

Libraries to be set up in every village of Karnataka under Centre's mission

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Books for the libraries have reached the Panchayat level

Kundapura: The Central Government has launched an initiative to revive the reading culture in rural India by establishing libraries in every village under the National Digital Library scheme. The project, already underway in states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, has now received funding for implementation in Karnataka as well.

Books from the National Book Trust of India (NBT) have already reached taluk offices for distribution to Gram Panchayats. Currently, Karnataka has 5,895 public libraries. This year, a budget of Rs 263.96 crore has been earmarked for the establishment of 6,599 new village libraries.

Since 2019, rural libraries have been shifted from the Education Department to the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.

In Udupi district, Rs 55 lakh has been sanctioned for the purchase of computers for 108 Gram Panchayats out of 150 total panchayats, and Rs 41 lakh for furniture. In Dakshina Kannada, Rs 1.5 crore has been allocated for computer and furniture procurement for

150 Gram Panchayats across 224 panchayats.

Buildings for new libraries are to be selected near residential areas, excluding villages that already have Panchayat libraries or school libraries. Some districts have already identified land for constructing new facilities.

The NBT will act as the nodal agency and knowledge partner for the project. Based on a preliminary survey, the scheme will be implemented in phases depending on the existing infrastructure at the panchayat level. Books in local languages and dialects, suited to various age groups, will be made available.

Each new library has been granted Rs 1 lakh, out of which 50% of the first instalment must be used for purchasing NBT-published books. Accordingly, books have already reached all districts, including Udupi and Dakshina Kannada. Children's books will be provided by the Azim Premji Foundation. Village library and information centres will be upgraded as "Knowledge Hubs."

Background and vision

NBT had first launched a village book fair and Panchayat symposium in Uttarakhand in 2018 and set up Panchayat libraries in Diu in 2019. The initiative was expanded to other states in 2020. The Union Budget of 2023 officially announced the plan to establish rural libraries across India.

The aim is to build a reading habit among rural children and youth by providing age-appropriate reading materials. The project also aims to integrate Panchayats into the mainstream knowledge network by promoting digital access, establishing reader clubs, and enhancing reading, writing, and speaking skills. It also envisions mentoring budding writers and generating at least one employment opportunity in each village. Over time, public libraries will serve as dialogue and knowledge centres in both villages and urban wards.

Work begins at grassroots

"Books have reached the Panchayat level, and procurement of computers and furniture is currently in progress." — Uday Kumar Shetty / Jayaram, District Planning Officers, Udupi & Dakshina Kannada

(Translated version of the Kannada article by Laxmi Machina)