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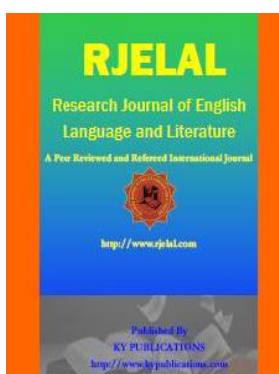
## RIDDLES OF KAMRUPIA DIALECT OF ASSAM: A PARADIGM OF FOLK INSIGHT

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### ABSTRACT



Prominent folklorist Alan Dundes mentions about three levels of studying and analysing folk lore: (1) Text, (b) Texture, and (c) Context; of all these the level of context is the most important. According to Allan Dundes *the context of an item of folklore is the specific social situation in which that particular item is actually employed*. Without context study of proverb also remain incomplete. In his book *Magic Science and Religion* (Garden City, 1954 P- 104) Bronislaw Malinowski also says, *The Text of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless*.

In order to know a proverb clearly one must know the context or social situation in the proverb is used. Only then one can understand the inherent meaning of the proverbs. Therefore in proverb *what is unsaid is much more important than what is said*. (Dundes, Alan—*Essays in Folkloristics*: 1978, P-25)

In my research work on proverb and riddles, I have tried to collect the prevalent proverbs and riddles from the proposed area and tried to present the proverbs with the context where the specific proverb is used along with possible interpretation of the proverb collected.

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### 1. AREA OF THE STUDY:

Kamrup is a historically rich area with its unique characteristics. In the colourful folk resources of Assam, Kamrupi folk materials occupy a prestigious position. The folk material of the place is getting impetus because of the demography and geographical position. Different sub dialects of the place is playing role in bringing variation to the folk materials of the district.

The name of Kamrup has been transmitted since time immemorial. In ancient time the Kamrupa occupied a larger area, including entire north eastern states and part of present day Coach Bihar. Before independence the place *Kamrupa* was spread up to present day Nalbari, Barpeta and Kamrup. However, such division cannot divide cultural heritage and can't affect folklore which is still

prevalent among the folk community. People of different caste and creed, tribes and sub tribes have been living in this district. Majority of people are Brahmin, Kalita, Koibarta, Kumar, Hira, Mali, Baishya, Mahanta, Boro, Rava, Tiwa and Garo etc. Apart from that there are Muslim community too living together in the main land and in the *char* area.

Most of the people of the area are cultivators. Some of the people are engaged with several other occupations including business, private and government jobs. Guwahati, the gateway of North East is situated in this district contributing to the huge population, contributing to the state of Assam.

### 2. Introduction

Folklore is actively shared by both men and women of any castes. Not only rural people but large parts

of the population of the pre-industrial urban centres are active bearers of the oral tradition. Oral literature is confined not only to the heart of illiterate people but also people of any category and that has been transmitted by word of mouth through successive generations.

Riddles are the resources of folk or literature. For what purpose the people use this may be implied but still these are distinct and clear. *The riddle is one of the best attested ancient folklore genres with numerous examples in Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Sanskrit traditions.* (Abrahams & Dundes, P-129)

It is difficult to define riddles adequately, and a genre as minor as riddle should command serious scholarly attention with respect, is really a matter of surprise. Texts of riddles are characteristically short. The primary function of riddle is to obtain entertainment. Riddles are generally associated with the fun of children rather than with the serious preoccupation of adults. The texts and language of riddles tend to focus predominantly on concrete, homespun details rather than on the more abstract features of human relation and behaviour which one expects for instance, in proverbs and aphorisms. However these are not valid conclusion in spite of having accuracy. Although the primary function of riddle is entertainment and fill the gap of time, in some societies riddles have social and dialectical value. Some of the Arabic riddles and Old English riddles are regarded far more serious than a simple child's riddle with the argument that riddles tend to focus predominantly on concrete, homespun details rather than on the more abstract features of human relations is not an argument to disapprove the possible sophistication of riddles as an art form. Instead of that there are instances to put forward in favour of their sophistication in terms of compactness of imagery, appropriateness of analogies and so on. For example one Persian riddle usually shared by Japanese *Haiku: A lion's thumb, a Godzilla's jump, and ass's cry* —Frog, or a blue napkin full of pears—Sky.

