

DEVELOPING DIGITAL REFERENCE SERVICE MODEL FOR INDIAN LIBRARIES

Uzma Qadri

Assistant Librarian

Allama Iqbal Library, University of Kashmir

Uzmaqadri10@gmail.com

Sabiha Zehra

Deputy Librarian

GMC, Srinagar

sab.zeh04@gmail.com

Mohammad Ishaq Lone

Allama Iqbal Library, University of Kashmir

ishaq109@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

One of the best ever growing and most innovative services being developed by libraries today is digital reference. It is only an advancement of the same traditional services which is emerging as natural solution to meet the user's information needs in the changing technological environment. This paper provides an insight to different Digital Reference Services (DRS) provided by selected libraries across India. Besides the study is an attempt to explore important requirements, characteristics and features for developing a Digital Reference Service network model in India

Keywords: Digital Reference, SMS, Library Services, Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library

INTRODUCTION

New and modern ideas, jointly with the evolution of technology continue to change the customs in which present-day librarians meet the information needs of the patrons. With the increasing availability of computers and Internet access both within libraries and in modern society at large, online services have become among the most heavily used services libraries offer (Pomerantz & Luo, 2006). Since the invention of the World Wide Web, there has been a great enhancement in the number of reference services made available by libraries in digital form. Digital reference, also called virtual reference and online reference, is a relatively new addition to library services that is gaining wide-popularity in libraries. Reference librarians encounter a wide variety of information queries, depending on their user populations and the type of libraries in which they work (Sherikar, Jange & Jadhav, 2006). According to RUSA Guidelines (2004) Digital Reference Service (DRS) is reference service initiated electronically, often in real-time, where patrons

employ computers or other Internet technology to communicate with reference staff, without being physically present. Communication channels used frequently in virtual reference include chat, videoconferencing, Voice over IP, co-browsing, e-mail, and instant messaging

In Reference services, it is difficult to establish quantitative standards to assess the requirements for quality characteristics. Therefore, reference standards and guidelines are mostly general, leaving individual libraries to set their own standards for quality or compare their situations to those of other libraries (Kasowitz, Bennett & Lankes, 2000). Many guidelines and standards have been established which are altogether intended for directing and assisting the libraries with implementing and maintaining DRS. Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) is one of such initiative, handy to libraries attempting to formalize a DRS.

The libraries in developed countries are already a step forth in endowing DRS, whilst the developing countries are in the progression of providing such services to their users. In this changing scenario, many Indian libraries are influenced by increasing use of technology and techniques, thus have taken steps to serve their patrons through web based reference services. Most of the libraries and information centres in India such as JRD Tata Memorial Library (Bangalore), American Library (New Delhi), Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library (Tata Institute of Social Sciences), Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, Indian Institute of Technology (Bombay), Ananda Rangapillai Library (Pondicherry University) etc are providing web-based reference services in addition to their traditional library services.

There is an unprecedented move by libraries collaborating on an international basis to provide 24/7 digital reference services. New models of service delivery are being developed and implemented (Borchardt and Croud, n.a). Several models exist that describe specific steps in the asynchronous reference transaction. Some of these models describe processes similar to processes in the traditional reference interview, while others describe entirely new processes. Despite variations in these conceptualizations of the digital reference transaction, all DRS perform many of the same functions when managing electronically received reference questions (Pomerantz, Nicholson, Belanger and Lankes, 2004).

It appears that discussion and experimentation with providing DRS in Indian libraries has begun, but there are still many issues, both practical and theoretical that must be addressed to create true state-of-art DRS at regional and national level libraries to meet user needs. Thus the study presents a snapshot of the state-of-the-art in DRS offered by Indian libraries and is an attempt to propose a technical/functional model for providing DRS to Indian libraries at regional and national level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Library and information centres are following some standard guidelines based on which various models are designed and then implemented for providing digital/virtual (Internet based) reference services that can be email based, some chat based and a growing number are using web contact center software. A guideline serves as a measure to help libraries meet the requirements of a standard. Duinkerken, Stephens and Donald (2009) states that Reference and User Services (RUSA) guidelines call for the librarian to demonstrate a commitment to provide effective information assistance and focus all their attention on the patron's information need. As per Dollah and Diljit (n.a) the number of libraries offering e-mail reference service continues to grow making e-mail the most common vehicle for providing digital reference services. As cited in

