

## TĀI ELEMENTS IN THE PLACE NAMES OF ĀSSĀM

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**INTRODUCTION :-** The word 'Tāi' is a generic name denoting a great branch of Mongoloid population of Asia the present inhabitant of the Tāi people extends from Āssām (North-East India) in the west to Kwāngsi and Hainan in the East and from the interior of Yunān in the North to the southern most proximity of Thāiland in the South, i.e. 90° East-180° East longitude and 6° North to 33° North latitude. The Tai groups and sub-groups in this vast region are known by innumerable other local names, which at times tend to obscure their racial identity such as in Burmā, 'Shān', in Thāiland 'Siānese', in Lāos 'Lāo' (Combodia), in Yunan 'pie' and in Assām (the Brahmaputra valley) as Tāi-Āhoms, Tāi-Phāke, Tāi-Khāmti, Tāi-Turung, Tāi-Āi-ton and Tāi-Khāmyāng. But the members of this great race, whatever the local groups to which they may belong, call themselves 'Tāi'.

The Tāi-Āhoms, a branch of the great 'Tāi' race, conquered the valley of Brahmaputra, Āssām in the early part of the 13th century (1228 A.D.) under the leadership of Chāolung Sukāphā. Sukāphā laid foundation of a Tāi state here which lasted for nearly six hundred years.

This state was known as Prāgjyotishpur and Kāmrupa in early times. Sukāphā renamed the state as

Mung-Dun-Chun-Khām ; Mung=country, Dun=full of, Chun=garden, Khām=gold ; a country full of garden of gold.

The Āhoms brought into being during their reign in Āssām a stabilized polity, a balanced society, a liberalized economy and a flourishing cultural life. Their endeavours left their impress on all aspects of life and culture, literature-particularly the 'Buranjies' (Chronicles), music, dance, drama, architecture, Sculpture and painting even today bear the testimony of the achievements made in this field during the six hundred years of their rule. In the words of Dr.B.K.Baruā "the most distinctive aspects of the period were the geographical and racial unification of the country, stabilization of the political institutions, organisation of the economic, social and religious system and finally the rise of nationalism". In the same context a noted historian of Āssām Dr.S.K.Bhuyan rightly remarks, "The Āhoms as a sovereign power have ceased to exist since 1826 A.D., but visible traces of their rule still exist in different form".

The Āhoms as they advanced into and conquered Āssām used their own language. This language of Āhoms were a branch of Siāmesese-Chinese group which is a member of Sino-Tibetan family. In spite of the fact that the Āhom Rulers had their own manners and customs, language, and religious rites, they didn't impose their language, culture and religion on the conquered. On the other hand by inter marriage, by speaking the language of the indigenous people and by adopting their culture, the Āhom conquerers gradually became one with the

conquered. Finally, in course of time they had to give away to the language of the people, i.e. Āssāmesē and the language got confined to the priestly clans-the Deodhāis, the Bāilungs, the Mohans etc. But today most of the people have rejuvenated their language.

In the formation of the modern Āssāmesē language the following groups of people have contributed, such as the Indo-Chinese, particularly Austro-Asiatic-Khāsi, Kolāriān and Mālayān ; Tibeto-Burmāns-Bodo, Koch, Rābhā, Hojāis, Lālūng, Gāro, Morān, Borāhi, Chutiā etc. and 'Tāi', Tāi-Āhom, Tāi-Phāke, Tāi-Khāmyāng, Tāi-Turung, Tāi-Āiton, and Tāi-Khāmti. Except the Tāi-Āhoms, these later-migrated Tāi groups have been continuing their language and culture as before with local variations.

The Tāi elements in place names owe their origin to association with Lakes, Rivers, Trees or some striking natural characteristics or incidents that happened in the locality. Similarly, river names are associated with terms indicating noise, breaking terrain, quality, specific gravity etc. A good number of these places still retain the original names and are currently in use mostly in the district of Golāghāt, Jorhāt, Sibsāgar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukiā, Lakhimpur and Dhemāji. The Tāi-Āhom historical documents, Burānji or Chronicles abound in such names, in short, Āhoms were well-acquainted with the places under their domain.

