



# Grassroots Governance in Andhra Pradesh: A Study of the Village Secretariat System

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**Abstract :** Grassroots governance plays a pivotal role in ensuring inclusive development and effective delivery of welfare schemes. In this context, the Government of Andhra Pradesh introduced the Grama/Ward Sachivalayam system as a unique model of decentralized administration. This study seeks to trace the genesis of the Grama Sachivalayam, analyze its organizational structure, examine the challenges in its implementation, and suggest measures for its effective functioning. The system has established 11,158 village secretariats and 3,786 ward secretariats, engaging 1.26 lakh employees along with 2.8 lakh village/ward volunteers across the state. By bridging the gap between government and citizens, the initiative has particularly benefited marginalized and below-poverty-line communities, including those in tribal regions, by ensuring timely access to welfare and development programmes. The findings highlight that village volunteers have become a crucial link in disseminating information and facilitating the application process for schemes. Overall, the Grama Sachivalayam has emerged as an innovative model of service delivery and citizen-centric governance at the grassroots level, with strong potential for replication across India.

**IndexTerms - Grama Sachivalayam, Panchayat Secretary, Welfare and Development Programmes, Grama Swaraj, Grassroots Governance**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi envisioned Ramarajya for India, which he believed could be actualised solely through the revival of the esteemed traditions of ancient India and the fortification of indigenous institutions most compatible with Indian culture. In alignment with this idea, the architects of the Indian Constitution included Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV), which underscores the creation of decentralised administrative entities to enhance governance proximity to the populace. In accordance with this constitutional obligation, successive administrations have developed and executed policies and programs designed to enhance local self-governance.

To commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Government of Andhra Pradesh initiated the Village/Ward Secretariat System (Sachivalayam). This novel governance model, launched on 2nd October 2019 by the Hon'ble Chief Minister Sri Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in Karapa village, East Godavari district, is fundamentally based on Gandhiji's principle of Grama Swaraj. This approach fundamentally embodies the decentralisation of democracy, guaranteeing that governance and public services are delivered to the grassroots level with efficacy and transparency.

The village and ward secretariats function as comprehensive centres for the provision of welfare programs and essential services. Empowered by the involvement of skilled volunteers, they seek to enhance governance by making it more accessible, accountable, and focused on citizens. Currently, 11,158 village secretariats and 3,786 ward secretariats operate throughout Andhra Pradesh, acting as a vital link between the administration and the populace.

Moreover, Article 243G of the Constitution authorises State Legislatures to delegate authorities and responsibilities to Panchayats, enabling them to operate as efficient local self-government entities. Subsequent to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the Government of Andhra Pradesh promulgated the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, which instituted a three-tier Panchayati Raj system consisting of Gram Panchayats at the village level, Mandal Parishads at the intermediate level, and Zilla Parishads at the district level. These institutions, pursuant to the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, are assigned 29 subjects, allowing them to pursue economic development, social justice, and local empowerment.

The Village/Ward Secretariat system embodies both the continuation of Gandhiji's ideal of Gram Swaraj and a modern advancement in grassroots governance, integrating constitutional principles with current administrative requirements.

### ELEVENTH SCHEDULE. (Article 243G)

1. Agriculture, including agricultural extension.
2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation.
3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development.

4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry.
5. Fisheries.
6. Social forestry and farm forestry.
7. Minor forest produce.
8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries.
9. Khadi, village and cottage industries.
10. Rural housing.
11. Drinking water.
12. Fuel and fodder.
13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication.
14. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity.
15. Non-conventional energy sources.
16. Poverty alleviation programme.
17. Education, including primary and secondary schools.
18. Technical training and vocational education.
19. Adult and non-formal education.
20. Libraries.
21. Cultural activities.
22. Markets and fairs.
23. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centers and dispensaries.
24. Family welfare.
25. Women and child development.
26. Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded.
27. Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
28. Public distribution system.
29. Maintenance of community assets.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In his 2021 paper, Bhaskar Kumar Kakati analyses the enduring significance of Gram Swaraj (village self-governance) and the advancement of rural businesses in the context of nations devastated by the COVID-19 epidemic, specifically focusing on India. He asserts that self-sufficient village communities grounded on Gandhian principles can offer resilience in times of crisis, guaranteeing livelihood security and decentralised governance.

