

The Role of Digital Libraries in Sustaining Access to Information in Context to Indian Government Publications

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1. Introduction

A Digital Library is a set of services and technologies that provide the means to collect, manage, access, disseminate, and preserve digital materials produced in any digital format. Digital Library disseminates rich source of digitized materials drafted and published by any organization or individual. While most digital libraries are based at educational institutions like colleges and universities, they also exist in the governmental agencies, museums, corporations and other organizations. In India major R& D institutes and Academic Institutes provide Digital Library service to its clientele. This technology offers organizations and researchers to deposit their work which facilitates the target audience to access the publications via digital form. Digital Libraries are becoming an increasingly important type of special resource and service offered by any institute. The essence of Digital Library is to make publications to be freely available on internet. This initiative was directed to have an increased visibility of the published documents; further this will generate good deal of enthusiasm in users.

The content of a Digital Library may include many different types of resources: published books and journal articles, dissertations, other types of academic publications, and various types of unpublished articles, such as journal preprints, technical reports, research progress reports, courseware, and other gray literature audio and video recordings in born digital and digitized manner. The sharing of knowledge may lead to further development in the same discipline or related disciplines. Digital Library is now becoming a platform for the sharing of knowledge.

2. Document type and file format in Digital Library

Data in Digital Library is a valuable resource, usually requiring much time and money to be produced. Many data have a significant value beyond usage for the original research. A Digital Library should accept and produce data in such a way, which can be share and use by users easily.

Shared data must..

- encourages scientific enquiry and debate
- promotes innovation and potential new data uses
- leads to new collaborations between data users and data creators
- maximizes transparency and accountability
- enables scrutiny of research findings
- encourages the improvement and validation of research methods
- reduces the cost of duplicating data collection
- increases the impact and visibility of research
- promotes the research that created the data and its outcomes
- can provide a direct credit to the researcher as a research output in its own right
- provides important resources for education and training

Mostly digital data is stored, disseminated and made easily accessible online to users by many institutions with the aim to increase the impact and visibility of their repository.

3. Genesis of Indian National Library for Government Publication.

Government of India produces vital socio-economic and statistical information which is essential to the public for understanding the national issues. Some of the government-produced information is issued mainly for administrative and operational purposes, but the vast majority of it has potential value for diverse segments of the Indian population. Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in production and delivery of Govt. publications not only makes the process effective, efficient and cost-effective, it also make it available 24x7x365 to a wider population of users. Government produces large amount of information at different levels by various ministries, departments and divisions. Presently, these government agencies produce information in electronic form and disseminate it through their websites. As such, a vast amount of available information in full-text is distributed across web sites of different ministries and its departments and affiliated organizations in an unorganized and unstructured manner. Sometimes

these Government publications can be searched through general-purpose search engines like Google and Bing. A National Digital Library for Government Publication can function as a single-point access portal that would facilitate organized and structured access to all Government Publications in India in open access environment to world-wide community of users using open source digital library software. National Digital Library for Government Publications can provide a single-point access to full-text of Government Publications with appropriate web-based interface for users to interact with the repository to browse and retrieve documents of their interest.

4. Role of Government Publication in Citizen's Life:

A government is usually by far the largest publisher of information within a country. A government publication is defined in the U.S. Code (44 U.S.C. 1901) [1] as "*...informational matter which is published as an individual document at Government expense, or as required by law.*" Government publications also defined as "Publications, regardless of physical form, issued or published by authority of a government body. Specifically: those issued or published by the executive, legislative, and judicial functions of government at all levels - international, national, federal, local government bodies and intergovernmental bodies" (York University Libraries)[2]. However Dictionary of American History defines government publication as "The various divisions of the federal government produce a vast collection of documents on an enormous range of subjects. In addition to common publications such as the federal budget and presidential papers, government departments write reports about everything from beekeeping and naval history to crime trends and national health disasters." So government publications can be considered as those official publications originated from any government body or organization , government departments and central government organizations. They include parliamentary publications, legislation, policy documents, discussion documents, statistics and reports.