1. RIVER NAMES :- As we have mentioned earlier a handful of Tāi elements can be traced in river names of Āssām. The Tāi Āhom



**Nāphuk<Nām-Phuk :-** Nām - water,  
Phuk - white,  
(in Sibsāgar  
District : name  
not in use).

**Nām-Sāi :-** Nām - River, water, Sāi - Sandy,  
A sandy river, Āssām-Arunāchāl  
Border. The name is still in use.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACES :-** The nomenclatures of  
the place was always on  
particular characteristics and  
these characteristics still are  
in prevalence :-

**Bāntung :-** Bān-God, Phi ; tung-meadows or  
field ; devottar land, the land  
earmarked for the temple,  
(Gaskilākhāt, in Sibsāgar  
district). The name is still in  
use.

**Bāruk<Bānruk :-** Bān-ruk ; Bān-village ; ruk-six;  
counstellation of six villages,  
in Sibsāgar district. Still in  
use.

- Chaiyāṅg :- Chaiyāṅg<Che-āṅg;Che-town,āṅg-tradition  
-al ancestral; traditional or an  
ancestral town. Still in use in  
Sibsāgar district.
- Charideo :- Charāideo<Che-rāi-doi ; Che-town ; rāi-  
prominent ; doi-hill, mountain ;  
a prominent place on the hill top  
in Sibsāgar district. The First  
capital of the Tāi-Āhoms. Still  
in use.
- Khum-Tāi :- 'Khum'-a tank ; 'Tāi'-Tāi-Āhoms i.e.  
a tank excavated by Tāi-Āhoms, in  
Golāghāt district and also a  
place in Sibsāgar district. Still  
in use.
- Nām-Chāṅg :- Nām-water, low (foot hills) ;  
Chāṅg-a Nāgā village ; a village  
of Nāgās on the foot-hills in  
Āssām-Nāgāland border, in  
Sibsāgar district. (Still in use)
- Nāzirā :- Nā-a field; Zi-store,Rā-Slanting,  
a rice growing field on the bank  
of river Dikhow in Sibsāgar  
district.(Still in use).
- Rāilung :- Rāi-Shinning; in Sibsāgar(Still  
in use).
- Rāisā :- Rāi-Shinning near Charaideo in  
Sibsāgar district (Still in use)

- Rukāṅg** :- Rukāṅg < Ru-Kāk-āṅg; Ru-kāk-bamboo; āṅg-compound, enclosure. A compound for bamboo, in Sibsāgar district. Still in use.
- Tāokāk** :- Tāṅg-way ; kāk-muga; 'muga rearing place' ; i.e. a way to muga cocoon  
 <Tāṅgkāk : (antharoea Anomoea) rearing place, in Sibsāgar district. (name still in use).
- Tihu** :- Ti-place, Hu-cattle, a place known for cattle, in Nalbāri district. (still in use).
- Ting-Khāṅg** :- Ting-high land ; Khāṅg-wide ; a wide high land, on the bank of Dihing, in Dibrugarh district. (Still in use).
- Ting-rāi** :- Ting-high land ; rāi-shining, twinkling; prominent; a prominent high land ; in Tinsukiā district, once known for elephants. Still in use.
- Tung-Khāṅg** :- Tung-a meadow or a field, Khāṅg-wide; a wide field near Charāideo; the living place of Tung-Khangīā clan who ruled Āssām for about a hundred and forty five years, in Sibsāgar district. Still in use.

3. TRANSLITERATED PLACE NAMES :- A set of River names of Āssāmeṣe origin have just been transliterated into Tāi-language;

ASSAMESE

Jāji  
(Jāji-garbage)

Seshā river,  
(Seshā-cold).