Abraham Mutluri (2022) emphasises the concept and implementation of Grama/Ward Sachivalayam as an effective mechanism for executing welfare schemes and development programs. His findings indicate that the system has been operating efficiently in Andhra Pradesh and may serve as a replicable model for other Indian states. The Sachivalayam has markedly enhanced service delivery and governance at the grassroots level through the establishment of a decentralised administrative framework.

Praveen Kumar C and Dr. G. Parvathi (2023) contend in their collaborative article that Panchayati Raj institutions are essential for political empowerment at the grassroots level, enabling rural and isolated communities to influence their developmental trajectory. The Government of Andhra Pradesh established Village and Ward Secretariats to enhance these institutions, thereby extending the presence of all government ministries to the panchayat level. Departmental representatives function locally, facilitating improved identification of beneficiaries and enhanced service delivery efficiency. Their study highlights the efficacy and aims of this method in advancing local governance.

Anil Kumar (2023) offers a historical analysis by examining the development of Panchayati Raj and decentralisation in Andhra Pradesh. He observes that significant improvements occurred prior to the implementation of the new Panchayati Raj system in 1959, initially in the Madras Presidency (of which Andhra was a component until 1953) and subsequently in Andhra Pradesh. He records significant milestones, including the establishment of the Community Projects and National Extension Service Committee in 1957, the creation of the Working Group in 1977 under the Janata Party administration, and the formation of the Hanumantha Rao Committee in 1983 by the Planning Commission to enhance decentralised planning at the district level. This historical narrative underscores the persistent endeavours of succeeding administrations to institutionalise grassroots governance.

Carrasco, B. et al. (2023) underscore the significance of enhancing multi-level governance systems in their publication. They contend that efficient service delivery and equitable development rely on the efficacy of subnational governments. The book emphasises the importance of local government structures in facilitating fair access to public services and underscores the need for well-organised and balanced governance frameworks that incorporate local, regional, and national levels.

Sakthivel P (2024) articulates a plan for the localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in India in his work. He discusses the elements necessary for localisation, the function of digital planning platforms like E-Gram Swaraj, and the difficulties associated with capacity building at the grassroots level. The study delineates techniques to surmount implementation barriers and endorses systematic institutional capacity building as a progressive approach. His research elucidates the alignment of grassroots governance frameworks with global developmental goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explain the genesis of Grama Sachivalayam System.
2. To study the Grama Sachivalayam organizational structure.
3. To study the challenges in implementation of the Grama Sachivalayam.
4. To provide the appropriate suggestions for effective implementation of Grama Sachivalayam

#### IV. VILLAGE SECRETARIAT SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

##### Importance of the Village Secretariat System

The Village Secretariat System was implemented in Andhra Pradesh to reorganise and enhance government at the local level. The necessity stems from the subsequent objectives:

- Reorganizing governmental service delivery systems to enhance efficiency and accessibility.
- Developing a resilient and efficient framework for the successful execution of the Navaratnalu welfare initiatives.
- Guaranteeing transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in the provision of services.
- Fostering integration and cooperation among various government departments delivering services at the village level.

##### Goals of the Village Secretariat System

The primary aims of the Village Secretariat are to provide government and welfare services to citizens in a consistent and accessible manner.

- To enhance interdepartmental coordination at the village level.
- To guarantee the prompt formulation and execution of village-level development strategies.
- To ensure field-level personnel are accountable to Gramme Panchayats/Gram Sabhas, with explicitly delineated duties and responsibilities.
- To amalgamate the Village Volunteer System with the Secretariat, thereby improving the final delivery of services.

