CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Language and people

The name ‘Inpui’ is composed of two syllables in ‘house’ and pui ‘big or large’. Hence, the literal meaning of Inpui can be translated as big house. There is an interesting story behind the name Inpui. According to their legend, God made a shelter for all human beings and kept them inside the cave beneath the earth in order to protect them from the cruel beasts. In the course of time, they intended to go out of the cave, but the cave was covered by a huge and heavy flat stone. They made several attempts to break the door but failed. After much struggle, they found a giant buffalo from the south and engaged him to break the door. But the buffalo was found too weak. Then, the people engaged a big mithun that manages to break the door of the cave. As they come out of the cave, they saw a light and they uttered the words Ramting Kebin which means the sky is shining. Thus, the Inpuis believed that they emerged out of a cave called Ramting Kebin which is located somewhere in the Ngwang village of Senapati District of Manipur. After they came out of the cave, they settled at a place called Bangkungiwan by constructing a big house. There lived in that big house a family that consisted of an old man called Hovah who had four sons viz. Kovah, Kadih, Namgangba and Nrimbang. As the family members increases in number, of the big house ‘Inpui’ could not accommodate them any longer. One day, Hovah called his eldest son Kovah and told him that he had become very old and he would probably die soon.
The father told his son that after his death he must take his (father’s) place and instructed him to treat all his brothers equally and distribute the land and other properties proportionately. So, after the death of his father, Kovah did everything as his father had advised him. Atlast, he came to realize that there was nothing left for him. So, he told himself that he would inherit the big house Inpui and decided to name it as Inpuirwan which mean people of the big house. As time passed by, Kovah along with his children left the site and established for themselves a village called Lwangjang.

1.2. Geographical location

The Inpuis are mainly found in the easternmost region of Tamenglong District of Manipur. Tamenglong district lies 24°30’N and 25°27’N latitudes and of 93°10’E and 94°54’E longitudes. The district is bounded by Nagaland in the North, Churachandpur District in the South, Senapati District in the east and Assam in the west. At present, there are thirteen Inpui villages spread in different parts of Tamenglong district. The names of these villages are: 1. Kabuikhulen(Lwanjang), 2. New Kabuikhullen (Lamjang Namthan), 3. Haochong (Pantong), 4. Oktan(Puichi), 5. Nungtek Part-I, 6. Nungtek Part II, 7. Bakua, 8. Tamenglong Headquarter, 9. Ijeirong(Tulimowan), 10. Pungmon(Chingchen), 11. Noney, 12. Lower Karwangmon and 13. Upper Karwangmon. The Inpuis are bounded by other Tibeto-Burman languages, viz. Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei and Meiteis. Of all the Inpui villages, Haochong is the biggest and serves as a center for the Inpui tribe. The Inpuis are also found in few villages of Changangei, Tamphagei, Yurembam, Majorkhul and Keishamthong in Imphal valley. They are also found
in Senapati District (Waphong and Makuilongdi), Juluki area of Nagaland and also in Signal Basti of Dimapur (Nagaland). According to the census of India, 2001, the population of the Inpuis is 10,000.

Map: 1. Map of India showing the state of Manipur
Map: 2. District map of Manipur showing Tamenglong District

Map: 3. Map of Tamenglong showing Inpui speaking area
1.3. Position of Inpui within the Tibeto-Burman family

The position of the Inpui within the Tibeto-Burman family remains to be worked out. Most of the classifications available did not mention the language owing to lack of reliable data. Grierson’s Linguistics Survey of India (1903) hereafter referred to it as *LSI* classified the Naga languages into five sub-groups: western group, central group, eastern group and Naga-Bodo group. Based on the *LSI*, Inpui (Empeo) fall within the Naga-Bodo subgroup. But none of the latter classifications on Tibeto-Burman make any attempt to relate Inpui with the Bodo-Garo languages. The classification of the Tibeto-Burman languages by the *LSI* is provided in Fig 1 below.