Shāmuk-jān =  
Shāmuk - snail ;  
Jān - streamlet).

Sonāi river  
(Son-gold).

TAI

Khe-nām-jeng; khe-river ;  
Nām -water ;  
jeng-garbage  
(Jorhāt district :  
Name is not in use)

Khe-nām-jin; Khe-river,  
Nām - water,  
jin - cold.  
(in Dibrugarh  
District : not in  
use).

Khe-Nām-hoi. Khe - river  
Nām - water,  
hoi - Snail,  
(in Sibsāgar district  
: not in use)

Khe-nām-Khām; khe - river,  
Nām - water,  
Khām - gold.  
(in Sibsāgar  
district : The  
river is not in  
existence).



Tengāpāni	Nām-choom ;	Nām-river, water
{Tengā-acidic, sour		Choom-acidic, sour (in
Pāni-water, river).		Tinsukiā district : the
		name is still in use).

4. PLACE NAMES WHERE TAI ELEMENTS ARE PREFIX : Before the advent of Tāi-Āhoms, Brahmaputra valley was surrounded on all sides by aboriginal tribes of Tibeto-Burmān origin except the Khāsis who belong to the Monkhmer branch of Austric stock. The remnants of those tribes, particularly the Bodos and the Austrics are still in prevalence in the form of river names. The Tāi-Āhoms prefixed "Khe-nām" and 'Nām' to the Austric and Bodo origin river names.

<u>AUSTRIC</u>	<u>BODO</u>	<u>TAI</u>
Dhansri>Dhansiri (Name still in use)	Dimā (not in use)	Nām-ti-mā (Tāi pronounced di as ti) in Golāghāt district. Not in use.
Lāo-ti>Luit (Still in use).	Di-lāo (not in use).	Nām-ti-lāo, Khe-Nām-ti Lao, Nām-dāo-phi. Not in use.
Sobansri>Subansiri (still in use)		Khe-nām-ti-mā (in Lakhimpur district). Not in use.
	Dibru (still in use).	Ti-Phāo in Dibrugarh district. Not in use.
	Dichāng (still use)	Khe-nām-Chāng, le-chāng ; (in Sibsāgar District). Not in use.
	Dikhow (still use)	Khe-nām-chāo, (in Sibsāgar district). Not in use.

5. TAI ELEMENTS IN CAPITALS & TOWNS : During the Tāi-Āhom rule, they established a few capital towns as well as small township in their domain and named it in Āssāmesē language but it always had a Tāi-name which abound in Tāi Chronicles. The Āssāmesē names are now in existence.

ĀSSĀMESETAI

Abhoipur	Che-khru < che-mākhru ; Che-town ; Mā-Khru-brinjal; , egg plant (in Sibsāgar district).
Dihing nagar	Che-tāi-mung > Tāi-mung ; i.e. a tāi populated town (in Sibsāgar district).
Gajpur	Che-Chāng, Che-town, Chāng-elephant. (in Sibsāgar district).
Gargaon	Che-hung ; Che-town ; hung-rāmparts A town with ramparts (in Sibsāgar district old capital).
Jorhāt	Sām-Che-hāt ; Sām-two, che-town, hāt-market i.e. a twin market. (in Jorhāt district : last capital).
Kaliābar	Tun-rung-dām to denote a kind of Banyan tree. (in Nowgāon district).
Rangpur	Che-mun ; Che-town ; mun-enjoy, delightful ; A place of enjoyment. (in Sibsāgar district : old capital).

Sadiā	Mung-teo-lā, Pong-teo-lā (in Tinsukiā district).
Sonāpur	Che-Khām; Che-town, Khām-gold near Simalguri in Sibsāgar district.