##### Objectives of the Village Secretariat System

###### Government Order and Legal Framework

The Village Secretariat system was established by Government Order (G.O.) No. 110, dated July 19, 2019, from the Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Department. This directive transformed existing Gramme Panchayat Offices into Gramme Secretariats, effecting a significant alteration in the administrative structure.

The Gramme Secretariat functions as the central office of local self-governance, with the Panchayat Secretary acting as its executive officer, in contrast to other government offices. The formation of Gramme Secretariats is supported by Section 4(3) of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 (Act 13 of 1994), which grants legal authority for local governance.

##### Structure of the Village Secretariat System

The Village Secretariat is established to guarantee the effective and incorruptible implementation of government programs for homes. The structure is as follows:

**Village Administrative Offices:** A Secretariat is built for every 2,000 individuals, manned by approximately twelve officials. The officials, referred to as functional assistants, operate under the oversight of the Panchayat Secretary.

**Village and Ward Volunteer System:** Governance is disseminated to each household via a volunteer framework. Each volunteer is allocated 50 households, performing door-to-door visits to identify clients and apprise them of assistance programs. Volunteers are issued an identification card and get a monthly stipend of ₹5,000 for their services.

Volunteers identify recipients, comprehend their problems, and connect them with government programs. The Functional Assistants and Secretariat staff constitutes a cohesive workforce that together delivers services. Functional Assistants may fulfil roles in many Secretariats based on administrative requirements.

The Gram Panchayat Office, now designated as Grama Sachivalayam, serves as the principal administrative entity. The Panchayat Secretary, in conjunction with other officials, aids the Gram Panchayat in governance while preserving its autonomy. The staff are accountable for both routine duties and supplementary assignments as assigned periodically.

The Village Secretariat System signifies a substantial shift in local governance, guaranteeing openness, accountability, and effective service delivery. The system seeks to enhance governmental accessibility to the populace and realise the ideal of participatory and responsive governance in Andhra Pradesh through the collaboration of Gram Panchayats, Functional Assistants, and Village Volunteers.

##### FUNCTIONARIES OF GRAMA SACHIVALAYAM

SL No.	Designation of the Functionary	Primary Functions	Line Department
1	Panchayat Secretary (Grade V)	Executive Officer of the Panchayat act as Liaison Officer between Gram Panchayat & Village Secretariat, Convener. Custodian of Assets/ Records Drawing & Disbursement Officer etc.,	Panchayat Raj & Rural Development
2	Panchayat Secretary (Grade VI) (Digital Assistant)	Processing of Requests & Delivery of services after due approval etc.,	Panchayat Raj & Rural Development
3	Engineering Assistant	Execution of infrastructure related projects like Roads, Drains, Water supply, MGNREGA works, Nadu - Nedu etc.,	Panchayat Raj & Rural Development (Engineering)
4	Welfare & Education Assistant	Delivery of Welfare Schemes YSR Asara, YSR Cheyutha, YSR Pension Kaanuka etc., Inspections of schools regarding Non -Academic activities like Mid-Day Meal implementation etc.,	Social Welfare/ Tribal Welfare
5	Agriculture/ Horticulture/	RBK Kendra -Integrated Village Plan -	Agriculture and Cooperation



	Sericulture	Departmental Schemes/ Services etc.,	
6	Veterinary/Fisheries Assistant	Selection of beneficiaries and State & Central Schemes, Applications under Animal Feed Act, Aqua culture etc.,	Animal Husbandry, Fisheries
7	Village Revenue Officer (Grade II)	Land records, Civil supply matters, Assist in issue of certificates like: Caste etc.,	Revenue
8	Survey Assistant	Detailed Survey of lands Scheme, Maintaining all survey registers etc.,	Revenue
9	Mahila Police/ Grama Mahila Samrakshana Karyadarshi	Ensure safety for Women and Children.	Home
10	Energy Assistant	Identify Power Supply Problems, Short circuit points and Transformer Failures, Assist DISCOM Staff etc.,	Energy
11	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)	Pregnancy care (Neo Natal/Post Natal), Child -Birth, Nutrition, Communicable & Non Communicable diseases etc.	Medical, Health & Family Welfare