Although riddles can be interpreted as minor genre of folklore, it cannot be considered as

'trivial,' and sophistication of riddle can't be debased.

Presence of riddle can be seen in almost all language in the world. The meaning of the word riddle according to Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend, edited by Maria Leach, '*riddles turns poetic and poets make riddles*'. She has mentioned that Aristotle has several times pointed out the close relation between metaphor and the riddle. *The oldest riddles long predated the ones now definitely associated with the ancient Hellenic, Semitic, and Vedic cultures, which were already producing fairly complicated enigmas.*

But in lengthy note on pages 121-122 of Golden Bough IX, Sir James Frazer confesses his perplexity and inability to solve the riddle about riddles: '*The custom of asking riddles at certain seasons or on certain special occasion is curious and has not yet, so far as I know been explained.*'

In Vedic Literature of India there are different examples of riddles. In the Greek drama 'Oedipus Rex' written by Grecian dramatist Sophocles, there is example of riddles. In the Mahabharata the questions asked by *Dharma* to *Yudhishthira* are examples of riddles.

### 3. Purpose of Riddles

Riddles are unique source of the Assamese folk literature. Riddles have had a long history. Riddles have been asked as a way of entertainment, fun and process to discard boredom. For the children riddles are used by the elders as a method of imparting worldly wisdom, knowledge. They have been used for ceremonial purpose or recreational purpose in Asia, Australia and Europe but according to R.H.Lowie, neither the proverb nor the riddle was developed in America.

Still there is practice in the rural society to ask riddles to the bride groom when he comes out of his home to go to the house of the bride and tie the nuptial knot. Such ritual is practiced to bless the couple so that however obstacles come on their way they might overcome and live the life successfully to the very end.

Riddles have been associated with the careers of Samson and Oedipus; in ancient India riddles were part of the horse sacrifice rituals. The riddle proper is brief and precise, written with

alliteration and rhyme. In Assamese riddles means *sathar* or *distan words* with uncertain derivation, an illustration, a parallel.

Riddles can be classified into different types. Some riddles refer to child psychology, some others are full of deep thoughts, and some other riddles are based on a story. There are some riddles which are full of wanton thoughts and sexual imageries. This is a high time to collect the riddles and preserve such riddles otherwise lion's share of the riddles will vanish from the community.

### 3. Classification of Riddles

- 1) Riddles of Spice
- 2) Riddles of Instrument or Agent
- 3) Riddles of Insect
- 4) Riddles of Food Items
- 5) Riddles Related to Plants
- 6) Riddles on Child Psychology.

#### 3.1.1 Riddles of Spice

- 1) *bikotai bikee, kinotai kinee*  
*randhotai randhe khaotai pelai diee.*

Tentative meaning: The salesman sell. The customers bought and the consumers throw away.

— Curry Leaf

- 2) *barir pisor tuni sorei*  
*mukh sai sai uttar kore*

Tentative meaning: The maina of the back yard, retort staring at the face.

— Chilly

#### 3.1.2 Riddles of Instrument or Agent

- 1) *raja hator koli guyghate ghate pani khai*

Tentative meaning: The black cow of the king's family, drinks water at each landing place of the river. — Fishing Hook

- 2) *ek threngia bogoli*  
*shadai nashe gadhuli*

Tentative meaning: One legged heron, dances daily in the evening.

— Hand Fan

- 3) *lohar guy damuri nai*  
*jjman doei siman pai*

Tentative meaning: Iron cow, without calf, the more you miloch the more you get.

— Tube well

- 4) *dat ashe namare kamor*  
*habi tani pone kore*  
*nam ki bapur*

Tentative meaning: It has teeth but does not bite, straighten the jungle dragging, what is that?

— Comb

- 5) *bohe nakot dhore kanot*

Tentative meaning: What is it that sits on the nose and catch the ear?

— Spectacle

- 6) *mat ashe manuh nai*  
*ghar ashe duar nai*

Tentative meaning: Voice without the human body, house without a door.

— Radio

- 7) *chu mari uri jai nohoi chiloni*  
*buk pari somai gatot nohoi nigoni*  
*junga junga thoat tar nohoi bogoli*  
*oha joar matho etai bat seitono ki*

Tentative meaning: Flies swiftly but not a kite, enters into a hole creeping but not a rat, with pointed beak but not a heron, with only one way for exit and entrance what is that.

