Background

The emphasis of the present study is on information as a vital resource in all the development processes and its role in improving the quality of human life. In the present-day information-intensive society, every individual needs to have access to information that is pertinent to all spheres of life. Every development process and contemporary human conditions depend greatly on the access to information that is precise, relevant, accurate, adequate, expeditious and timely available. The role and value of information in modern society has been increasingly recognised, which has become apparent even in the rural settings. In fact, the need for information relating to all aspects of life is felt more acutely by the rural masses. Reaching the rural populace with valuable and appropriate information is the key to success for any attempt at bringing an all round national development.

Today, the strength and welfare of a nation greatly depends on its information richness. The world is divided between the information rich and the information poor. Even within a society, people are divided into haves and have-nots of information—the latter usually being the ignorant
and the downtrodden rural populace. It is, therefore, very crucial to provide the rural populace with appropriate and timely information for individual as well as national progress.

The review of related literature, in this regard, brought to light the following points summed up as below:

(i) Information is a vital resource in all the development processes equally essential both in the urban as well as the rural settings.

(ii) There is a general consensus that the benefit derived from the adequate information flow and access transcends all geographical and cultural boundaries.

(iii) There exist wide gaps in the information flow and access between the urban and rural areas, which today has become a major area of concern for the information professionals, policy makers, researchers, administrators and others.

(iv) Though the extent and intensity of the information needs and seeking behaviour varies from person to person, in any given socio-economic and political environment, it is generally
accepted that the need for information relating to all aspects of life is felt more acutely by the rural dwellers.

(v) Considering the multi-dimensional nature and role of information, institutions and professionals, involved in information services are faced with increasingly demanding roles in providing appropriate and concerted information services to the rural populace.

(vi) A complete understanding of the community in terms of their physical environments, socio-economic and political circumstances, their beliefs, traditions, values, life-styles, habits and their psychological outlook has been considered as a very crucial factor in providing effective and efficient information services to the rural public.

(vii) The indigenous knowledge base and its applications has to be taken into consideration in attempting to provide effective information services to the rural folks.

(viii) Knowledge of the existing information sources, channels and services in the rural setting has been found very vital for the success of any attempt to provide effective information services.
With this background, the present study was carried out to assess the volume of information flow and access in the rural areas of the two North Eastern states of Meghalaya and Nagaland.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study include the following considerations:

**Objectives:** The objectives of the study were:

(i) To identify the sources and channels of information flow and access in the villages.

(ii) To undertake a comparative analysis of the information flow and access patterns in Meghalaya and Nagaland.

(iii) To propose suggestions and recommendations for effective information services in the rural areas.

**Hypotheses:** The study was carried out with consideration to the following hypotheses:
(i) The interpersonal communication among members of a social system serves as an important source and channel of information flow and access.

(ii) Use of information sources and channels vary across socio-economic variables.

(iii) Information flow and access vary across geographical variations.

Research sites and sampling

Personal familiarity and accessibility of the research sites were considered essential in selecting the research areas. Accordingly, two North Eastern states of Meghalaya and Nagaland were selected. Further, one district from each state, located at a distance of not less than 150 kilometers from the state capital were selected. Following this, two villages from each district were selected with one village located within the radius of 5 kilometers and another located at a distance of not less than 60 kilometers from the district headquarters. The total number of households was also considered in selecting the villages. Only the villages having between 100 to 400 households were considered for the purpose of the present study. Finally, 20 percent of the total households from each
selected village were taken as the sample population and the heads of the families or anyone from the family who can provide necessary information were chosen as the respondents. All together, 155 observations were taken from the four selected villages.

**Data collection**

A pilot survey was carried out using structured-interview and observation methods to assess the relevance of the study. Keeping in mind the objectives of the study and on the basis of the information gathered through the pilot survey, the final schedules were constructed and the data were collected personally. This was supplemented by personal observations and discussions with the villagers.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis and testing of hypotheses have been made using appropriate statistical tools.
Findings

The findings of the study are:

(i) Villagers in Meghalaya and Nagaland need more information pertaining to all aspects of life.

(ii) The interpersonal (IP) communication sources and channels are more effective than the non-interpersonal (NIP) communication sources and channels in meeting the information needs of the villagers. It has been found that the villagers, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, use IP sources and channels to a greater extent than NIP sources and channels. This has been primarily because of the ready availability and accessibility of the interpersonal sources and channels to the villagers.

(iii) The non-interpersonal communication sources and channels considered in the study do not have constant touch with the villagers and are not readily available when needed. This is why information flow and access through these sources and channels have been inadequate in information dissemination to the villagers.
(iv) It has also been found that for most of the purposes, the extent of use of various information sources and channels do not vary across socio-economic variables though it varies in certain cases. The variations are indicated mostly in the extent of use of NIP sources and channels, which indicates that the villagers use NIP sources and channels only to a limited extent.

(v) There are no differences on information flow and access and the extent of use of various information sources and channels across geographical variations for most of the purposes though negligible differences exist for certain purposes. Therefore, the hypothesis that 'information flow and access vary across geographical variations' has been partially rejected.

(vi) The total volume of information flow and access through both interpersonal and non-interpersonal sources and channels in the villages for various purposes are found to be very low.

(vii) Poor communication infrastructure existing in the villages remains a major drawback in information flow and access in the villages.
5.2 Suggestions:

The following suggestions have been proposed:

(i) It is suggested that there should be a Village Information Centre (VIC) in every village through which integrated and concerted information services can be provided to the villagers.

(ii) The study also strongly suggests the need for an integrated rural information system established specifically for the purpose of providing information tailored to meet the requirements of rural masses of the North Eastern states. Such need can only be ignored at the cost of individual as well as national progress. In this regard, a model for the North Eastern Integrated Rural Information System (NEIRIS) has been proposed.