As there are so many facets to government; a government needs a large amount of information to undertake its duties of governance and a government is often the only body with sufficient resources at its disposal to undertake particular work. In India, government collectively producing a huge amount of documentation through central ministries includes parliament and all ministries and departments and at provincial and local level (Mohinder Singh, 1982) [3] .

At the present time there has been an increasing demand by the community, that such data collected should be made more readily available to all, for enabling rational debate, better decision making and use in meeting civil society needs. Even functioning of democracy depends upon the active and intelligent participation of the people in the government process. It is the right of the public to know what is being done by their chosen representatives for their welfare.

Principle 10 of the United Nations Declaration on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992)[4], stated

“.....each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities and the opportunity to participate in the decision making process. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available.”

Benefit and importance of government approved data are widely recognized at all levels. Data collected or developed by government bodies, when made openly available for public, their potential value could be more fully realized. On the other hand it is government's foremost duty to see that its citizens are properly informed on everything. Government uses various methods for dissemination of information like radio, television and by means of print media. Now with the emergence of Information and Communication Technology most of the information is disseminated through websites. Government publications have become particularly important and more visible since the 2005 because the whole system of government and participation in government has changed with the acceptance of Right to Information Act.

Section 4(2) of the Right to Information Act, 2005 [5] reads

“It shall be a constant endeavor of every public authority to take steps in accordance with the requirements of clause (b) of sub-section (1) to provide as much information suo motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communication, including internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information”

The principles on which sharing of data need to be based are: openness, flexibility, transparency, legal conformity, protection of intellectual property, formal responsibility, professionalism, standards, interoperability, quality, security, efficiency, accountability, sustainability and

privacy. Then also large quantum of data generated by various organizations and institutions in the country remains inaccessible to civil society, although most of such data may be non-sensitive in nature and could be used by public for scientific, economic and developmental purposes.

5. Levels of Government Publications

In the detailed study published by Herson (*Herson*, 1983)[8], it is explained that in India government publications are brought out at different levels to cater the need of people in an effective way. Depends on the user and type of information, publications are of divided in to following levels.

5.1 Central/ Federal Government Publications (National level)

Legislature of the Union which is called Parliament, consists of President and two Houses, known as Council of States (Rajya Sabha) and House of the People (Lok Sabha). Parliament in India has the cardinal functions of legislation, overseeing of administration, passing of the Budget, ventilation of public grievances and discussing various subjects like development plans, national policies and international relations. Government publication at the national level comes from Parliament ie Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha , Central Ministries and their departments (annexure 1), Parliamentary Committees and their offices like Cabinet Secretariat and National Authority Chemical Weapon Convention which work directly under Prime Minister (annual report 2010, pg 35)[9]. Publications of public services like All India Services , Central Secretariat Services, Union Public Service Commission and Staff Selection Commission falls under same category. Inter State Council Secretariat, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances and Administrative Tribunals are nodal agencies(annual report 2010, pg 48)[10] which work for Central Government and produces publication at national level. Publications at national level includes, but not limited to codes, gazettes , and other statutory and regulatory materials, legislative and judicial publications, administrative reports, and publications containing statistical demographic, socio-economic and scientific data.

5.2 State Government publications (State level)

Publications at state level comes from Legislative Council (*Vidhan Parishad*) and Legislative Assembly (*Vidhan Sabha*) of the state . Publications at state level include information

about the activities of various committees as well as departments -related to Parliamentary Standing Committees. State level publication also includes State Legislature Bill Information, Committee Hearing, Debates, Details of Votes and Governor's Action Plan, General Reports and Annual Reports , State Municipal Acts and State Commission Reports, Circulars and Notifications. Most of the state governments also publishes "Periodical Publications" which shall include monthly, fortnightly or weekly publications containing public interest news or features.

The whole information is disseminated through print and electronic media.

