

**A REFERENCE AND RESEARCH SECTION IN PARLIAMENT
LIBRARY**

Manoj S. Dongardive,
Librarian,

Arts, Commerce College, Mayani, Satara, Maharashtra, India

Genesis:

We can regard 1947 as the "beginning of a new era" in respect of the expansion of reference work in Lok Sabha. The necessity of such a division was felt after independence of the country. The mode of Parliamentary debate also underwent a change which was partially evident from the increased interest of the Members of Parliament. Impelled by the spirit of service the Members of Parliament wanted to participate in the debate more effectively than ever. That is how the Members realised the need of such a service from an impartial body like Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Thanks to the efforts of Shri M.N.Kaul, the first secretary of the Lok Sabha which went a long way to visualise the magnitude and effectiveness of such services. A reference division was proposed in the Secretariat of the Central Legislature as far back as 1947. Mr M.N.Kaul the then secretary (later became the first Secretary General), of Lok Sabha explained in a memorandum, prepared for the use of a Research and Reference Service in the Legislature in the following words:

"In this section (reference) the staff will necessarily work out minor references made by Members. For instance, a bill is under consideration in the House, a particular clause is under discussion or it may be that the Member had made careful study of the Bill and he want literature on a particular aspect which is dealt with in a particular clause of the Bill, he will refer this point to the staff in the reference section, who will immediately set to work and as they have a trained mind and technical knowledge they will quickly be able to trace all the references and not merely heap all the books upon the Member but quickly make a short note giving the salient points in, say about half a page and the important references which the Member, can study and make up his mind as to what point of view he should take up in the House in view of the literature that has been shown to him on the subject. The advantages are too obvious and I have no doubt that all the the Members of the House will very much appreciate it. It is equally obvious that for this kind of work we cannot recruit clerks or ordinary assistants but have to recruit men with higher initial salary ordinary be trained under the guidance of the Librarians and course of a year or so be fully conversant with the work."

Mr. C.V. Mavalankar, famous speaker of Lok Sabha once observed that so long as Members themselves are not conversant with the details of facts which the Government secretariat know, it is not feasible to criticise or study in proper perspective any measure which Government intends to put into statute book. Any criticism or suggestion without such study is more likely to fall flat as the Secretariat which instruct the Ministers are better informed on facts This plan to post the Member with full facts is a unique idea to raise the standard of parliamentary debate.

When India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic in 1950, Members of parliament felt it very much and acutely that they had to depend too much on government sources of information for policy-making as well as for evaluation of policy. The government sources remained the only source of information even for critical appraisal of governmental activity. With such dependence Members cannot advance pragmatic and useful criticism. The opposition as well as the backbenchers of the treasury bench longed for an independent but reliable source of information. "Members must be adequately informed, if not as well informed as ministers, if they are to perform their parliamentary work in a proper manner," said Mr A.L. Seth.

Government collects valuable and authentic information in course of the study of a particular problem which ultimately take the form of bills. These information are not parted with by the Government for use of Members either through Parliamentary Libraries or any other agencies. The Government not only makes useful and extensive study of the problem at hand but sometimes appoints committees of experts to make in-depth study of the problem. In order to furnish useful information to the Members, there should be an Advanced Research Section in the Library so that the Members, when needed, may take the help of their study. Since these materials are usually of technical nature the Parliamentary Libraries should, of their own accord, engage trained workers to collect materials on such subjects as is done in the Research Section of the Library of Congress. Much importance is attached

to such studies and materials so collected are made available to interested Members in the form of brochures.

Library should not merely be depository of books and other parliamentary papers but it should competent to provide an upto date source of facts on which the members may fully depend to draw their own conclusions. "This was necessary for the librarian to be equipped and run in such manner that information could be supplied to members on any matter, which came before the two Houses of Parliament and in connection with their parliamentary- duties." (A.L. Seth)

Mr M.N. Kaul fought for the creation of the Research and Reference Section systematically. In the memorandum to the Economy Committee he stressed the need of the Research and reference section in the following words:

"I know that it is a difficult matter to organize, but I am equally certain that it has organized someday under a competent and well qualified Librarian assisted by proper staff. Unless this lacuna in the Library of the Legislature is filled up any study that is made by Members is likely to be haphazard. As H.S. (Honourable Speaker) is aware, a Minister has at his disposal the entire Secretariat and all the resources of Government to advise and instruct him in connection with measures and its detailed provisions and the policies and principles underlying them. So far as the Members are concerned they start with immense handicap which can only be made good in the manner which I have suggested in these notes." This is genesis of the Research and reference Section in Lok Sabha.

Research and Reference branch of Lok Sabha

Considering the importance of the Reference section in Parliament Library and the quantum of work to be performed by it the Economy Committee recommended very favourably. In their observations regarding the staff attached to the Legislative Assembly Department, the Economy Committee made the following observations:

"There are two projects which deserve consideration. These relate to the establishment of a Reference Section and the reorientation of the Library. A "Reference section" on the American model will be found useful by the Members of the Assembly. Amongst other items its duties will be to collect information required by Members of the Legislature and to present it in a condensed form for their use.

