

A leap towards hassle-free procedures

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| Feature |
| Self Attestation |

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Whenever one has to appear for a job interview, apply for a passport or open a bank account, getting the documents attested by a gazetted officer or any authorised signing authority has always been a big hassle. However, these cumbersome preconditions like attestations and affidavits are undergoing a landmark reform. In a constant endeavour of the Government to simplify procedures of attestation and certification, all Central Ministries/Departments as well as State Government/UTs have been requested to review the existing requirement in this regard and make provision for self certification, wherever possible.

Background

Self attestation is an essential method to affirm that the copies of documents presented as proofs of one's identity and whereabouts are true and original. In a country which still functions on paperwork, a lot of documents have to be submitted along with every form we fill. The last dates for the forms approach so soon and half of the times we are worrying about where to find a gazetted officer who will attest the copies of our original documents. We end up calling friends, relatives to find one person who would attest our documents so that the form gets submitted in time.

Recently Government of India has asked all its departments and state governments to make provisions for self-certification and accept documents which are self-attested as a confirmation of identity in place of attestation by a gazetted officer. This practice has already been adopted by some of the Central Government agencies and is being introduced in various states gradually. University Grants Commission has also issued special instructions through D.O.No.F. 14-1412014(CPP-II) dated 26th September, 2014 regarding abolition of affidavits and adoption of self certification. This move comes as a big relief not only to the students but also to all the individuals associated with the academics.

Self-attestation would save time and money as people will not have to chase officers for attestation of documents. It has been seen that some of these officers charge for these services making it a part-time business. In most of the cases one hardly knows the gazetted officer and getting documents attested by a stranger seems pointless. If the government's idea behind attestation is an assurance of the person's identity and character then a document attested by a stranger is useless. The government's initiative of switching over to self-attestation is a welcome move as it also gives us the opportunity to take responsibility and ownership of our own actions.

No legal hassle in going for this positive change

Self-certification might seem risky as not all self-attested documents will be true but this puts the blame directly on the person who is attesting false documents. He/she will be solely responsible for any false documents attested by them.

The advantages of self-attestation are that the public agencies can impose penal liability for making wrong statements in terms of suspension of the services (suspension of ration card facilities, disconnection of power supply, etc.). This will save a lot of botheration and sizeable expenses for the citizen who has to procure stamps/stamp paper which is mostly not available at the place where the affidavit is to be submitted.

There appears to be no legal problem in adopting this practice. The Indian Penal Code contains a number of Sections such as 177, 193, 197, 198, 199 and 200. These Sections specifically deal with the implications of any false information/evidence/disclosure/ declaration made by the deponents and, any such instances included shall be liable to imposition of penalties, fines, registration of criminal cases and even imprisonment, as the case may be.

DigiLocker: Another Giant leap

The Department of Electronics & Information Technology (DeitY) has recently launched an Aadhaar-based e-locker service for storing documents. Users will be able to store electronic versions of important documents like birth certificates, voters ID cards, academic documents, etc in the e-locker. They can also electronically sign these documents with the e-sign facility, which is currently still being tested, and then share them with government organisations or other entities when required. The sharing of e-documents will be done through a registered repository, which will ensure that the documents are authentic. This is likely to reduce usage of fake documents to a certain extent and also minimize time spent on authenticating documents. To Sign-up for the DigiLocker you need to have an Aadhaar number and a mobile number registered with Aadhaar.

Following are the key features of the DigiLocker:

- i. Digital Locker of each resident is linked to their Aadhaar number.
- ii. 10MB of free space in the locker to securely store resident documents and store links (URI) of Govt. department or agency issued e-documents. The storage space allocation will be increased to 1GB in subsequent release.
- iii. eSign online service to digitally sign the documents online without using dongle. For details please refer to the e-Sign brochure available on the portal
- iv. Sharing of e-documents online with any registered requester agency or department
- v. Download eAadhaar
- vi. List of issuers who have issued e-documents to residents and list of requesters which have accessed resident's documents.

More information on the futuristic service can be found on: <https://digitallocker.gov.in/>

It is extremely important for all of us to create awareness among the citizens about the concept of self-attestation which is purely in favour of the commoners. This whole concept revolves around trust and responsibility. Self-certification is a citizen-friendly initiative by the

government of India that marks a departure from the cumbersome system established since decades.

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