

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR MEMBERS OF INDIAN PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

An attempt has been made through this paper to present a brief introduction of the Digital Libraries and how these are helping to make information available in libraries to the users globally. A brief overview about the Parliament Library of India and various services being provided to the Members of Parliament to enable them to discharge their duties, has also been presented. Apart from this, the paper describes the rich collections of the Parliament Library, its digital collection, Documentation service and the details about the database collection on the Parliament of India website. A brief write-up about the Children's Corner, a recent innovative step taken by the Parliament Library, has also been included.

Introduction

Libraries are information centers actively involved in information collection and promoting its use for the development of the individual and the society. Doorways to Libraries are becoming gateways to the

world as digital content, through new and constantly changing technology, is becoming available with each passing day. Coupled with technological innovations we need to establish a framework that is deeply tied to the core mission of our libraries to enable quality and value added solutions to be addressed, to ensure the long term progress towards our vision. The term “Digital Library” is now widely accepted to mean the use of digital technology in the provision of library services and operations, which include acquisition, organization, storage, conservation and dissemination of information to users.

Digital Libraries have emerged as a crucial component of global information infrastructure. The impact of digital library is nowadays considered so widespread and general that all subject periodicals have featured articles and majority of national and international conferences are focusing on various aspects of digital Librarianship.

In other words, it is a library in which a significant proportion of the resources are available in machine-readable format, accessible by means of computers. The digital content may be locally held or accessed remotely *via* computer networks. These libraries can immediately adopt innovations in technology providing users with improvements in electronic and audio book technology as well as presenting new forms of communication such as ‘wikis’ and blogs. Impact of digital collections is an access to digital information and the most distinguishing attribute of

the information age. These are truly the libraries without boundaries, making information available globally.

Parliament of India Library

Parliament of a country is a democratic political institution and a supreme legislative body where every element of the population of a country is represented. Since it is the supreme deliberative body, a wide range of topics covering almost all spheres of national and international issues are discussed there at different points of time. Therefore, information is of vital importance to the parliamentarians for effectively discharging their duties and responsibilities. To be an effective parliamentarian, a Member needs to be well informed of the fast changing developments taking place at national and global levels. He must have access to truthful, non-partisan, authoritative, and essential information on varied issues.

It was in this context that an independent and comprehensive Library and Information Service was set up in the Indian Parliament not merely to serve as a repository of books, legislative debates and parliamentary papers, but for developing and maintaining an up-to-date and objective storehouse of knowledge on which members could draw upon.

Parliament Library in India is one of the finest and richest repositories in the country today with a collection of approximately 1.27 million volumes of books, reports, government publications, UN reports, Debates, Gazettes, periodicals, newspapers and other documents, including publications brought out by the Secretariats of the two Houses. The collections of the Library are primarily in English and Hindi, which is India's official language. India being a nation of diverse languages, these are a sizeable numbers of books and other publications in all other regional languages as well. Besides, we have separate sections of Gandhiana (books by and on Mahatma Gandhi), Nehruana (books on and by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru) and rare books, including the original Calligraphed copy of the Constitution of India.

Established in 1921, during the Central Legislative Assembly days of pre-Independence era, Parliament Library has undergone remarkable upgradation over the years in terms of the size, structure and modus operandi. Structured in an integrated manner covering all the inter-dependent services essentially required to meet the information needs of members of Parliament, we have an independent Library and Information service known as the Library and Reference, Research, Documentation and Information Service, or LARRDIS in short.

Automation of Parliament Libraries

Parliament Libraries all over the world have been exploring and making use of new technologies for providing to their users better and faster access to the vast array of information resources. Pioneering work has been done in developing computer-based data systems for the use of Parliamentarians. The databases developed electronically in libraries have become large reservoirs of information enabling users to retrieve the desired material in an amazingly short time.

In India, we have taken significant steps in developing information technology to assist our parliamentarians in the effective discharge of their duties. Besides providing every member with one computer, either desktop or laptop, along with a printer, handheld computer, scanner etc., internet and e-mail connectivity have been provided to enable them to have access to the Parliament databases, various other Government databases, databases of foreign Legislatures and vast sources of other information available on the Internet.

Since 1996, we have our own Home Page containing a large number of index-based databases as well as full-text databases of information generated within the two Houses of our Parliament. The Parliament of India Home Page is making available non-partisan, objective and reliable information and authoritative data to our parliamentarians and research scholars on a continuous and regular basis

covering a wide range of areas pertaining to the Houses of Parliament. The major components of parliamentary information now available on the Lok Sabha Home Page are: (i) Business of the House: List of Business, Bulletin Part-I, Bulletin Part-II, Synopsis of Debates, Daily Debates, Debates (with search facility), Parliamentary Questions-Lok Sabha, Resume of Work, Wit & Humour; (ii) Member of Parliament: Brief Biographies of Members (14th Lok Sabha), List of Members (1st to 9th Lok Sabha), Biographical Sketches of Members (10th to 13th Lok Sabha), Address/E-mail Address of Members, Handbook for Members, Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS); (iii) Information about Parliamentary Committees and their reports; and (iv) General Information: Introduction to Parliament, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, Directions by the Speaker, Organization of Lok Sabha Secretariat. All this information can be accessed from our website <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in>. and <http://loksabha.nic.in>.

