1. Manipuri, also called Meiteiron by the native speakers themselves, is a Tibeto-Burman language; and it is spoken mainly in Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. In India, it is spoken at various states, namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Manipur state bordering Myanmar is its native place. Manipuri speakers live in all the cities in India either doing some jobs or business, or as students undergoing a certain course.

There are Manipuri speakers in Dhaka and mainly in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Manipuri speakers are found in Sagaing division, around Mandalay and Yangon, etc., in Myanmar.

Of the over two million population (through personal communication) of the state, about one and half million people speak Manipuri as their first language in Manipur alone, and another half a million speakers live in different states of India. Manipuri is also used extensively as second language or lingua franca in Manipur among the various tribes (twenty nine tribes) and as trade language in the neighbouring states, particularly in Nagaland and at Kabo Valley in
Myanmar.

Manipuri is the only one among the Tibeto-Burman languages (there are more than one hundred mother tongues) which has received recognition as one of the national languages of India.

Manipuri is the mother-tongue of three major groups of people in Manipur, namely the Meiteis, the Pangals (Muslims) and the Lois. Pangals live scattered around Imphal, the capital city of Manipur, and at various parts of Manipur valley; Lois dwell exclusively at the periphery of the valley and the Meiteis occupy the central portion. Historically, the Meiteis were the ruling class people and they brought in the Pangals (Muslims) from Cachar district of Assam, India as prisoners of war. "Lois were those subdued people who paid tributes to the Meitei Kings and remained unassimilated in the Meitei fold. Hence the name Loi was given to them." (Sanajaoba 1988:148).

The kingdom of the Meitei kings was divided into a number of divisions ranging from four to ten depending upon the wisdom of the ruling king. These administrative units (divisions) are known as Panas. The most popular Panas are: Ahallup Pana, Naharup Pana, Laipham Pana and Khabam Pana.

The Meitei society consists of seven yeks (clans), namely, Angom, Khuman, Khaba Nganba, Luwang,
Moirang, Ningthawja (Mangang) and Sarang-Leisangthem. A Meitei must belong to one of these seven Yeks. However, there are few exceptions, probably from the 18th Century A.D., due to Sanskritization of Meitei society. The Brahmins, Lairik Yengbams, Khetrimayums etc. do not have their affiliation to any of those yeks, but they are very much among the Meiteis.

Those people who are under the fold of Meiteis are the only legitimate Pana Machas (Members of a Pana). The function of Pana is to participate in the affairs of administration, join in religious, social and cultural activities. For instance, a person who is not a Pana member cannot join in a wrestling competition, boat race, festivals, etc. where the king is to grace the occasion. The competition of any sort was being arranged amongst the Panas only (a social segregation indeed?).

Before the advent of Hinduism (18 Century AD) a member of any tribe or community could become a Pana member if the king so desired. Many people, particularly from the East and the West, came to Manipur and became ingredients in the cauldron of Meitei society which has been developed for the last 2000 years or so. Perhaps the belief prevalent among the different tribes and the Meiteis of old generations that they were one and the same, would be correlated with such social convictions and other practices in the
past.

2. On the basis of old texts, Manipuri makes use of fifteen consonants and six vowels. Tone was not taken care of properly. Of the fifteen consonants, there are seven stop consonants \(p, t, c, k, p^n, t^n\) and \(k^n\), three nasals \(m, n, q\), two fricatives \(s, h\) one lateral \((l)\) and two semi-vowels \(w, y\).

Modern Manipuri is found using nine more consonants i.e. \(b, d, j, g, r, b^n, d^n, j^n\) and \(g^n\). The first four consonants are the voiced counterparts of the voiceless stops, \(p, t, c\) and \(k\); the flap \(r\) was derived from the lateral \((l)\) and the four voiced aspirated stops \(b^n, d^n, j^n\) and \(g^n\) would be developed due to the impact of loan words.

The dialect variations, among the three Manipuri dialects, can be taken as spin-off due to extension of new sounds and tonal shifts among them. In the process of new development, the standard dialect (Meitei) is more dynamic than the Loi and the Pangal (Muslim) dialects. This does not mean that the Loi and the Pangal dialects take no changes at all. They also do change in their own way which is quite different from that of the standard one; but the number of such changes is not many.

The major variations that are found among the three dialects are in (1) Voicing (2) Deaspiration and (3) Change of fricatives \(s\) and \(h\), (4) fricativization