5.3 Local Government publications (Local Level)

“Local government is to central government what basic tissues are to human body. Without them, government would have no vitality. The countries, cities, towns , villages and borough serves as training schools for the leaders of government, and in the affairs of local government, who aspire to be in state and national offices” quoted by Anwar Hussain Syed [11]. Jawaharlal Nehru, underlying the importance of local self-government in free democratic India, has remarked, “Local Self Government is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy”.

Local government serves as a channel of communication between the state government and the community. The demands made by the local community are on the one hand transmitted to the state government, the creator of the local government, and on the other hand people living in far-flung areas came to know about the government policies and programmes through local bodies stated by Pradeep Sachdeva [12] (Local Government in India, pg. 49) .

Local government ensures close and clear relationship between the people and the higher level of governments through device of communication by publications. In a quarterly publication of Panchayat Smachar [13], Orrisa Government stated that “Information is key element in Rural Development, where information is often deliberately not passed as it provides power to the information hoarders over common people. Basic information regarding the development schemes and programmes of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development for the people do not reach or are not allowed to reach the target audience, resulting in deprivation of intended benefit to the targeted people. A medium of communication, appropriate to build a bridge between the

development planner and the beneficiaries is relevant as a suitable intervention to follow implementation of Rural Development Programmes in an effective manner”.

The importance of the communication to activate people and seeking their willing participation in development process is well recognized. Statements and reports from government side plays a pivotal role in making people aware about nature and content of the development programmes. Information at grass root level enables people to have knowledge, to make choices, exercises their options and understand in proper perspective, the impact; the development process would have on their lives, their household and communities. Local Publications has assumed a greater importance in the administration of local self-governance and management of Rural Development programmes. They give transparency into the system and help common man take more informed decisions.

Publication at this stage includes official gazettes and other substantial legal, regulatory, and judicial publications. This also include information about city departments, offices, and divisions, compilation of city ordinances, profile of the city, including demographics, business information and more. Publications also contains information on development programmes like manuals, guidelines, success stories relating to their programmes, employment avenues & related matters.

5.4 Foreign Government publications (Foreign Government level)

According to ‘U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Foreign Government Publication/ Information [14] is defined as information that is:

Provided to the U.S. Government by a foreign government or governments, an international organization of governments, or any element thereof, with the expectation that the information, the source of the information, or both, are to be held in confidence; Produced by the U.S. pursuant to or as a result of a joint arrangement with a foreign government or governments or an international organization of governments, or any elements thereof, requiring that the information, the arrangement, or both are to be held in confidence.

Library Of Congress Collections Policy Statements (Library of Congress. 2008, pp 3)[15] states that “government publications include all those issues under authority of any legislative body, executive or judicial department, ministry, bureau, agency, independent office, court, commission, or officer of any government.

Foreign government publications may deal with any subject including international exchange agreements, a gift, gazettes, debates of parliamentary bodies, and other official publications of foreign national agencies. The strength of the tangible collections is enhanced by electronic resources. Freely available online current foreign government publications through country internet web pages have improved access to the materials. Also strengthening access with subscribed electronic resources, such as the PAIS, Constitutions of the World, and the Statesman's Yearbook, as well as specialized databases and files, such as House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (UK), Russian Governmental Publications, Ukrainian Publications, and RDB: Rechtsdaten bank (Austria) to name a few.

Foreign Government Publication can be available at agency's overseas offices, embassy office or in special collection of country's National Library. The national library also receives publications of the governments of the United States of America, Great Britain, Canada, the Commonwealth nations, and the publications of the European Economic Committee. Almost all the volumes of the sessional sets of British Parliamentary papers since the beginning of the 19th century are available (nationallibrary.gov.in).