6. PLACE NAMES WITH PREFIX 'CHE' AND 'TI' :- A handful of place names prefix word 'Che' and 'Ti', a particular characteristics are traced and hitherto being used :

Chepon	=	Che-town, pon-cotton, an area known for cotton : Sibsāgar District.
Cherequā >		Old capital of Āhom. Sibsāgar District near Demow.
Choroquā		
Timon	=	Ti-place, mon-muga silk : Antharoea Assamoea (Cocon).
Tingali bām	=	Ti-place, 'ngā'- sesāme, li-small, little (in Sibsāgar district).
Tipām	=	Ti-place, pām-mounds. (in Dibrugarh district).
Tiphuk	=	Ti-place, phuk-white, sandy, (in Sibsāgar district).
Tirāp	=	Ti-place, rāp-connected (in Tinsukia district).
Tiru	=	Iron melting place, (Teu-ru) teu-to melt iron (in Sibsāgar district).
Tiyok	=	Ti-place, yok-diary products (in Jorhāt district).

7. PLACE NAMES FROM PARTICULAR EPISODE : There are some places which have derived their names from particular episode and the names are still in use.

Chāring,        :- Sukāphā advanced upto Nāmdāng and had  
 < Chāmring       a camp there and ordered his nobles  
                  to search for a, suitable place for  
                  capital. The nobles came across a  
                  river on their way which had three  
                  thousand ghāts, (footway to a river  
                  for carrying water) and named it  
                  Chāmring, a rivulet with three  
                  thousand ghats or footways now  
                  known as Chāring in Sibs<sup>ā</sup>gār district.

Chongtok >    :- King Sukāphā and his followers  
 Chontak        renamed 'Silpāni' as Chongtok -  
                  Chong-two, tok-tola, when going  
                  upstream of the river Dikhow (Nām-  
                  Chāo), they arrived at Silpāni, a  
                  rivulet, and weighing the specific  
                  gravity of both the river water they  
                  found the rivulet water two tolas  
                  heavier than that of Dikhow and named  
                  'Silpāni' as 'Chongtok' (in Sibsāgar  
                  district).

8. PLACE NAMES : BOTANICAL ORIGIN :- Certain nomenclatures of places were found of Botanical origin. The Tāi names are not in use now.

ĀSSĀMESETĀI

Āhontguri	: Che-Chop ; after a peepal tree (in Jorhāt district).
Chopāguri	: Tun-māk-rān-khām-a kind of tree.
Jāmuguri	: Tun-mūk-bin ; after a black berry tree, (in Sibsāgar district).
Kathālbāri	: Chun-māk-lān ; after Jack fruit orchard, (in Sibsāgar district).
Metekā-toli	: Pā-phāk-dim ; after water-hyacinths, (in Sibsāgar district).
Phutukātoli	: Joi-Khām-dāng ; a kind of wild shrub (in Sibsāgar district).
Silikhā guri	: Ti-che-tum-māk-chāk ; the myrobalan; <i>Terminslia citrina</i> , in Jorhāt district.

9. RECHRISTENED PLACE NAMES :- The Tāis rechristened some places which already had Assamese synonym ; the Tāi names are not in use now.

ĀSSĀMESETĀI

Dibrugārh	Ti-phāo, (Dibrugarh district).
Gāhbaru parbat	Nong-doi (Jorhāt district)
Jakāi-chuk	Khek-chok, (Sibsāgar district)
Jerengā pathār	Nām-khrum, (Sibsāgar district).
Mohong	Chao-bo-din (Sibsāgar Nāgāland Border)
Mothādang	Jong-mung-khām, (Sibsāgar district)
Nowgāon	Bān-aon-māo. (Nowgāon District)
Pāni-tolā	Tāk-nām, (Tinsukiā district)
Safrāi	Thāmfrāi, (Sibsāgar)

Sonāri Nagar      Che-mung-khām (Sibsāgar district).  
The place is not in existence now.

10. CORRUPTIONS IN PLACE NAMES : In a group of place names, due to wrong pronounciation, corruptions took place. All the names are still in use.