(Onifade and Sowole, 2011) Tajer affirms that new reference service models have been designed and developed roving reference, reconfiguring the reference desk, no reference desk, consolidating service points, outreach, and virtual reference. As cited in (Chowdhury, 2001a) Weissman described the 24/7 Reference Project at Metropolitan Cooperative Library System, a consortia around Los Angeles, and the Bay Area Libraries Project at San Francisco that are cooperative projects for providing Web-based reference services to customers. Parida (2004) reveals that the Library of Congress, USA has launched the collaborative digital reference service with a mission to provide such services to the users from a remote location at any time. Chowdhury (2001b) found that the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) is providing an online reference services to its users through Dialog Alerts, Current Contents and so on. (Borchardt and Crowd, n.a) states that the University of Queensland Library implemented two parallel web based digital reference services “AskIT, which offers computing help and training” and “Ask A Cybrarian, the Library’s digital reference service” for the students and staff of the University of Queensland. It has been found that digital reference services in Indian libraries are still in developing stage. Kalra (2011) reveals that the library of Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, (IITM) offers various services using a web-interface and Libraries and information centres of British Council and American Embassy in India provide Digital and Virtual Reference service (DVRS) to their users. Thus the present study attempts to provide a function model for Indian libraries to provide digital reference services at regional and national level.

OBJECTIVES:

- To take a comprehensive look at Digital Reference Services (DRS) across Indian libraries.
- To identify various requirements for providing DRS network in Indian libraries at regional and national level.
- To propose a technical/ functional model for effective DRS network in India.

METHODOLOGY:

To address the research objectives articulated in the study, various approaches are applied.

- To attain the first objective, the Indian library websites were analyzed on random basis to take a detailed account of DRS offered.
- To determine requirements for providing DRS in Indian libraries at regional and national level, RUSA (Reference and User Service Association) Guidelines were scrutinized
- Based on the completion of first and second objective, an attempt is made to provide a DRS network model for Indian libraries.

SCOPE

The scope of the present work is confined to the identification of DRS provided by libraries. The study is further limited to Indian situation for providing adequate data about the various requirements to propose a suitable DRS network model for libraries.

Data Analysis

Fig. 1 Chat Service (Video/Text)

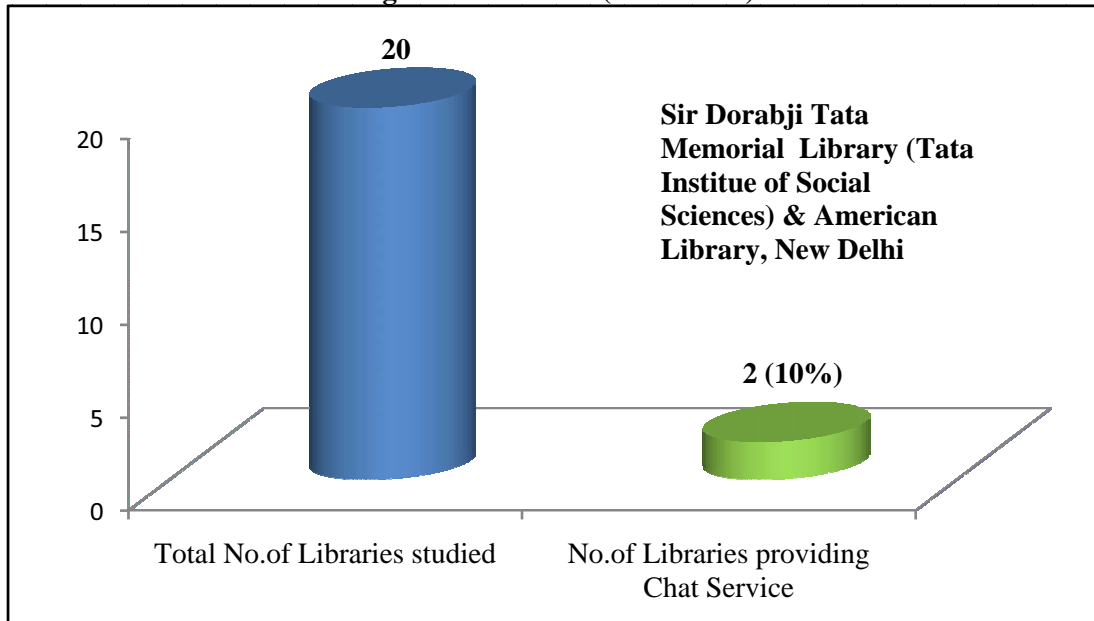


Fig. 1 reveals that Chat service as one of the most essential constituent of DRS, which allows live interaction between patrons and librarians is offered by only 10% of the studied libraries in India namely Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) and American Library, New Delhi via Yahoo, AOL, MSN Messenger and Google Talk.

