Informative Abstract

Information has been an essential ingredient for the progress of civilization and society. Lack of information transfer and effective means of communication is now widely recognized as being a limiting factor in socio-economic development of the people. Basically, it should be recognized that people require information for self-development and that the channels and mechanism that carry, store, process and supply information are traditionally week and non-existent at the village level. Right to information is one of the emergency human rights of the twenty first century. If people are well informed, they will be more vigilant and therefore democracy is bound to become more vibrant. Right information to right people at right time will naturally help for the socio-economic development among rural masses. In the present era the information is not only to be considered as a resource and also it is a product and basic need of any country. The kind of productive survival and basic need of information and/or developmental information is “Community Information”, which is crucial for socio-economic development of the country and those of rural areas of Manipur. Like any other socio-cultural concept, the concept of Community Information (CI) is easy to understand but hard to define. The Community Information (CI) is equally important in the present day information oriented society. In regard Community Information Needs, a wide range of studies in Western and European countries at different periods of time had indicated a high demand for Community Information. There is good reason to believe that high levels of Community Information Need also exist generally within both developed and developing countries. The Community Information Needs of the rural areas are different according to the state of development of the concerned rural areas. In order to understand the needs of information by the communities at the village level, a detailed case study was undertaken by the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) on the existing library system in
the rural areas as well as the user community residing in those areas such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa etc. Whereas, in the context of Manipur State, so far no attempt has been made by the Government agencies/departments, learned societies, research organizations, professional associations, NGOs, private or cooperatives agencies to facilitate the various information needs by the rural communities in the rural areas and practically non-existent.

The objectives of the present study are (i) to identify, study and survey the existing information infrastructure in the rural areas of Manipur; (ii) to examine the programme adopted by various government organizations for the development of rural areas; (iii) to identify the information needs of the rural people and various information-communications in between the information providers and target groups; (iv) to examine the reading habit of different communities living in the rural areas of Manipur; (v) to find out some means through which the information can be disseminated to the rural people; and (vi) to support the rural development programme of the government through such study. The geographical area and time period of the study are restricted to the rural areas of Manipur for a period of five years (1999 – 2004). The work has been carried out using different methods and techniques like scanning of literature, conducting survey, interviews for collection of data. The required data for the present study is mainly based on the primary data. Primary data are collected from the different levels of rural communities, government offices, community information centres, information centres, libraries, user communities, voluntary/non-governmental organizations etc. by using different methods – ‘Interview cum Questionnaire’ (Pre-tested semi-structural questionnaire) methods. The ‘Interview cum Questionnaire’ method is most suitable technique used for the collection of data.
The present study has been divided into two parts, Part I: Study of Community Information Needs and Part II: Study of User Community. Data is processed and analyzed through Minitab-software with well known statistical formula like chi-square test. The sampling use in the present study of Community Information Need is Multi-Stage Sampling and Simple Random Sampling is adopted for User needs survey. Multi-Stage Sampling - in the first stage, Stratified Random Sampling is adopted by classifying the entire rural area of Manipur state, the study population, into two strata viz., rural valley districts and rural hill districts. 60 villages, 15 from each valley district, from the first stratum have been selected while 50 villages, 10 from each hill district, from the second stratum. Simple Random Sampling is again used as the second stage sampling. By which 15 individuals have been selected from each selected villages for both valley and hill that comprises a sample of 1650 individuals. In the third stage the sample has been again classified into 10 different occupational levels (groups) with 165 individuals each. Again, for each category of occupation, 90 individuals from valley and 75 from hill have finally been chosen for data collection.

The study finds that, there are 1121 males with a percentage of 67.94 and 529 female with 32.06% in the sample which are further distributed with respect to their occupations. The highest percentage (40.61) of individuals who belong to the age group 35-55 years constitutes the sample, followed by the age group 25-35 years (29.64%), 20-25 years (14.12%), 55 years and above (10.85%) and the lowest percentage (4.79) belongs to the age group of below 20 years. Over all average age of the people in the sample is found to be 39.23 years with standard deviation of 278.08 years. Table further shows the oldest group (51.33 yrs) pertaining to the occupation of Group-D (Service Holders community) while the youngest group (20.52 yrs) to Group-J (Students community). Maximum number of persons (22.00%) in the study sample has an educational attainment of under
metric. Next to the maximum is illiterate with a percentage of 21.45 which is followed by secondary (17.82%), graduate (16.48%), metric (16.18%) and postgraduate (6.06%) respectively.