MP's Home Page

Each Member of Parliament has his/her own web page, which contains bio-data, information about participation in the parliamentary proceedings, Questions, Bills, Motions and information pertaining to the development of constituency. Links to the Member's Home Pages are available on the Parliament of India Home Page.

Digital Library

Although the foray of Parliament Library of India into the realm of digital era is comparatively new, yet we do have a Digital Library of electronic publications on DVDs, CDs, tapes and floppies, etc. which was set up in the year 1997. The collection is being updated and enriched regularly keeping in view the core areas of interest of Members of Parliament and latest technological advances. A list of all digital collections are now available on Internet. In view of the ever-increasing need for digitization of our other useful library holdings we propose to undertake the digitization of various documents in the near future. These include Parliamentary Debates (from 1st to 10th Lok Sabha), books, monographs and other important publications of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Secretariats, Centre, State and UN Reports, and rare books available in Parliament Library, which are not covered under any provisions of the Copyright Act.

Documentation Service

The Documentation Service in Parliament Library, which was set up in 1975, is primarily responsible for indexing articles published in various documents, including newspapers, books, reports, periodicals, parliamentary debates, etc. received in the Parliament Library that may be of interest to the Members of Parliament. The articles selected during a particular fortnight are suitably annotated, assigned subject-headings and

fed into the 'Libsys Software'. These are retrievable author-wise, title-wise and subject-wise through the Home Page of 'Parliament of India' (<http://loksabha.nic.in>) under the icon, 'Parliamentary Documentation'.

A limited number of copies of computer-generated printouts of Parliamentary Documentation are, however, being brought out for the use of Members of Parliament. Electronic version of 'Parliamentary Documentation' is e-mailed to all the Members of Parliament, accredited media persons, and officials of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha Secretariats.

Widening of Access to Library

In order to ensure the optimum use of our rich collections, the Parliament Library which was initially meant only for MPs has been thrown open to other users also on the initiative of the Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha. Now, the Library facilities can be availed by Members and staff of the State Legislatures, Foreign Legislatures, scholars from the Central and State Governments, Public Undertakings and Statutory Bodies, Indian and foreign Press correspondents accredited to the Press Information Bureau and bona-fide Research Scholars from the recognized Universities, subject to security clearance. As a result of this, it has been observed that quite a large number of Research Scholars from various Universities of India and abroad, media persons, officers of the Government of India and Public Undertakings have been making

increasing use of our Library facilities which is in fact a matter of deep satisfaction for us.

Children's Corner

Children's Corner in the Parliament Library is a unique facility insofar as Legislature Libraries are concerned. Such an arrangement for children exists only in the National Diet Library of Japan.

The Children's Corner was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, on 21 August 2007. His concept to establish a "Children's Corner" in Parliament Library is an initiative towards easy access of knowledge to the children, specially children of under privileged sections of the society, who do not have access to a good and resourceful Library. It has been designed to inculcate reading habits amongst children and to enable them to share the vast resources of Parliament Library and the exhibits displayed in the Parliament Museum and Archives.

The Children's Corner presently has a collection of more than 2,000 books, magazines/newspapers, old classics, contemporary fiction, encyclopedia, science project books and e-literature in the form of CDs & DVDs. Children can watch movies, plays and other informative programmes on computers and plasma screen. They are being encouraged to use the computer as an educational tool and are assisted in preparing school projects on computers.

Special events like drawing competitions, story telling, story painting, cultural programmes and puppet shows are being organized from time to time to make the Children's Corner an interactive hub of activities. It has been established as a branch Library of the main Parliament Library. Small group of children sponsored by recognized schools and registered NGOs are making regular use of the Children's Corner.

Children in the age group of 8 to 17 years are eligible to be members of the Children's Corner. Membership is also extended to

- (a) Children/grand children of Members of Parliament and Ex-MPs
- (b) Children of permanent employees of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, Rajya Sabha Secretariat and Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and
- (c) children sponsored by registered NGOs and schools.

The setting up of the Children's Corner in Parliament Library is also a step forward to fulfill the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to the development of his or her full potential, the right to free and open access to information, materials and programmes under equal conditions for all children, irrespective of age, race, sex, language, social status and cultural background.

Conclusion

As the Parliaments and Legislatures are faced with complex and challenging problems, legislators across the world may have to share and

learn from each other's experience and knowledge to find solutions to such problems. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to ensure that the Parliament Libraries of the world remain well connected so that resources of each library could be shared to the maximum. Such sharing will also help the parliamentarians to know how other Parliaments work, the procedure followed in different Legislatures, how the Committees function, how the Committee Reports are prepared and above all, how Executive Accountability to the Legislatures is ensured. It is also the responsibility of the Libraries and their allied research services to keep a vigil on the latest developments in all fields and bring out well-documented research studies on important topics in anticipation. This would surely enable them to function more effectively in discharging their varied responsibilities in the Parliament, as well as in their constituencies. The Parliament Library in this way plays a proactive role in disseminating authentic information to the Members for the ultimate progress and development of the nation.