Fig. 2 Web Forms

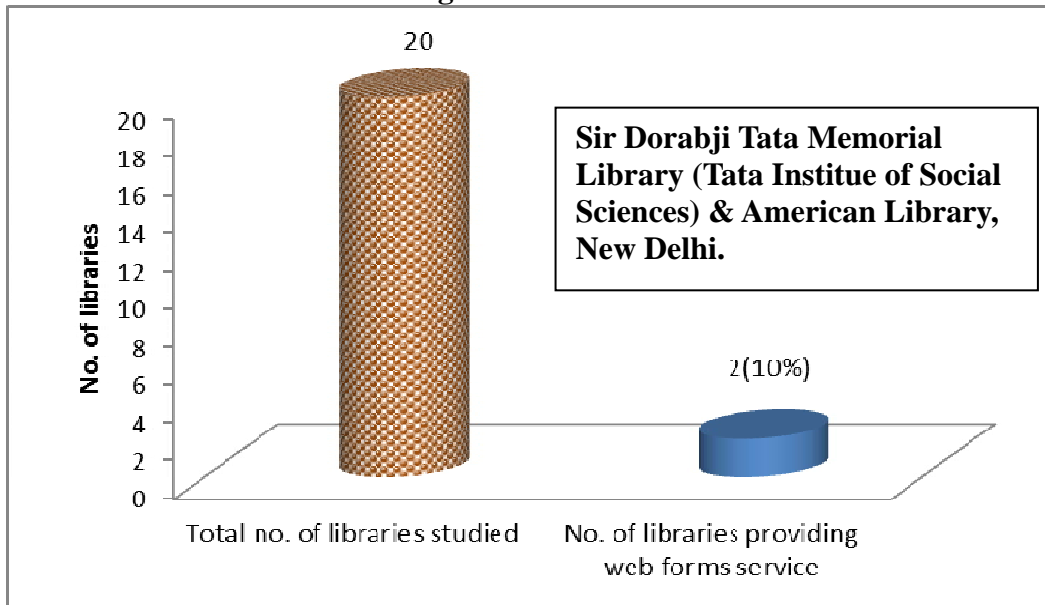


Fig. 2 Web Forms are one of the most user-friendly and simplest Digital Reference Service for librarians to discover what exactly user wants, is offered by 10% of the studied libraries in India namely Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) and American Library, New Delhi.

Fig. 3 E-mail Service

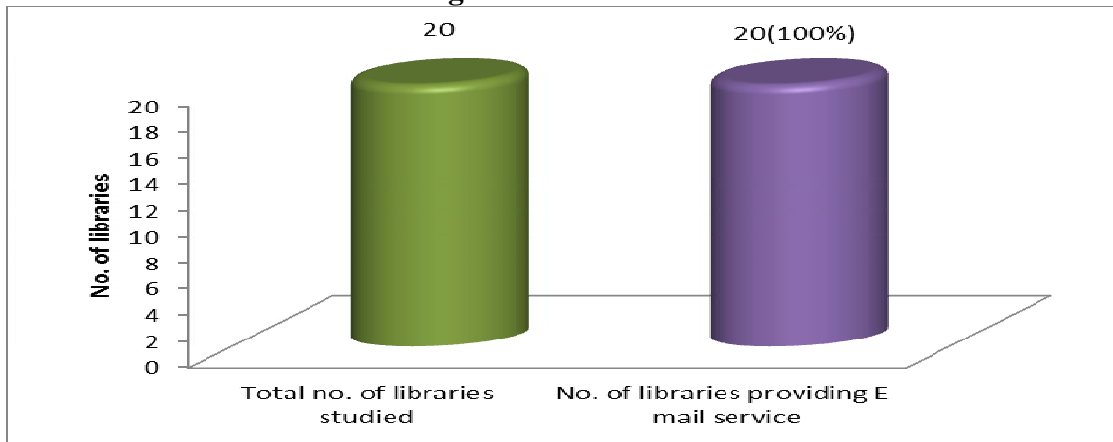


Fig. 3 evidences that E-mail is the only service that is typically provided by all the libraries (100%) considered for the study.