5.5 International/ Inter-Government Organization's publications (International level) "An intergovernmental organization is an agency set up by two or more state governments to carry out projects and plans in common interest" (www.uia.be,2013)[16]. Encyclopedia of Public International Law states that "An association of states established by and based upon a treaty, which pursues common aims and which has its own special organs to fulfill particular functions within the organization". Examples are the United Nations, the World Bank, or the European Union etc. Thomas J. Volgy define "intergovernmental organizations as entities created with sufficient organizational structure and autonomy to provide formal, ongoing, multilateral processes of decision making between states, along with the capacity to execute the collective will of their members (states)(Thomas J.Volgy,2008)[17]". Many IGOs issue publications and documents that may be of interest to the legal researcher. IGOs publishes many documents like **treaties**, charters, statutes, legal acts, proceedings, documents issued by the IGO's legislative body, and decisions of the IGO's adjudicative body (**Nigel D. White,2005**)[18] . According to Abbott & Snidal (1998)[19] the two primary functions of intergovernmental organization are a stable organizational structure and some amount of autonomy in a defined sphere. Stability of

organizational structure (in terms of routine interactions by states along with an administrative apparatus to ensure both institutionalized interactions and stability of organization) and autonomy are also critical for institutional conceptions of power, for assessing both global governance and hegemony (Barnett & Duvall, 2005)[20]. Many international organizations produce a variety of documents with the following themes and objectives

Publications describing their work like summary of its origin, purpose, mission, etc

Publications describing and evaluating problems like topical, statistical, and analytical information on agriculture and food; crime; health; human rights; laws and treaties; transportation; women and children; and more.

Policy suggestions

Case studies of member nations

International statistics covering a variety of topics gives comprehensive access to statistical data

Many of the sources are linked to the full text of the data, although some state, private, and IGO sources are cited, allowing the researcher to then locate the statistical source on the internet or in the library. The web is proving to be a rich source for these documents, although access and coverage vary widely from one organization to the next. In India, National Library is one of the repository libraries for United Nations Organization and its agencies. All the publications of UNO and its agencies are received by the library.

6. Central government key publications:

6.1 Legislation – bills and statutes:

Legislation comprises laws that have been written down. A law is also known as an act or a statute. The highest law making body is the national parliament. The Constitution is the supreme law and contains a Bill of Rights. While in draft form and before approval by Parliament, an Act is known as a Bill. A Bill is the draft of a legislative proposal. It has to pass through various stages before it becomes an Act of Parliament (<http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in>)[21].

According to South Australian Legislation [22] a *Bill is a proposed Act of Parliament that has been introduced into the Parliament. It becomes a new Act of Parliament (or amends an existing Act) when assented by the Governor after having passed through both Houses.*

Every act has a name and number, re-commencing at one (1) each year. An act is cited thus: Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act 3 of 1996. Changes to acts are published as amendment acts and the word 'amendment' appears in the titles of such acts.

The Indian Parliament has about 790 members from over 40 political parties. Each MP represents close to two million citizens. Parliament passes 60 Bills a year on average. Bills are primary source of information for citizens and research scholars. For public engagement in the legislative process and on issues of national importance, details like bills introduced during the session, passed during the session, bills withdrawn, negative, assented, pending and lapsed is given on Parliament Library website. This step is taken by government to strengthen democracy by making sure elected officials and citizens have the chance to read and understand legislation. The electronic texts of Bills introduced from the year 2002 onwards are provided by the Government of India Press, Directorate of Printing, Government of India (<http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/lis/>).

The purpose of publication is to provide guidance about, boundaries to and acceptability as regards behaviors in almost every facet of life. The authoritative version of any act is initially published in the Government Gazette. Gazette of India and Delhi Gazette of Ministries also published and distributed by this Department. In additions to gazette other publications and periodicals including reports, rules, acts, codes, gazettes and specifications are channelized through the sale outlets of the department, authorized agents of the departments all over India for the awareness of the people.

An act cannot provide all the necessary nitty gritty detail so the relevant minister may when necessary publish regulations (delegated legislation). An example is professions who are governed by acts of parliament such as engineers, psychologists, lawyers and so on. The relevant acts stipulate fee structures that practitioners may charge. As fees have to change over time due to inflation etc, an act cannot prescribe in advance what fees might have to be charged. At intervals, new fees will be negotiated in the profession and then published as regulations. These

regulations are published in the Government Gazette but as a separately numbered sequence called Regulation gazettes.

