



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Design is the process of creation, manifestation, and consumption of ideas. Yet the dominance of vision, and by extension, the focus on tangibility in the domain, potentially marginalizes Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). However, ICH forms like folk songs and folklore frequently embed rich documentation connecting the tangible to the intangibles. This thesis investigates Assamese Folk Bihu songs (Bonghokhas), associated with Assam's state festival, as significant representations of ICH, aiming to explore the cultural knowledge and lived experiences they encapsulate through the lens of conceptual metaphors.

A corpus study was conducted on the earliest published Bihu songs from Dimbeswar Neog's "Bana-benu: Akul Pathik, Faguni, Bihuwati" (excluding the "Bihuwati" section), treating the songs as poems. The analysis employed Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which posits metaphors as cognitive mappings between familiar source domain knowledge and complex target domain ideas. A Codebook Thematic Analysis framework was utilised, using source and target domains from existing literature as preliminary codes.

The analysis revealed several key metaphorical themes mapping abstract concepts to tangible experiences: - 1) People (lovers/singers) are conceptualized through local Flora and Fauna, reflecting gendered dynamics and environmental interactions; 2) Ideas, along with subcases like words and abuses are understood as food or objects. Influencing perceptions of acceptance and communication; 3) Negative and Positive values are systematically associated with specific Directions, Colours, and Shapes (e.g., negativity with blackness/ direction down/ backside, positivity with round or straightness, fairness/vermillion red); 4) Fate is mapped onto a Flowing River or Divine writing on the forehead; 5)The experience of betel quid chewing understands the feeling of love and friendship; 6)Other emotions like Love, Desire, Grief are similarly structured metaphorically.

While affirming the universality of some conceptual metaphors, the study highlights unique, culturally specific manifestations within the Bihu songs (e.g. LOVE IS A DRUG is represented by betel-quin chewing). This research demonstrates how these songs function as a culture-specific knowledge base, documenting tangible and intangible realities and contributing to ICH preservation. It argues that this extracted cultural knowledge offers a valuable resource for designers and creators seeking to develop culturally resonant artefacts, products, and systems within the Assamese context. The analytical framework presented is potentially adaptable for studying other forms of ICH in and outside Assam and Bihu.