Fig. 4 FAQ Service

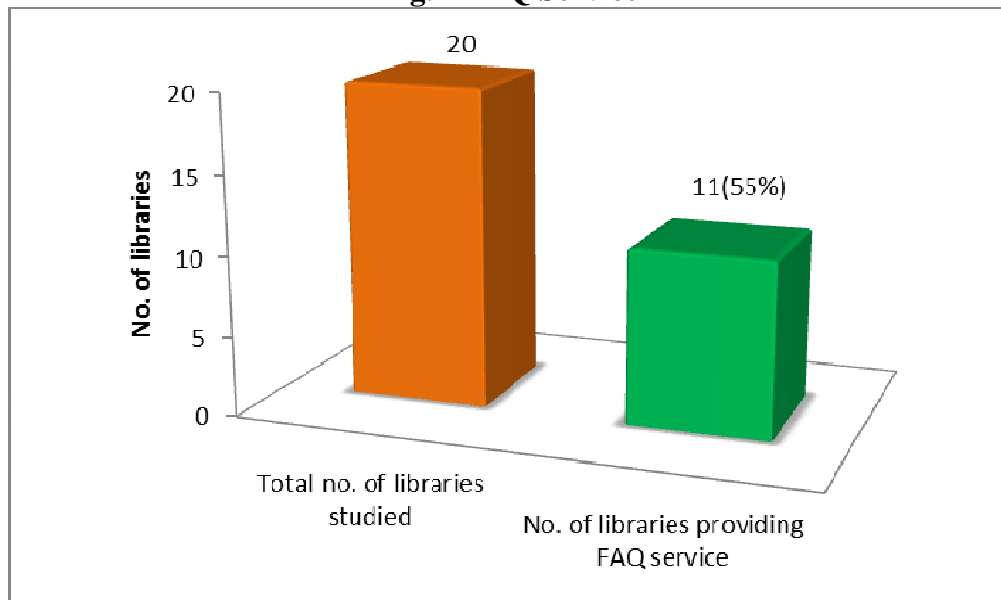


Fig.4 depicts that 55% of libraries are those that provide FAQ (a list of Frequently Asked Questions and their answers about the given subject) service to the patrons.