Fig 1: Classification of Tibeto-Burman languages (*LSI*: 1903)
The Sino-Tibetan family branches out into the Siamese-Chinese and the Tibeto-Burman sub families based on the word order - the Siamese-Chinese has SVO word order while the Tibeto-Burman has SOV pattern, where S stands for Subject, V stands for Verb, and O stands for Object. Matisoff (2003) simply club all the languages of Northeast India under Kamarupan which include Naga, Kuki-Chin, Abor-Miri-Dafla and Bodo-Garo subgroups. A schematic diagram of the Sino-Tibetan language family by Matisoff (2003) is given in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Classification of Sino-Tibetan language by (Matisoff: 2003)

According to Benedict (1972) also placed all the Kuki-Naga, Mikir, Methei and Mru under Kachin. The schematic diagram of Sino-Tibetan languages (Benedict 1972) is shown in Figure 3 below.
Figure 3. Classification of Sino-Tibetan language by (Benedict: 1972)

Bradley (1997) gives a more detailed picture of Tibeto-Burman languages at the lower level as shown in Figure 4 below.
Fig 4: Tibeto-Burman Classification (Bradley 1997)
1.4. The structure of social life

The Inpui society believes in egalitarian. There is no social distinction between rich and poor and high and low. The Inpuis follow patriarchal system, but there is no gender among them. They maintained a strong community life in the form of a village system. The Inpui patriarchal society is composed of three main clans: Bariam, Inka and Khumba. The three major clans are divided into various sub-clans. The Khumba clan is found in the north while the Khumba Kathwei clan is found in the south. The youngest son of the family inherits the property. The system of clan in the society is strongly cohesive and it pervades in all walks of life. The Inpui society gives respect and regard to the head of the family. In all socio-cultural gathering, the head of the family represents the respective family. Discipline is strictly maintained by family members and they abide by the directions given by the head of the family. In Inpui society, women occupy a vital role in the decision making of the family, although, they devote most of their time in domestic chores, child rearing and agriculture. Inpui women are very hard working and dedicated. They act as the backbone of Inpui society and economy. Agriculture is the main occupation of the Inpui society.

1.5. Property rights and its inheritance

The law of inheritance is basically the same among all the Naga tribes. Only the son has the right to inherit the property of the parents. The Inpuis believe that if a family has more than one son, the father would divide the property among the sons and the youngest son gets the lion’s share including the parent’s house. He is considered as the custodian of the family property. However, he is not empowered
to sell or mortgage the property without the consent of the family members. In case, a family has no son, the property is passed on to the sons of father’s brothers. However, in some families, an equal share is given to all the sons after the death of the head of the family. The property always goes to the nearest male kin but not to the daughters. The daughters are not entitled to the property rights of the family in terms of movable or non-immovable goods. But, they can take along with them paddy, ornaments, domestic animals, and clothing, etc. after they are given for marriage.

1.6. Religion and culture of Inpui

The Inpui have a rich heritage of culture and tradition. The custom and tradition of the Inpui are great source of knowledge and are orally imparted to the next generation by their parents. The youths acquired the knowledge of making weapons, hunting, house building and the art of weaving through their customs. The Inpui are extremely creative people. They have great skill in designing different cloths and ornaments of various colours and sizes. They used different dresses for each festival which are celebrated in different seasons of the year. Some of the famous cloths of the Inpui are: Pwan-Rangou ‘shawl for male’, Pwan-Thiyam ‘shawl for the youth’. The Inpui people are highly religious people. They believed in the religion of their fore-fathers known as Apu-Apa Ririak. Their religion revolves around various rituals which include prayers, songs, dances, offerings and sacrifices. The Inpui do not believe in the worship of idols. Natural object such as stones, trees, mountains, and rivers are believed to be the abode of the evil spirits and demons which make them to worship nature. They believe in
the concept of supreme-being which is referred to as Rikrwang ‘king of all gods’ or Pukrangba ‘the awesome or the almighty’. The Inpuis perceived it as a male god who created and sustained the universe. It is said that, the relationship between Rikrwang and the Inpuis is love and reverence and not fear. He is considered to be loving, benevolent, protecting and caring. He is remembered in every occasion such as birth, marriage and death. He is invoked upon to judge in oath taking and to protect human-beings from the natural calamities.

The traditional Inpuis believed that there are two kinds of spirits which they named it as malevolent spirit and benevolent spirit. They worshipped the benevolent spirit with hope but propitiate the malevolent gods so that they will not harm them. The Inpuis also worshipped tutelary or guardian spirit called Taswang which they believe is a spirit that protects the village from external threats, diseases or evil spirits. The Inpuis also believe in life after death. They believe that the soul of the death goes to Kathiram, which literally means the ‘land of the dead’. The concept of final judgment of human conduct after death makes Inpui people to live a careful and discipline lives.