The study also reveals that the primary occupation in most villages is agriculture which amount to 80.27% of total hill respondents and 81.89% of total valley respondents, next is animal husbandry 52.67% (hill respondents) & 57.89% (valley respondents), which is followed by household industry and a good number of rural people engaged in household industry (small scale, cottage, handloom and handicraft) which amount to 50.67% (hill respondents) & 56.44% (valley respondents) and business/small trader community earn good income on daily basis i.e. 43.60% (hill respondents) & 52.67% (valley respondents) respectively. The major information needs of the rural community are found as follows: 74.24% needs educational and training information which is highest percentage of the total respondents followed by 73.33% of total respondents needs health information and 66.36% needs agricultural information of the total respondents by the rural community. The study also finds that the use of information channels by the rural communities has a high potential of radio, because it does not need literacy to get messages transmitted by the radio, next is T.V. for providing information to the rural communities. The traditional form of communication is also occurred in the rural community to transmit and exchange the information among the rural people and this is an integral part of the cultural fabric of the rural community. Due to lack of information provider service centre in the rural areas, the use of and dependence on the information from library, information centre and community information centre is very low.

According to 2001 Census, the population of the state is 22,93,896. Out of the total population of the state, 17,17,928 (74.89%) population are living in the
rural while only 5, 75,968 (25.11%) population live in urban area. Since a large percentage of our population lives in villages and hence these villages are to be developed as the overall progress of the nation depends to a large extent on the welfare of the rural people. In spite of these development, planned progress and slow progress of urbanization in the state, the village scenario has not changed much since 1972 when Manipur was become a state of India. Still there are many with no drinking water facilities, sanitation facilities, employment opportunities and proper connectivity in terms of roads, communication, health, and educational facilities worth mentioning. Added to this, the village society is divided with caste complications, religious bigotry and various other dissensions. Besides, there are problems in each category of the society like small farmers have difficult in obtaining reliable seeds, proper irrigation facilities, input at fair prices and credit to purchase these inputs; educated youth have difficulty in finding suitable employment; and women and other disadvantaged groups in the villages have yet to get their fair share in the process of development. After studying the rural scenario of the state, one assumption which can be made is that the rural community is at the most basic level. The characteristics typical of this environment will include the following: (i) economic activity is based on agriculture which is at the subsistence level; (ii) illiterate is high and economically backward; (iii) communication facilities with the outside state/country/world are very poor; (iv) education, health facilities are at the primary level; (v) information providing service centre at the village level are very few; (vi) gap is wider in between target groups and govt. agencies meant for rural development; and (vii) local organizations are based primarily on religion, peer groups or traditional social groupings etc.

The study also whoever reveals that the rural community (people) need support and assistance for (i) agriculture and their related issues; (ii) better health,
family welfare, water supply and sanitation; (iii) employment and self employment plans and programme; (iv) education its related areas; (v) animal husbandry, common diseases and their cure in animals; (vi) prevention and control of social problems, social security, environmental degradation; (vii) govt. plans and programme, public information, credit system, information on people, culture, legal aids and recreational facilities etc. In a state of Manipur with agro-based rural economy, rural development can play a major role in national development. The Information Support System for Rural Development is a prerequisite for Integrated Rural Development in the State of Manipur and the necessary information support required for rural development as well as the community development, a proper information infrastructure has to be developed. In order to develop such rural development information there is an urgent need of establishing a Network of Rural Libraries and Information Centres dealing with rural development research and its allied subject at the first instance. There is also a general need of coordination between different government agencies/departments, institutions, NGOs, libraries and information centres, rural populace with gram panchayat as its hub.

The present study has seriously considered the lack of proper information service centres at the village level, rural people are not getting the right information at the right time, and this will lead to the slow development of rural mass. In view of the failure of the present Rural Library and Rural Community Information System and non-existent of the Rural Development Information Network System in the villages of Manipur, the investigator has suggested different model, if the situation warrants in order to meet all the information requirements of village people and to uplift the socio-economical, political, cultural and all round development of the rural community for the construction of information oriented or knowledge based society in the state of Manipur. The
proposed model will facilitate for improving the existing system and services in building up a healthy and progressive rural community. It also help rural people to make use of information resources, acquire, store, assemble, retrieve, and disseminate the right information to the rural people and can access the information at local, regional, national and international level if the system or centre have extended its network facilities abroad.

The observation of the present study has called for improving (i) the socio-economic conditions and their living standards; (ii) the minimum needs programme of the rural community; (iii) the various welfare programme and should be facilitate at the village level; (iv) the information and communication network system at various level; (v) the existing library and information centre and create rural information centre with audio-visual aids. On the basis of the existing infrastructure, and considering the needs and requirement of the rural communities, views and the suggestions of the user communities, the investigator has finally suggested a model “Manipur Rural Information Network System” (MRINS) has been proposed, the designing programme, as proposed, will carried with the cooperative efforts of different and similar agencies who will be the participating members. The proposed model of ‘MRINS’, the Directorate of Information will act as its hub. This model is purely conceptual and non-existent when the researcher tries to suggest such type of model. The entire proposed model will have a phase wise manner for establishing, implementing, maintaining, evaluating and monitoring the usefulness, functions and services and feed back from the rural community as well as user community will be determined.

(Informative abstract of the thesis entitled “Community Information Needs in Rural Manipur” submitted to Manipur University by L. Shanta Meitei)