Fig.5 SMS Service

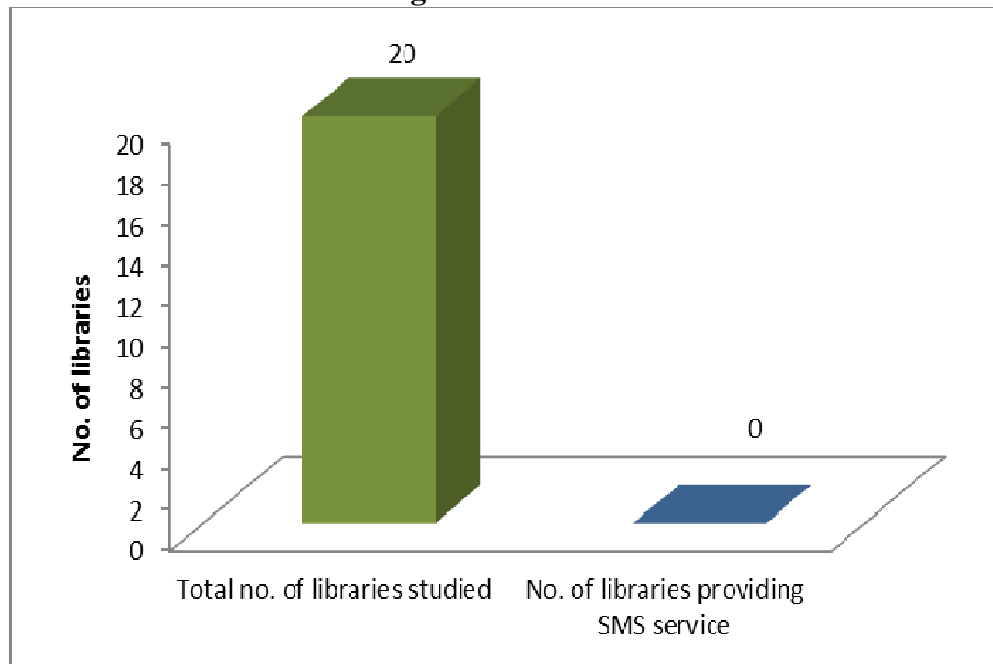


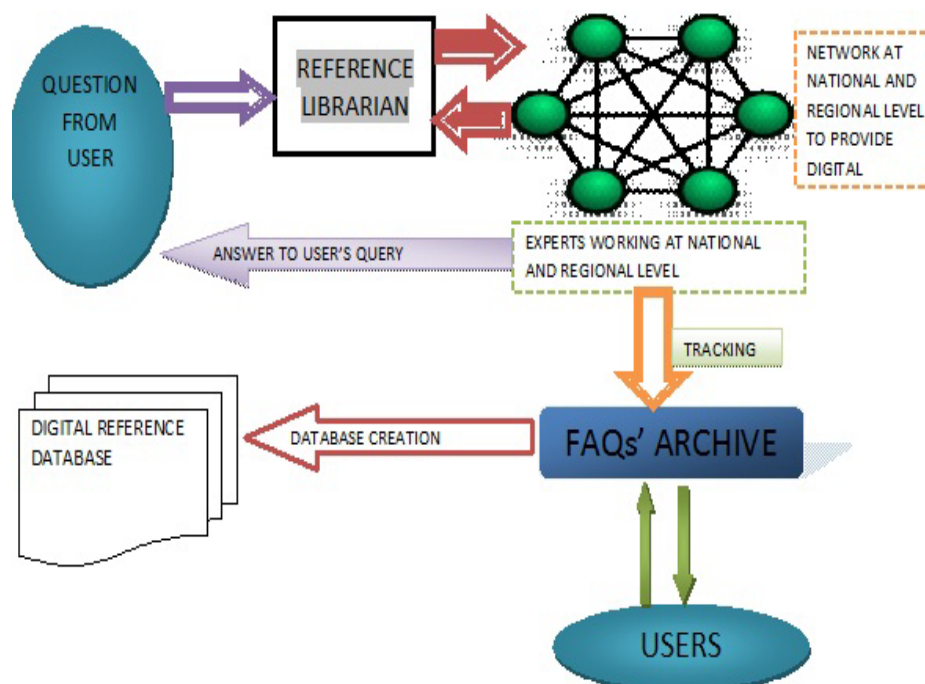
Fig.5 shows that not a single studied library (0%) from India has come up with SMS service for communication of reference queries to their broader user groups.

RUSA Guidelines

In an effort to reach patrons accessing the library via their computers, many libraries and library consortia are based on some standard guidelines and Reference and User Services Association

(RUSA) guideline is the significant one. The Reference and User Services Association originally prepared by the MARS Digital Reference Guidelines Ad Hoc Committee Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) in 2004 and revised by the RUSA MARS/RSS Virtual Reference Committee in 2009 is responsible for stimulating and supporting excellence in the delivery of general library services and materials, and the provision of reference and information services, collection development, readers' advisory, and resource sharing for all ages, in every type of library. For Preparing Digital Reference Service RUSA guidelines has defined certain requirements like Provision of Service, Collaborative DRS, Organization of Service and Privacy.

Fig.6 General Digital Reference Service Model for Indian Libraries



Many libraries and organizations have recognized the benefits of providing DRS through collaborative services. Existing library consortia are adding digital reference to current shared services, and networks of libraries in different locations are banding together to share question loads and expertise. Some regional library consortia are offering member libraries the opportunity to share reference questions with each other using the Internet and other technologies (**Kasowitz, 2001**). Fig. 6 shows that how a reference query in a collaborative set up is routed to different locations at regional and national level to satisfy the user demands. When a user poses query to Reference Librarian, he/she gives feedback by consulting various sources or for gathering further information the librarian can pass the query to other experts at regional or national level who in return tracks the information from the FAQ's Archive maintained for the purpose. Afterwards the information is passed to the Reference librarian and then he/she provides related answer back to the user or the experts can directly forward the feedback to the ultimate user. Alternatively, user can directly browse the FAQ database for the required information.

CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that the Indian libraries are in the progression of providing Digital Reference Services to their users. However, it has been seen that many libraries provide Digital

Reference Services like e-mail service, web-forms service, FAQ service, chat service etc. to their users. In the current study RUSA guidelines were scrutinized to determine the requirements for providing Digital Reference Services to the broader community of users by Indian libraries. Finally, the study provided a functional model for Indian libraries to provide digital reference services at regional and national level.

REFERENCES

1. Borchardt, K. & Croud, J. (n.a). Digital reference service: a new service, or thenext logical step? Retrieved February 21, 2012 from <http://www.library.uq.edu.au/papers/digitalref.pdf>
2. Borchardt & Crowd (n.a). Digital Reference Service: A New Service, or the next logical step?. pp (1-15). .Retrieved February 18, 2012 from <http://www.library.uq.edu.au/papers/digitalref.pdf>
3. Chowdhury, G. G. (2002a). Digital libraries and reference services: present and future. *Journal of Documentation*. 58 (3), 258 – 283. DOI: 10.1108/00220410210425809
4. Chowdhury, G.G. (2002b). Digital libraries and reference services: present and future. *Journal of Documentation*. 58 (3), pp(258 – 283). DOI: 10.1108/00220410210425809
5. Dollah, W.A.K.W& Singh, D. (n.a). Digital Reference Service in Academic Libraries. Retrieved February 3, 2012 from <http://www.lib.usm.my/elm-equip/conference/Documents/ICOL%202005%20Paper%207%20Wan%20Abdul%20Kadir%20&%20Diljit%20Singh.pdf>
6. Kasowitz, A.S. (2001). ED457869 2001-11-00 Trends and Issues in Digital Reference Services: ERIC Digest. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology Syracuse NY*. pp. (1-8). Retrieved May 25, 2012 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED457869.pdf>
7. Duinkerken, W., Stephens, J., Donald, & Karen I. M. (2009). The Chat Reference Interview: Seeking Evidence based on RUSA Guidelines: A case study at Texas A & M University Libraries. *New Library World*. 110(3/4), pp (107-121). DOI: 10.1108 /03074800910941310.
8. Kalra, H.P.S. (2011). DVRS as a catalyst for transforming L&I services. 8th *International CALIBER – 2011*. pp (184-191). Retrieved 5 February 2012 from <http://ir.inflibnet.ac.in/dxml/bitstream/handle/1944/1609/19.pdf?sequence=1>
9. Kasowitz, A., Bennett, B., & Lankes, D. R. (2000). Quality Standards for Digital Reference consortia. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*. 39 (4), 355.Retrieved February 21, 2012 from <http://quartz.syr.edu/rdlankes/Publications/Journals/qualitystandardsfordigitalreferenceconsortia.pdf>
10. Pomerantz, J & Luo, L. (2006). Motivations and uses: Evaluating virtual reference service from the users' perspective. *Library & Information Science Research*. 28 (2006), 350– 373. DOI: org/10.1016/j.lisr.2006.06.001

11. Pomerantz, J., Nicholson, S., Belanger, Y. & Lankes, D.R. (2004). The current state of digital reference: validation of a general digital reference model through a survey of digital reference services. *Information Processing and Management*. 40(2004), 347-363. Retrieved February 27, 2012 from RUSA. (2012). Reference and User Service Association. Retrieved May 25, 2012 from <http://www.ala.org/rusa/about>
12. Sherikar, A., Jange, S., & Jadhav, S. (2006). Digital reference services in the web based information world. *4th International Convention CALIBER*. Retrieved March 1, 2012 from <http://ir.inflibnet.ac.in/dxml/bitstream/handle/1944/1330/49.pdf?sequence=1>

Appendix(s)

Libraries Taken for the study

- American Library, New Delhi
- Barr. Balasaheb Khardekar Library, Shivaji University
- British Council India
- CSIR, NISCAIR
- DELNET
- DRTC
- Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (Vikram Sarabhai Library)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
- Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
- Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Sciences & Technology
- INFLIBNET
- Jawaharlal Nehru University Library
- JRD Tata Memorial Library, Bangalore (IIS)
- Library of Baba Farid University of Health Sciences
- Library of Indian Association for Cultivation of Science
- Library, Documentation & Information Science Division, ISI, Kolkata
- Management Development Institute Library, Gurgaon.
- Pondicherry (University Ananda Rangapillai Library)
- Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library (Tata Institute of Social Sciences)
- University Library, Cochin University of Science & Technology

---@ @ @---