- Bāruk               : Bānruk. (Sibsāgar District).
- Bokotā             : Makthā, Blokthā (Sibsāgar district)
- Morangi            : Morāngkii, (Golāghāt district).
- Nāmrup             : Nāmruk (Tāi-Āhom), Nāmruk (Tāi-Khāmti) (Dibrugarh district)
- Pātkāi             : Pātkāi-seng-kān, Pāt-to cut, or sacrifice, Kāi-fowl, seng-an oath. Kān-taking. Taking an oath after sacrificing a fowl. Old name is Doi-kāu-rong, Doi-hill or mountain, kāu-nine, rong-connected, join. A mountain with nine chains of hills, (Tinsukiā district Nāgāland boundary)
- Solā                : Sāolā or chāolā, (Nowgāon district).  
(Map No.1 shows Tāi river names)  
(Map No.2 shows Tāi place names)

11. CLASSIFICATIONS OF PLACE NAMES : The place names of Tai origin can be classified or divided broadly into three categories :-

- 11.1 Geographical : This can be again sub-divided:  
11.1.1 Physical viz, Changtok, Nām-Khe, Nām-chao etc.  
Nām-water; Chāo-clear.

- 11.1.2 Cultural : Tipām, Tiru, Bāruk<Bānruk etc.
- 11.1.3 Political : Pātkāi -Seng-kān > Pātkāi.
- 11.1.4 Economic : Tiok, Chepon etc. Che-town, Pon-Cotton, derived from the silk cotton tree or Bot, hepaphylam.
- 11.1.5 War : "Chup-nām-chao" mouth of river Dikhow where a battle between Tai-Ahom and Kachari took place "Māk-lāng-dāng" Kaliābar, a place where Tāi-Āhoms and Mughals fought for number of times.
- 11.2 Historical : This may be further subdivided to :-
- a) Early period of Tai-Ahoms,
  - b) Medieval
  - c) Modern.

In this Medieval and later historical periods, the Tāi-Āhoms since Susengphā, (Hindu name of Pratāp Singh A.D. 1603,) adopted and patronized the Hindu religion and Āssāmesē language. Thence onward the nomenclature of places, rivers etc. were mostly done in Hinduised Āssāmesē form. And they are ; Mechāgarh, Pukhuri (a Tank), Rupahi Pukhuri, Rohdholā Pukhuri, Lakhimi Pukhuri, Tengā Pukhuri, Lāngkuri dol (a temple), Thāorā dol, Siva dol, Sibsāgar dol, Rājṃāo pukhuri (Rājṃāo is the mother of king) etc. etc.

- 11.3 Miscellaneous : This group includes the names outside the periphery of geographical or historical divisions