### Powers and Functions of Gram Panchayat

- Subject to the provisions of this Act and the rules made thereunder, a Gram Panchayat may also make such provision as it thinks fit for carrying out the requirements of the village in respect of the following matters, namely: -

- (i) The construction and maintenance of dharmashalas, sarais and rest houses for travellers;
- (ii) The planting and preservation of groves and trees on the sides of roads and other public places;
- (iii) The promotion and development of pre-primary education, elementary education, social and health education, cottage industries and trade;
- (iv) The establishment and maintenance of dispensaries and the payment of subsidies to rural medical practitioners;
- (v) The establishment and maintenance of wireless receiving sets, play grounds, akhadas, clubs and other centres for recreation and physical culture;
- (vi) The laying and maintenance of parks;
- (vii) The establishment and maintenance of libraries and reading rooms;
- (viii) The provision of relief to the crippled, the destitute and the sick;
- (ix) The establishment and maintenance of nurseries and stores of improved seeds and agricultural implements of the production and distribution of improved seeds, pesticides and Insecticides and the holding of agricultural shows including cattle shows;
- (x) The propagation of improved methods of cultivation in the village including laying out of demonstration plots with a view to increasing production;
- (xi) the encouragement of co-operative management of lands in the village and the organisation of joint co-operative farming; and the promotion of co-operatives for the manufacture of bricks, tiles, hinges, doors, windows, rafters or other building materials as provided in the village housing project schemes sponsored by the Central Government;
- (xii) The establishment and maintenance of ware-houses and granaries;
- (xiii) The establishment and maintenance of cattle sheds;
- (xiv) The extension of village sites;
- (xv) the improvement of cattle including purchase and maintenance of stud bulls and the provision of veterinary relief;
- (xvi) The control of fairs, jataras and festivals;
- (xvii) The organisation of voluntary labour for community development works in the village;
- (xviii) The establishment and maintenance of maternity and child welfare centres;
- (xix) The organisation of watch and ward;
- (xx) The provision of relief against famine or other calamities;
- (xxi) The destruction of stray and owner-less dogs;
- (xxii) The preparation of statistics of unemployment;
- (xxiii) The opening and maintenance of public markets;
- (xxiv) The opening and maintenance of public slaughter houses;
- (xxv) The implementation of land reform measures in the village including consolidation of holdings and soil conservations;
- (xxvi) The setting up of organisation to promote good will and social harmony between different communities, the removal or untouchability, the provision of house sites for harijans, the eradication of corruption, the prohibition of or temperance in the consumption of intoxicating drinks or drugs which are injurious to health and the discouragement of gambling and litigation;
- (xxvii) Other measures of public utility calculated to promote the safety, health, convenience, comfort or moral, social and material well-being of the residents of the village.

### Sarpanch Functions

- 1) To ensure the proper functioning of the village secretariat and all other officials.
- 2) To preside over and moderate the meetings of Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha, Action Committee and may attend all Mandal level meetings as an ex-officio member without the right to vote.
- 3) To monitor, control, review the activities of Gram Secretariat officers and staff and prepare internal reports on their performance.

4) To send reports relating to the services of public officers and employees filed with the local government to the Appointing Officer of the concerned department and to take those reports into consideration while preparing the internal reports to the respective officers.

5) Management of contingency expenses as per government regulations from time to time, fund limit and circumstances.

6) To authorize payments and repayments due to the Gram Panchayat.

7) Bringing all kinds of records and files except the records and files related to the exercise of legal powers reserved only to the Panchayat Secretary and other officers in the administration of the Gram Secretariat, giving appropriate instructions and pass order on them.

8) To perform such other powers and duties as may be specified by law, government rules.

