

Gram Panchayat Libraries in Dharwad District, Karnataka: Infrastructure, Extension Activities, and Government Information Services

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Abstract—Gram Panchayat Libraries (GPLs) are central to rural knowledge dissemination in India, bridging literacy promotion, community engagement, and access to government programs. This study examines the infrastructure, extension activities, and government information services of GPLs in Dharwad District, Karnataka, using primary data from structured questionnaires administered to GPL supervisors and district-level profiling, complemented with secondary sources from contemporary policy initiatives such as the Karnataka Digital Public Library (KDPL), Pustaka Jolige, and Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) support programs. The study finds that while Dharwad demonstrates strong GPL coverage and digitization efforts, constraints in physical space, staffing, collection relevance, and active digital mediation limit service delivery. The paper recommends targeted investments in infrastructure, formalized ICT training, integration with state and national digital platforms, embedding GPLs into Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs), structured monitoring, and partnerships with NGOs and civil society. Evidence suggests that implementing these measures can transform GPLs into vibrant community information hubs, enhancing literacy, promoting welfare scheme uptake, supporting women and youth, and fostering lifelong learning.

Index Terms—Gram Panchayat Libraries, rural development, community information centres, Karnataka, government schemes, digital libraries

I. INTRODUCTION

Public libraries at the Gram Panchayat level occupy a pivotal position in rural India, serving as conduits for education, social interaction, and access to government information (Ranganathan, 2011). In

Karnataka, the Department of Public Libraries recognizes the strategic role of these libraries in rural development and literacy initiatives. Programs such as *Namma Grama Namma Pustakalaya*, Pustaka Jolige, and the Karnataka Digital Public Library (KDPL) aim to enhance library infrastructure, digitize resources, and extend library services to underserved populations (Department of Public Libraries, 2022). Dharwad District exemplifies this dynamic, as it combines relatively strong library coverage with ongoing challenges relating to infrastructure, staffing, and outreach capacity. Examining these factors provides insight into strategies for optimizing the role of GPLs as community information hubs.

Globally, rural libraries have evolved from repositories of printed materials into community information centres, delivering educational, health, and social welfare services to populations with limited access to formal education and administrative services (Manohar, 2014). In India, GPLs are strategically positioned to facilitate awareness and uptake of initiatives such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Krishi Bhagya, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, health programs under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), and women and child welfare schemes including Stree Shakti. Despite this potential, operational challenges persist, including insufficient physical infrastructure, limited staffing, irregular operating hours, and inadequate digital capacity (CRISP, 2023). This study investigates these constraints in Dharwad and provides evidence-based recommendations for strengthening GPLs as community information centers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND POLICY CONTEXT

Rural libraries as community information centres: Public libraries in rural contexts are increasingly conceptualized as community information centres capable of supporting education, agricultural extension, health awareness, and civic participation (Kunhambu, 2012). Karnataka-based studies emphasize the GPL's potential to provide targeted support for women, farmers, and youth through reading programs, career guidance, and informational outreach on government schemes (Lamani, Talawar, & Kumbar, 2014). Extension activities such as literacy campaigns, workshops, and community events have been shown to enhance both engagement and the practical utility of libraries for local communities (ResearchGate, 2018). These studies underscore the importance of developing libraries not only as physical repositories but as active facilitators of community knowledge.

Karnataka state initiatives: The Karnataka government has actively invested in rural library modernization, emphasizing both physical infrastructure and digital connectivity. Initiatives such as Pustaka Jolige have mobilized civil society and corporate support to replenish rural library collections and conduct reading campaigns, effectively engaging children and adult learners (EdexLive, 2022). Simultaneously, the KDPL provides extensive digital content, including e-books, educational resources, and competitive examination materials, thereby extending library services beyond physical books to meet contemporary learning and employment needs. Many GPLs have participated in digitization initiatives aligned with the Digital India program, yet utilization and integration into daily operations vary considerably (Department of Public Libraries, 2022).

National support and funding: The Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) plays a critical role in supporting GPL modernization, providing grants for digitization, infrastructure enhancement, mobile library services, and accessibility for differently-abled users (RRRLF, 2021). While these programs represent significant opportunities to address resource limitations, they require administrative knowledge and capacity to successfully apply for and manage funds—

a capability that is not uniformly available across all Gram Panchayats.

Evidence from Dharwad: Dharwad District maintains approximately 150 GPLs, covering about 60% of Gram Panchayats. While digitization initiatives have provided basic computer infrastructure and connectivity, most libraries operate from small, shared spaces such as GP offices or school rooms. Staffing is minimal, with a single librarian often managing multiple functions, including cataloging, lending, and community outreach, often with modest remuneration. Evaluation studies highlight that libraries with enhanced infrastructure, trained staff, and active digital mediation exhibit greater engagement and higher impact on community information dissemination (CRISP, 2023; Manohar, 2014).