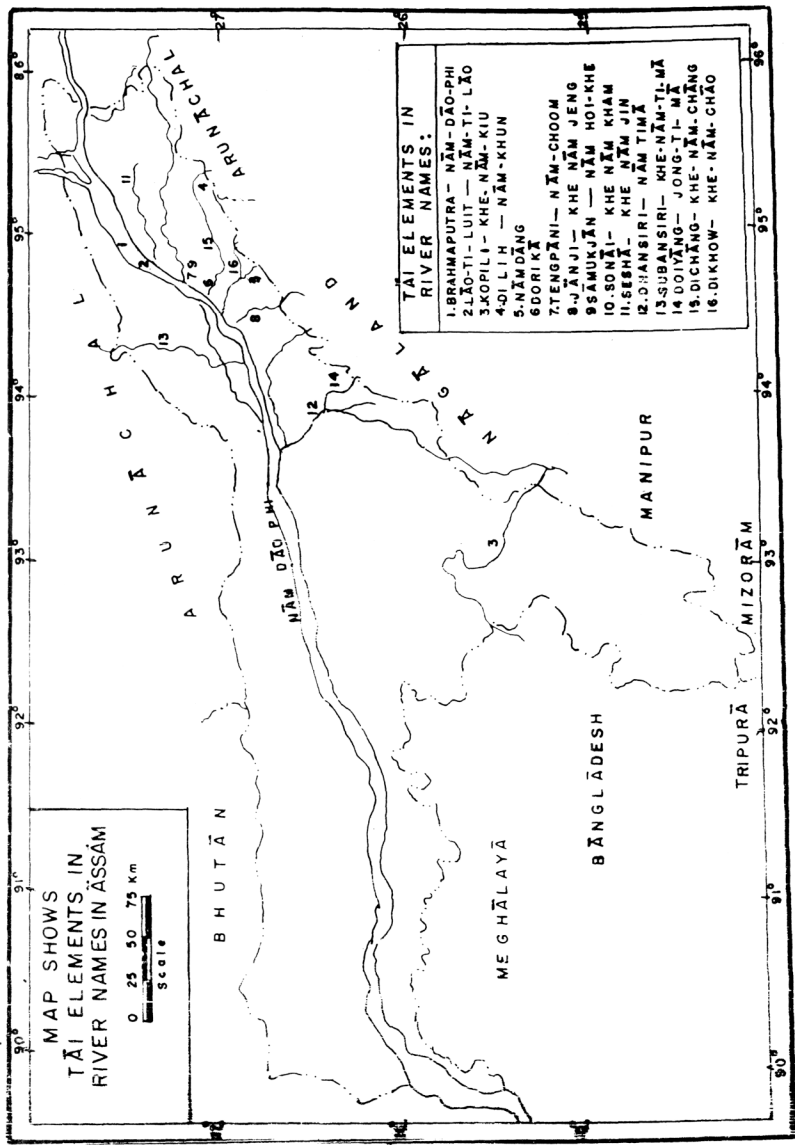
12. CONCLUSION : In this paper we are trying to highlight some of the important aspects of place-name study which is still a virgin one in which no systematic work has been done so far. An indepth study on the subject will definitely reveal certain facts of national importance on the socio-cultural back ground of various tribes housed in this part of the country. Further it will also reveal the sound knowledge of the Tais in the naming process in a scientific and systematic manner.

The study of place names, particularly in Āssām, which has been melting-pot of various tribes, cultures, languages and religions throughout the ages, has a special relevance to our sense of history as a civilized people living in a colourful and traditionally rich region of India. When one talk of unity in diversity in the national context, it would be well to remember that in Āssām in particular and the North-East in general, this adage of unity finds a very colourful and unique application vis-a-vis the rest of the country, for it would be the rare state in India which has such a diverse multi-racial and multi-cultural tapestry of social and anthropological life, we have in the North-Eastern region. As such, the place names of Āssām provide us with a subject of study which can prove to be as absorbing and as interesting to the student of history, as the study of wild life and environment proves to be to the nature lover, or the study of birds is to the ornithologist. And more so, as this is a scholastic area in which the social, cultural, historical and political life of the native people of Āssām are intricately bound, as they are bound with the names of the places in which they reside.