Creation of Research and Reference Section

On April 15, 1950 a small Research and Reference Section was created in the Parliament Secretariat (as the Lok Sabha Secretariat was then known) consisting of four Research officers. They were working formerly in the secretariat of the Constituent Assembly. This was the nucleus of the present giant and one of the busiest branch of the Parliament Secretariat known popularly as LARRDIS

Reference service for Members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha: The magnitude of the duties and responsibilities of the Reference section as well as the Members of the reference staff may be realised from the observation of Mr. A. L. Seth who was once the chief Librarian of the Parliament Library.

A library must never be static. It must be a living, growing organism like the parliament, it serves, capable of thinking ahead and planning new tools and services to meet the multifarious needs of Members. As members of parliament reflect the aspirations of the entire nation the Parliament Library has to reflect the gamut of entire national activity. The scope and tempo of parliamentary business exclude no subject from its purview and the criterion for the selection of books is their utility to Members in their discharge of their Parliamentary duties and for equipping themselves in the work of betterment of the nation.

Therefore, in order to help the Members effectively, "reference provided to Members has to be geared to the fast moving pattern of Parliamentary business, as most of the documents or information are required at a moment's notice and the resources of the library have to be so mobilized that the information is available to Members for instant use."

Subject coverage of inquiries from Members in all parliamentary libraries is very wide with emphasis on matters connected directly or indirectly with their parliamentary work. The nature and depth of enquiries vary considerably. It may be a spot reference like giving materials on a given topic such as newspaper cuttings, articles in periodicals locating some topics in parliamentary debates. It may also be compilation of bibliographies on matters of major and general concern, statistical memoranda on a subject of financial, fiscal or commercial interest, etc. Since the demand, particularly during session period might come at any moment the Reference Staff should remain equipped to meet such challenge. Mr. Seth while trying to emphasise the pressure of work on the reference staff, particularly during session, narrated the situation in the following words:

"Sometimes Members require information which has to be furnished within hours or even minutes. A debate may be introduced with little notice, an issue may arise suddenly in the House, or a member may require some information to enable him to put supplementary, particularly with respect to a Short-notice question. Nevertheless, the information has to be factually correct and in sufficient quantity and must be supplied before the deadline if it is to be of any help to the member."

SL Shakhder, Secretary, Lok Sabha observed that in order to assist the Members in their parliamentary activities the Lok Sabha Secretariat made provisions for a Legislative Reference Service. "The primary object of this service is to keep Members well informed of the day-to-day developments at home and abroad and to supply information on specific topics asked for by them." Shri Shakhder grouped the facilities provided broadly under two categories:

(i) preparation of study materials by the staff on various current

problems, and

(ii) Supply of reference material on specific topics or problems on requests made by individual members.

STUDY BOXES

"Study Boxes" is an innovation of the parliament Library to facilitate instant references. These boxes contain book and other publications pertaining to a subject under discussion in the House. Preparation of such materials on specific subject requires careful and elaborate indexing of all materials available in the library and its classification and documentation in minute detail.

According to Mr. Seth, it also requires "specially trained research and reference staff who can effectively and efficiently consult the library collections and prepare notes in such a manner that the Member can assimilate the information in a matter of minutes. And the information furnished has to be strictly factual and authoritative and presented in an objective manner."

Background materials. Brochures.etc.

Another notable assistance to members is the supply of background materials. Members of parliament are very busy people. They may not have enough time at their disposal to keep themselves abreast of latest developments in the national and international

fields. The Parliament Library has come forward to shoulder such a responsibility by preparing useful background material in the form of bibliographies on important bills and other subjects coming up before parliament. In this process of educating the Member brochures, monographs, information bulletins etc, on topics of special current interest are issued besides publication of some very useful periodicals by the Research Division.

The purpose of these publications is to bring to the notice of the members all the useful materials and to encourage them to go to the original sources if they are so interested,

Anticipated enquiries:

in order to help the Members at the right moment without loss of time and with abundant and appropriate material the library staff should anticipate demand from the Members and keep such material ready well ahead. The Parliament Library is aware of this responsibility and keep materials ready in anticipation of enquiries Card indexing of articles and other materials is made use of extensively and press clippings are arranged under a detailed classification scheme. Answers to parliamentary questions, mini-serial statements etc. are collected and arranged under different subject headings. Similarly notes prepared and supplied to Members are arranged in folders, under subject headings, in case the inquiry is repeated. According to Mr. Seth, the Parliament Library has "attained a stature which promises to compare favourably with parliamentary Libraries elsewhere in the world, but we are alive to the fact that its services



can be further developed. It is also proposed to have a multistore building exclusively for the Parliament Library which can accommodate about two million volumes. The further expansion is designed to make it a fine reference library where Members of parliament and research scholars can find adequate source material for their projects."

Reference :

1. A. L. Seth, "Parliament Library of India: Its growth and function" in Parliamentarian, vol LI
2. M.N.Kaul, Memorandum prepared for the use of Economy Committee in 1947.
3. A.R. Shirali, Research and reference service in Lok Sabha Secretariat-A souvenir.
4. SL. Shakhder, "Services available to Members of Parliament India in the Parliament, vol LI.