’s family. After this, he is taken to another room called Trethlong and was made to sit on a special mat prepared for him only. At this time the groom is considered as sanctified and no one is allowed to touch him or the mat where he sits till the marriage ceremony is over. During this time, the bride is seated in another room known as Chlur along with her friends. Betel nuts are exchanged between the two sides and a Lamiutang ceremony begins. The negotiator called U Waheh Kni u Chynrang from the groom’s side talks and shows the boy as a person with good character. He wishes the couple on behalf of all a happy and prosperous married life. Then the representative from the girl’s side called U Waheh khanatang speaks in a similar way and wishes the couple for a happy life. After this, the priest takes over with the invocation to the goddess Ka blai Synchar. The exchange of marriage contract and pouring of libation take place. Water sprinkling is also done by the priest.

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

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

Dress and Ornaments

The traditional dresses of the Khasi women are different from their neighbouring communities. The Khasi women used *ka Jainpien* which is wrapped around their waist and loop down to the ankle over which *ka Jainkyrshah* (a kind of apron) is tied from the left shoulder and looping down below the knee. The Khasi women can also be distinguished by their dress which they called *Jainsem*, which consists of two pieces each about one and half metre, tied over both the shoulders. On festive occasions they also wear their traditional dresses called *Dhara* made of silk. A kind of shawl called *Ka Tapmoh* which covers the head and upper part of the body is worn by the women. Over the *Jainsem*, a garment known as *Jainkup* is worn. This is draped over the shoulders, its two ends knotted in front at the chest. It covers the lower end of *Ka Tapmoh* and falls down to the knee. Another important part of the Khasi woman’s dress is *Ka Pla Kieng* (a cotton haversack) where she kept money, betel nuts and leaves, keys, knife and other things.
The Khasi men wear *Ka Jymphong* or a sleeveless coat mostly made of cotton with fringes stitching below the hem. Other items of men’s dress consist of a waist girdle, which is worn beneath *Ka Jymphong*, a cap with earflaps and dhotis. Today the *Jymphong* may be said to be out dated as it is replaced by male Western attires. *Jymphong* was no longer worn except in some ceremonial dances.

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

**Position of Women in the Society**

Women enjoy a dignified and respectable position in the society. They are considered to be the custodians of property. Khasi women enjoy more freedom in comparison to other women of other neighbouring communities. A woman
is accorded with respect as she is considered to be the one through whom the clan is propagated. But although women occupy an important position in the society, yet they have no rights in traditional political and administrative spheres. Khasi women are not allowed to participate in the Village Durbar and are excluded from political, administrative and judiciary processes.

**Festivals**

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

**Khasi Riddles**

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

**Statement of the Problem**

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

**Objective**

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

**Methodology**

For the purpose of this study data has been collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources have been generated from field work, written documents and Phawar compositions. This scholar has also employed direct interview method and non-participant observation method to elicit the required data. Data has also been collected through informal riddle sessions among youth and children and also among college students studied in different colleges in Shillong, Jowai, Nongpoh and Nongstoin. The scholar has also
visited many villages in different parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills and has been able to unearth valuable information through interactions with informants belonging to different age groups from Sohkha, Nongtalang, Dawki, Nongbareh, Jowai, Rymbai, Umtrai, Mawryngkang, Thadnongiw, 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 that the scholar employed was the used of modern communication system i.e. the internet and mobile phones. The cell phones and the internet contain vast stores of riddles and these will be studied and analyzed accordingly. A data based of internet and Short Message Service (SMS) riddles has been created by the scholar and a SMS riddle group was formed for the compilation of the data. In this way the data had been collected from people belonging to different professions like the doctors, engineers, teachers, sport persons, lawyers, business people, musicians and student community. The members of the SMS group circulated among themselves all the data they have received and passed them on to this scholar. Riddle groups has also been formed by the scholar through Social Networking like Facebook and Orkut to collect the required data.

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


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