— Shuttle of a loom

- 8) *toar hate moar gole*  
*pete pete jora lage*

Tentative meaning: Your hand and my neck, both of our bellies join.

— Pitcher

- 9) *pet ashe petu nai*  
*much ashe jibha nai*  
*eito ki koa bhai*

Tentative meaning: There is stomach but no intestine, There is mouth but no tongue, brother tell me what is this thing?

— Pitcher

- 10) *oparar pora poril hati*  
*dhan khai dine rati*

Tentative meaning: An elephant has dropped down from the sky and starts eating rice day and night.

— Dheki,

- 11) *roja hotor kekeri guy*  
*sangh pothare ghah khai*

Tentative meaning: The bent cow of the king's family, graze in all the fields around.

— Sickle

- 12) *har jeng jeng majot pakhi*  
*khaba noarai thoise rakhi*

Tentative meaning: The thing with the protruded bones with the wings in the middle, someone who cannot eat is preserving for no reason

—Japi (a wicker hat used as an umbrella)

13) *sario fale aaina majote koina*

Tentative meaning: There is glass all around in the middle the bride is present.

—lamp

14) *edal khere gharo bere*

Tentative meaning: One straw can cover the whole house.

—Saki (a candle)

15) *prithibir ata asarit bostu, ath numberto si  
ki pator tinita futa, tar Namtoni ki*

Tentative meaning: One of the wonders of the world is this, the wonder number is ten, what is the name of the leaf with three holes.

—sandel (Slipper)

16) *boga boga sahebor rongarongar tupi  
ek ghosa mari dile uthe joli poki— jui bah*

Tentative meaning: The white coloured gentlemen have black coloured cap, one stroke on them makes them burn.

— (fire stick)

17) *habit kahe olai nahe*

Tentative meaning: Cough is heard from the jungle, but do not comes easily.

— kuthar (Axe)

18) *eling tiling eka beka  
tar oparat uthi jai maha raja*

Tentative meaning: Jingle bell jingle bell moves widely, the king goes sitting on that.

—Cycle

19) *bhera sagolir nakot jhori  
Adha ashe matit pori*

Tentative meaning: The tethered sheep tied in the nose, half of it lying under the soil.

—bamboo post

20) *distanar nam gopal  
Chari kan katar eke khan sotal*

Tentative meaning: The name of the Riddle is Gopal, of the four cut ears only one yard.

—Loom

21) *keseimotar loti  
harata bhakotar eke khan koti*

Tentative meaning: The lump of the mud *loti* dug up by an earth worm, of twelve disciples have only one bottom.

— *chilim* (a vessel for smoking.)

22) *Tini pakhi meli bogoli ure garamar dinot  
pua gadhiuli ghure*—Hand Fan

23) *toli nothoka patra, pah nothoka jal  
pas khan korasor ekedal nal*— hand

24) *hat bhori ase saru bor  
sarothi nathakli nakaro lor sor*

— Arm Chair.

25) *morai jak ane, dfighale dighalak tane*—  
angling

26) *jiei die take khai pani dile mori jai*—Fire

27) *ehe sihe,  
pithi seki anja kuhai kihe*—Cooking Pan

28) *rojar gharar ashe hati,  
dhan khai pasi pasi*—Dheki

29) *rati puai uthi gatat hat dio*—Pitcher

30) *sari takoi bhori moar hat hole dukhan,  
anak moi kolat lao jimane hok ojan*  
— Arm Chair

### 3.1.3 Riddles of Insect

1) *hukur thukur  
batedi gol kola kukur*

Tentative meaning: A black dog is walking by the road.

— *bisha* (a hairy caterpillar)

2) *alir kasor sorer baha  
hat dili tamakha*— *borol*

Tentative meaning: The nest of the bird by the road side, once it is touched there comes storm.

— wasp.

3) *mamather gharat galo  
jokmokia ful palo  
fulok legi melilo hat  
ful gol othara hat*

Tentative meaning: Visited the home of maternal uncle, seen the colourful flowers, stretched the hands to pluck the flowers, flowers have move away far away.

— *Jonaki parua* (glow worm)

4) *ekhan garu garir ek sho soka  
lari dile hurum beka*

Tentative meaning: One bullock cart has hundreds of wheels, as soon as it is touched it coils fast.