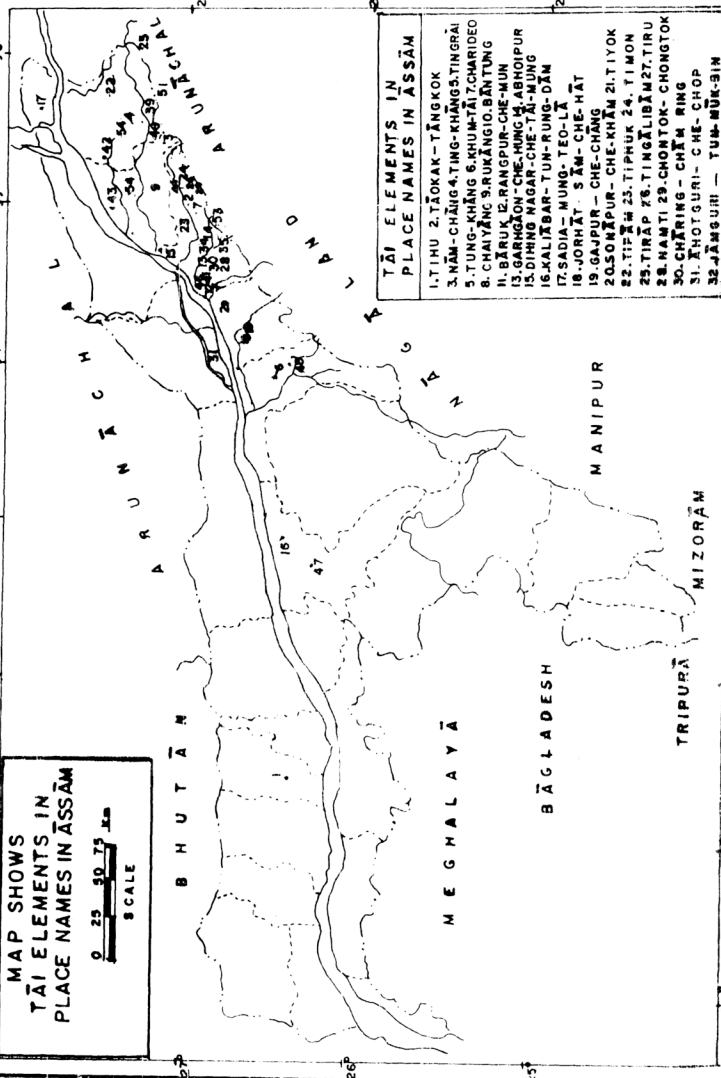


In this context, this paper purports to be a minor excursion into this vast extremely absorbing area of study, with the hope that this humble attempt may pave the way for bigger inroads into this virgin field.

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MAP SHOWS  
TĀI ELEMENTS IN  
PLACE NAMES IN ĀSSĀM



TĀI ELEMENTS IN  
PLACE NAMES IN ĀSSĀM

21. TILOK - TINGKOK  
22. NAM - CHANG  
23. TUNG - KHANG  
24. KHUM-TAI-CHARD  
25. CHAIYANG-SRANGUN-BAN-TUNG  
26. N. BAKU  
27. KANGSUNG-CHU-MUN  
28. GARHONG-CHU-MUNG  
29. ABOHUPUR  
30. SINGH NAGAR-CHU-TAI-MUNG  
31. KALIKAT-CHU-TUNG-RUNG-DAM  
32. TAI-SADIA - MUNG-TEO-LA  
33. JH-18 - JORHAT - SAK-CHU-HAT  
34. JUNG-CHANG  
35. GAJUPUR - CHU-CHANG  
36. OSONOJUPUR - CHU-KHAM  
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33. METEN B'ETOLI - P'AP'U-  
34. KAT'ALAN - CHU'AN-  
35. PHUTUKATOLI - JOH-KHUM-  
36. KAGAGSALIKHAGUM-T-CHU-TUY-MIA-CHU  
37. CHOPADU-TUY-MIA-CHU  
38. A'ALI - THIN'P'RI  
39. MOHONG - CH'AO-BO-DIN  
40. SOHARI NAGAR - CHU-MUNG-KHAM  
41. JERENGA PATHAN-NIA-KHUM  
42. P'IN'ITOLI - YIK-KHUM  
43. DISRUANG - YI-PAO  
44. JAHANU PARSY-KONG-DCI  
45. JAKI - CHU - GHE-CHOK  
46. KAT'ALAN - JOH-MUNG-KHAM  
47. KOWGONG - KAM-AON-MIA  
48. HORANGI-MORANGKI  
49. KHAMUP - KHAMUK  
50. SALT - SIOLI OR CH'OLI  
51. PATKI - PATKI SENG-KAN  
52. BOKOTI - KIKHI  
53. TIRU  
54. TENGKHAL - LAKENTANGHA