1.7. Birth

When a new baby is born, the members of the family perform a ceremony by sacrificing a cock. After eight days of a child’s birth, naming ceremony is performed which is known as MengBasaknu. The child’s ear is pierced with a needle and a black thread is tied on it. The ear piercing is usually done during the Nabitnu festival.
1.8. Marriage

The Inpui consider marriage as a vitally sacred institution of their society. Marriage among the same clan is strictly prohibited. Inpui marriage can be broadly classified into two types: *Nupa Meingai* (love-arranged marriage), *Suipaknu* (marriage by eloping). The former is the most popular form of marriage among the Inpui. When a boy and a girl are in love after attaining certain marriageable age, the boy would inform his parents about his wishes to marry a particular girl with whom he is in love. Then, the parents would send an elderly person to approach the girl’s parents for marriage negotiation. Marriage proposals are made before the harvest, i.e. from August to October of the year. The marriage negotiation is finalized by the council called *Munchatnu* in the presence of the two families where *zu* ‘wine’ is offered to the girl’s parents. On this auspicious day, *Taman* bride price is decided which usually consist of a *Patsopwan* ‘shawl’, *Katu* ‘spade’, *sung* ‘spear and a *chem* ‘knife’. On the day of marriage ceremony, young girls from the village would escort the bride to the groom’s house and the father-in-law and mother-in-laws would receive the bride and bless them for their prosperity and long life.

1.9. Death

Inpui society believed death as a plan of the almighty. When a person dies in a family, funeral is observed by killing a dog or a cock. The traditional Inpuis believed that a dog will lead the deceased person and a cock will take care of the dead in the next life. After the burial ceremony, the deceased family served food
to the villagers by killing pig, or dog or cow, depending on their ability of the family.

1.10. Economic life

The main economic life of the Inpui people is based on agriculture. They practiced jhum cultivation. Their main agricultural products include rice, millet, corn, yam, soya beans and various seasonal vegetables. Fruits such as banana, pears, orange, pineapple, guava and other seasonal fruit are abundantly produced. Weaving is one of the economic sources of the Inpui women. They have great skills in weaving and designing cloths. Inpui man folks also have great skills in arts and craft making. They used various types of cane and small bamboo for their craft. They make mugs, containers, baskets, mats, carrying bags, winnowing fans, etc. They also produce cane ornaments such as head bared, bangles, leg-guard, etc. Man folks are also engaged in wood cutting. Animal husbandry plays an important role in the economic life of the people. Animals like cows, buffaloes, mithuns, pigs, cats, dogs, chickens etc. are commonly reared by the Inpuis.

1.11. Festivals

Inpui festivals are celebrated according to their agricultural seasons of the year. They celebrate festivals with much feasting, singing and dancing. Inpuis observe four main festivals during the year. They are Tataknu, Karing-Ngei, Nabitnu and Muliangnu. Tataknu is a parting festival that is celebrated in memory those souls who died during that year. It is the last festival of the year and it is celebrated in the month of December. The relatives of the deceased and villagers mourned for
the deceased person during the festival. This festival is regarded as the new year festival of Inpui as they believed that a new life will begin after this festival. 

*Muliangnu* is a thanks giving festival which is observed after the harvest season. It is celebrated in the month of December. The family who got the largest amount of paddy will organize the festival. Feasting, singing, and dancing are the highlights of this festival. *Karing-Ngei* is observed in honor of those ancestors and warriors who protected the village from their enemies. It is observed in the month of February. *Kutcat Bangei* is an annual agricultural festival. It is observed just after the sowing is over in the month of April-May. *Nabitnu* is a celebration of ear boring for the new born babies. It is observed in the month of March. The ears of the children born after the last festival are pierced during this festival. The parents give thanks and offerings to the mother goddess and seek her blessings.

**1.12. Review of Literature**

Inpui is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages which has not seen the light of modern days Linguistics description. Hence, the present work is the first piece of information available till date. The only piece of literature available to the speakers is a mini- dictionary of English-Inpui published by Inpui Students Union, New Delhi.

Few literature on the socio-cultural aspect of the people have been written in recent years. These include “Traditional culture and Christianity” by Alung Khumba, “A development Perspective of Inpui” by Rangya Gachui and “Tribal recognition and celebration among the Inpui Naga in Manipur and Nagaland” by
K. Kapangai. Like other tribal languages of the region, the Inpuis use Roman script as their writing system. The language not taught in any government or private institution.

1.13. Method of Data collection
The data presented in this thesis is solely based on primary data. Word lists and sentences were collected from various speakers of different age group, sex and region. Data are collected through digital recorder and are transcript and analyzed. In addition to world lists and sentences, conversations and short stories also recorded and analyzed.

1.14 Rationale for taking up the study
Inpui is one of the most endangered languages spoken in the state of Manipur, India. Hence, this study will be a source of information on the language for which there is no literature available. It is hoped that, the resent work will benefit the community as well as the linguistic researchers who may like to take up the language for further study. The present study will assist the speaker in the preparation of pedagogy for the introduction of the language in schools of Manipur.