— *Kerelua* (millipede)

5) *ti ti tia, kokalti sia*  
*hanumonta bhai, manuh khedi jai*  
Tentative meaning: ti ti tia, the waist is thin, brother  
hanuman, it comes rouching after man  
— *Borol* (wasp)

6) *elki murai julki baei*  
*tokla murai sorag saoei*  
*hathik nothoi kujok thoi*  
*sei kujoy polau marei*  
Tentative meaning: The *elki mura* or apeuliar  
headed, fishes with *julki*, the bold headed looks up  
the sky, even an elephant will submerge into the  
water where the hunch back can stand safely.  
— snail.

7) *moar theng sar khien japei japei jao*  
*dighal dukhan kanere*  
*bipodar uman pao*  
— rabbit

8) *pet danger mukh saru gili thoi manuh*  
*garu*—Snake

9) *gun gunao bhomora nohai, gun gunao sorai*  
*nahoi,*  
*tej khao bagh nohai*— Mosquito

#### 3.1.4 Riddles of Food Item

1) *enu enu enu*  
*dharibor nai thenu*  
Tentative meaning: There is no branch to hold on.  
— Egg

2) *habir major sol suta*  
*gai dusta gakhir mitha*  
Tentative meaning: The fish of the jungle, the cow is  
naughty, but her milk is sweet.  
— Honey

3) *jalot janma sthalat bash*  
*pani pale sorbanash*  
Tentative meaning: Birth of which is in water, who  
lives on the land.  
— Salt

4) *panir majot putilo khuta*  
*gai dusta gakhir mitha*  
Tentative meaning: The pillar is established into the  
water, the cow is naughty and her milk is sweet.  
— Honey

5) *gotei melki mel kore*  
*kanot dhorli belti pore*

Tentative meaning: All the spokesmen discusses the  
matter, whenever the ear is touched falls down  
headlong. —boiling rice.

6) *pakhi ashe moar noro uribo saku ase kintu*  
*noaro*  
*moniba, nahaleo bhori furu moi ghuri jiban*  
*kotao panit saturi*—Fish

#### 3.1.5 Riddles Related to Plants

1) *sarute kapor pindhe*  
*dangor hole nipindhe*  
Tentative meaning: Wears cloth in the childhood,  
stripes off that in the adulthood.

—Bamboo soot  
2) *silmil dimbaru jil mil pat*  
*bahre dimbaru, othara hat*

Tentative meaning:  
— Bet (the rattan cane, calamus rotang)

3) *tinita akharare eta goshar nam*  
*tare eta mosi dile hoi eta masor nam*  
Tentative meaning: Name of a fish with three letters

— Bhotora  
4) *patalor pora futi olai*  
*kula han kan*  
*mukhedi poali jogai*  
*Ito ki bostu bhagavan*— Banana tree

5) *make sorag shai*  
*puteke borashi bai*—Bamboo  
6) *gaso khosonga, pato khosonga*  
*dima pare losonga losonga*—Komora  
(The white guard melon)

7) *gas nohoi moi gasar soli manhur sewa koro*  
*nai abhiman*—Flower

#### 3.1.6. Riddles Related to Child Psychology

1) *kone deshat mati nai*— Sondesht  
2) *gharar oparat ghar*  
*tate pori mor*—Mosquito net  
3) *oparar pora poril tekeli*  
*tekeli bitorat satsha bhekuli*—Jack fruit

4) *ji diea take khai*  
*pani dile mori jai*—Fire  
5) *ki rongar rong nai*— Kazironga  
6) *ki hatir sur nai*—Guwahati  
7) *ki doi tenga nohoi*—Mongoldoi  
8) *desh ashe mati nai*  
*nodi ase pani nai*—Map

- 9) *puar bhagat sari khan, duporoia dukhan;  
sondhia loi tak lage bhori tinikhan, teo koan  
korisane mon*  
—Human
- 10) *sorai nohoi moi jantu nohoi nissasar buli loka  
make koi*  
—Bat

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

It has been our endeavour to collect riddles of different category from different places of Kamrup district. The paper describes in a nutshell about riddles and then started to mention the riddles one after another classifying the riddles in seven categories.

It is expected that this study will help in spreading the academic and social value of Assamese riddles. The work is undertaken with the humble objectives that the study will help in preserving those riddles which are being scattered in the entire area in such a documentary form.

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