III. OBJECTIVES

This study is guided by two objectives: first, to examine the infrastructure and information facilities of Gram Panchayat Libraries in Dharwad District; and second, to analyze the extension activities and government information services offered by these libraries. By combining primary questionnaire data, district-level profiling, and contemporary literature, the study aims to identify operational gaps and propose actionable strategies to enhance GPL utility as community information centers.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was adopted. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to GPL supervisors, covering general library information, infrastructure, collections, services, extension activities, staffing, and financial resources. District profiling documents provided demographic and socio-economic context, along with library distribution and digitization status. Secondary sources included government reports, RRRLF guidelines, peer-reviewed studies, and contemporary policy analyses. Analytical methods involved triangulating questionnaire responses with district-level evidence and secondary literature to assess infrastructure capacity, extension services, digital inclusion, and service delivery effectiveness.

V. FINDINGS

Infrastructure and facilities: Most GPLs in Dharwad operate in small, shared spaces ranging from 10x12 to 12x15 feet, with only 40% housed in independent library buildings. Limited space constrains seating arrangements, children-friendly areas, and hosting of community programs. Basic furniture is available, including tables and chairs, but specialized shelving, display units, and reading rugs are scarce. Utilities, including water and sanitation facilities, are often inadequate, while lighting and ventilation are suboptimal. These infrastructural limitations restrict both library use and programmatic activities, affecting the overall effectiveness of libraries as community information centers (CRISP, 2023; RRRLF, 2021).

Collections and languages: Collections predominantly comprise Kannada-language materials, including general reading, textbooks, and children's literature, with limited English and Urdu resources. Initiatives such as Pustaka Jolige have improved book availability, but relevance and timeliness remain inconsistent. Libraries that maintain locally pertinent collections tend to achieve higher engagement and use among school students, women, and farmers (Lamani et al., 2014).

ICT capacity and digital services: While 5–10 libraries demonstrate meaningful digital resource use, most digitized GPLs have only basic computers and intermittent internet access. KDPL provides extensive e-content, including educational resources, career guidance materials, and agricultural information; however, lack of librarian training and limited user familiarity reduce utilization. Research demonstrates that effective digital mediation significantly increases the uptake of digital resources, enhancing literacy and facilitating access to government schemes (Ganjihal, 2022).

Staffing and training: GPL staffing generally consists of a single librarian responsible for multiple functions. Salaries range between ₹10,000–15,000 per month, and continuous professional development is rare. Workshops and training programs are sporadic, resulting in limited capacity to manage digital resources, facilitate community programs, or assist citizens with government services (CRISP, 2023).

Extension activities: Extension programs, including book exhibitions, storytelling, quizzes, film shows, and awareness campaigns, occur irregularly. Seasonal

activities, such as summer reading camps, health sessions, and women's empowerment programs, demonstrate the potential for community engagement when libraries are adequately supported. Libraries with proactive planning and modest budgets show increased participation, highlighting the critical role of infrastructure and capacity in program effectiveness (ResearchGate, 2018).

Government scheme information services: GPLs often provide passive dissemination of information about welfare schemes through pamphlets and notice boards. Active facilitation—such as personal counseling, assistance with digital form submission, or coordination with Common Service Centers (CSCs)—is limited to a few libraries. Where implemented, these interventions have significantly enhanced uptake of agricultural and welfare schemes, underscoring the potential for GPLs to serve as effective local service delivery points (Department of Public Libraries, 2022).

Usage patterns: Library users are predominantly schoolchildren and exam aspirants, with lower participation from farmers and older adults. Active libraries report 150–300 registered members and 300–500 monthly visitors, whereas smaller or poorly resourced libraries report minimal daily use. Integration with SHGs, schools, and GPDP activities enhances engagement and sustainability, suggesting that targeted interventions can increase library reach and effectiveness (CRISP, 2023).

VI. DISCUSSION

The effectiveness of GPLs in Dharwad is constrained by physical infrastructure, limited staffing, and insufficient digital mediation capacity. One-room libraries with inadequate utilities hinder group learning, community programs, and digital literacy initiatives. Digitization efforts alone are insufficient; trained personnel are critical to mediate resources, assist citizens, and ensure uptake of government programs. Active facilitation, including literacy workshops, scheme counseling, and community engagement, remains uneven across the district. Integration with local governance, SHGs, and educational institutions is crucial to ensure sustainability and equitable access.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing GPL capacity requires a multifaceted approach. Infrastructure upgrades should focus on creating child- and women-friendly reading areas, improving seating, lighting, ventilation, and basic utilities, leveraging RRRLF and state grants. Librarians should receive formal training in digital literacy, e-resource mediation, and community facilitation. Integration of KDPL content with locally curated resources can support regular “scheme clinics” and career guidance sessions. Libraries should be embedded into GPDPs, linked with SHGs, and actively monitored using simple metrics such as monthly visitor counts, extension activities conducted, and digital sessions completed. Partnerships with NGOs, civil society, and reading campaigns such as Pustaka Jolige can help sustain collections and outreach.

VIII. CONCLUSION

GPLs in Dharwad District demonstrate strong foundational potential, with substantial coverage and policy support. However, infrastructural, staffing, and digital capacity limitations constrain their effectiveness. Addressing these gaps through targeted investments, staff development, integration into governance structures, and partnerships with digital platforms and civil society can transform GPLs into dynamic community information centers, promoting literacy, enhancing welfare program uptake, and fostering lifelong learning. Coordinated action involving the District Library Office, Panchayat institutions, state programs, and civil society is essential for operationalizing these recommendations and realizing the full potential of GPLs.

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