6.2 VERBATIM REPORT: AN IMPORTANT DOCUMENT

According to UK Parliament [23] *“Both Houses of Parliament hold debates in which Members discuss government policy, proposed new laws and current issues”*. Debates are designed to assist MPs and Ministers to reach an informed decision on a subject. Votes are often held to conclude a debate, which may involve then passing or rejecting a proposed new law (legislation) or simply registering their opinion on a subject. All debates are recorded in a publication called 'Hansard' which is available online or in print. According to Parliament of Australia [24] *“Hansard is the name given to the edited transcripts of debates in the Senate, House of Representatives, Federation Chamber and parliamentary committees. They are published shortly after the chamber or committee proceedings have concluded”*. **Hansard** is the name of the printed transcripts of parliamentary debates. In other words Readings of proposed legislation, questions and answers and other matters discussed in Parliament are reported verbatim in 'Hansard'. The name 'Hansard' derives from the Englishman who first started recording parliamentary debates in the United Kingdom. The regular reporting of parliamentary debates developed gradually during the nineteenth century. The name generally used to describe the reports was "Hansard." This was due to the fact that T.C. Hansard was first the printer, and later the publisher, of the official series of Parliamentary Debates covering both Houses inaugurated by William Cobbett in 1803. Grants were voted annually from 1878 to 1908 to further the publication of debates. In 1909 the present system was adopted, whereby the reports of debates are prepared by staff in the direct employment of each House and issued in separate series. These reports were at first known simply as "Parliamentary Debates, Official Report." In 1943 the word "Hansard" was added to title.

In India Parliamentary debates[25] are known as Verbatim reports. The Official Report of the Proceedings of the House i.e. Lok Sabha Debates is prepared by the Lok Sabha Secretariat under the authority of the Speaker. Rule 379 and Rule 382 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha[26] provide that

a full report of the proceedings of the House at each of its sittings would be published, got printed and distributed as soon as practicable in such form and manner as the Speaker, may from time to time direct

The verbatim report entitled "Lok Sabha Debates" is issued in two parts : Part I contains Questions and Answers and Part II contains the rest of the proceedings. The printed version is available about two months after the date of the sitting. Its copies can be had from the Sales Section of the Lok Sabha Secretariat or from the authorized agents for Government publications on payment. The Verbatim reports of the proceedings of the Parliament are not a mere narration of Questions, Adjournment Motions, Bills and Resolutions, etc. As a matter of fact, they are a rich source of contemporary history. They provide detailed information on all matters touching the life of a citizen. They bring to light the political, economic and social conditions of even the remotest parts of the country. Besides, they serve as a mirror of the hopes and aspirations, concerns and apprehensions of the nation as voiced by its chosen representatives. As a matter of history, it is of the greatest importance that the remarks of every hon. member, who has a responsibility as the representative of the people fully recorded in the official report. This resource is only mean by which after generations shall be able to learn what were the subjects of interest engaging attention, what was the style of speaking and the style of thought, and what were the moving impulses of the people and their representatives in Parliament.

The original version of the debates contains proceedings in English and Hindi as they actually take place in the House. It also contains English/Hindi translation of speeches made in regional languages. The electronic version of the Debates do not contain the text of the questions and their written answers. It only contains the supplementary put orally and answered on the floor of the House. The questions and answers can be accessed by clicking the icon "Parliament Questions". The Lok Sabha debates are not for publication and are put on internet solely for purpose of immediate general information in the public interest.

7. Importance of Government Publication

Government publications provide a record of official activity and rationale for such activity. International records management standard published by the International Organization for Standardization. ISO 15489-1 [6] defines record as *"information created, received and*

maintained as evidence and information by an organization, or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.” This is government responsibility to create and disseminate complete and accurate records of what they are doing for their citizens. These records are important assets that are owned by government. In other words, records provide evidence of the conduct of government business and can be in any medium or format. All ministries have established policies or procedures for creating specific types of records. Government document comes out from government records which are not sensitive in nature and useful for researchers, students and citizen in many ways. Government documents also reflect policy making and changes in governance. They provide information that might not be possible unless undertaken by government such as the population census. It is the biggest administrative exercise. Conducting population census in a country like India, with a great diversity of physical features is undisputedly a challenge. Indian census is richest and only source for planners, research scholars, administrators and other data users.

Government publications also provide valuable statistical information on a wide range of activities such as trade, welfare and education. Other than this data has been collected, organized and interpreted on a variety of subjects including health, weather, crime, population characteristics, labor and employment. Government is also a major producer of maps, both geological and topographical. The survey of India is central engineering agency in charge of mapping and surveying. Survey of India plays a leadership role in providing users focused, cost effective reliable and quality data. This kind of information is useful for meeting the need of national security, sustainable national development and new information markets. (Survey of India)[7]. Government collects information on an ongoing basis in order to inform its activities so information is fairly up to date and continuous. That’s why they are important sources of primary information.

Printed form of all the publications of Government of India, State Governments, Union Territories, Government Undertakings, Autonomous Bodies are collected, processed and preserved separately in National Library of India. A separate division for this purpose was established in 1972. The library owns a rich collection of Indian official documents from the days of the East India Company to the present day (www.national library of India). In order to build up the collection in the Parliament Library, Reports, Debates, Acts, etc., of the State

Government Legislatures, foreign Governments, and Parliaments and foreign Universities, arrangements are made with those bodies for the exchange of such publications on a reciprocal basis. All State Legislatures and foreign Legislatures are requested to supply copies of their debates to the Parliament Library in exchange for the parliamentary debates. Exchange arrangements are made with foreign Legislatures/ Universities and other Institutions for the supply of their publications in exchange for the parliamentary debates.

8. Existing Resources

In recent years many Indian government documents have also been published in full text on the Internet. Here are some good starting points for tracing these.

The Press Information Bureau has the latest official press releases and statements from the Indian Government. It includes links to recent document and statistics. The National Portal of India provides similar information designed for the Indian public. It includes news, as well as links to forms, fact sheets and key departmental websites. The Government of India also has a central web directory with links to all departments and ministries. State ministry website and National portal but all of these can't replace the value of Indian National Digital Library for Government Publication.

9. Role of National Digital Library for Government Publication in the development of Society.

A Digital Library provides the benefit of bringing together all government publications at one place with a provision to make it accessible to the users world-wide (Chan, Leslie 2004)[8]. Some of the specific benefits that the model of National Digital Repository of Government Publications are as follows: Institutional repository offers a coherent and coordinated approach for identifying capturing, accumulating, storing, preserving and providing free online access to government publications published by different ministries and departments. The wider access to government publications would make citizens of the country more aware and better prepared about the government's plans and programmes; Showcase the government's plans and programmes through a single window by bringing all government publications together in one place, that otherwise, is distributed over several web sites of ministries and departments;

Demonstrate government's contributions towards social and economic growth and its impact on the citizen; Increase in visibility of government publications and its public value. The increased visibility of government publications gets translated into better aware citizen and tangible benefits in terms of better utilization of government's plans and programmes; Enhances opportunities for efficient use of existing plans and programmes of government with increased opportunities for collaboration between different ministries and departments of government within the country as well as outside the country; Provides an opportunity to the country to be a part of a global system of distributed interoperable digital libraries and contribute to the open access movement. Networked open access repositories, removes the access barriers and offer the widest possible dissemination of government publications; Dissemination of the government publications in digital form is a secure archive; Digital repositories offer faster and more efficient dissemination of publications including grey literature, presentations, conference proceedings, reports, economic and social data; Provides opportunity for dissemination of local issues and appropriate technological solutions used for solving them and for making them accessible worldwide; Publications in Digital Library can be indexed by Google Scholar, OAIster and other search engines. As such, contents in DL are searchable via the Internet. Therefore it can provide wider access and visibility to publications and thereby improved visibility; and Digital Library offers a huge capacity for indexing, searching, cross-searching, personalization and other value-added services.

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