9) Handing over his duties to the Deputy Sarpanch if he is unable to perform in his duties for more than 15 days.

#### **Deputy Sarpanch Functions**

1) When the post of Sarpanch becomes vacant and in cases where the Sarpanch is absent from duty for more than 15 days, the duties of the Sarpanch shall be performed without any formal orders.

2) In the absence of the Sarpanch, the Gram Panchayat Working Committee/Gram Sabhas should be constituted and presided over.

3) Ensure competent general administration and quality.

#### **IV. ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE VILLAGE SECRETARIAT SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

1. Decentralised Governance : Founded in 2019, the system facilitated governance at the doorstep of communities. Each
2. Secretariat serves around 2,000 individuals in rural areas or 4,000 to 5,000 in metropolitan districts. Facilitated participative and inclusive governance by providing accessible government services.
3. Employment Generation : Generated approximately 126,000 jobs for educated rural youth through the recruitment of Village and Ward Secretariat personnel. Decreased unemployment and offered solid governmental work prospects in rural regions.
4. Doorstep Service Delivery: More than 500 government services are provided by 35 departments at the Secretariat level. Minimised delays, intermediaries, and corruption in obtaining benefit packages and certificates.
5. Clarity and Responsibility: Online service portals and established timetables (often 21 days) enhanced efficiency. The grievance redressal procedure guarantees staff accountability. Citizens can monitor applications using digital platforms.
6. Enhancement of Welfare Initiatives: Village Secretariats oversee the execution of prominent welfare initiatives such as Amma Vodi, YSR Rythu Bharosa, Arogyasri, Housing, Pensions, and the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Beneficiaries are identified and verified locally, hence reducing leakages.
7. Integration with Volunteers: Each Secretariat is associated with Village/Ward Volunteers who do frequent family visits. Volunteers facilitate the final distribution of welfare funds and direct communication between the government and citizens.
8. Enhanced Rural Administration : Operated as a unified system for rural governance. Minimised the necessity for peasants to journey to Mandal or District headquarters for minor services.
9. Women Empowerment: A substantial allocation of positions was designated for women, facilitating their pivotal involvement in government. Female personnel in Secretariats manage welfare initiatives aimed at women and children.
10. Digital Governance: The implementation of biometric authentication, internet applications, and Management Information System (MIS) dashboards enhanced data accuracy. Improved e-Governance and decreased documentation.
11. Social Justice and Inclusiveness: Recruitment adhered to reservation policies to guarantee representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, and minorities. Village Secretariats emerged as emblems of inclusive development.
12. Recognition and Replication: The system garnered national attention as a pioneering governance approach. Other states have examined the system for potential replication.

#### **V. CHALLENGES AND ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY THE SACHIVALAYAM STAFF IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES.**

1. Political factors: They are impacted by political leaders about the selection of beneficiaries.
2. Technical factors: They encounter network issues during their work, which might lead to data analysis errors.
3. Corruption: Certain employees and volunteers are swayed by leaders and community members to engage in illicit activities under the guise of resource allocation and distribution. For example, ration cards.
4. The Village and Ward Secretariats must serve as a conduit between the populace and government welfare programs, with the staff in these secretariats acting as facilitators to ensure effective implementation. The volunteers and ward/village secretariat staff must collaborate to deliver all services to the populace at their doorstep and ensure that no eligible individual is excluded from government benefit schemes. Secretariat staff encounters several limitations, such as identifying suitable individuals for initiatives and recognising ineligible candidates.
5. Previously, the volunteers lacked expertise regarding the plan and functioning of cell phones. They have now offered capacity building for the schemes and mobile phone operations.
6. The absence of a reliable internet connection in the tribal settlements, coupled with server faults on the government website, results in delays in distribution.
7. The issues hindering the implementation of schemes include limited financial resources, deficiencies in planning and coordination, and a primary challenge of corruption.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Andhra Pradesh government constructed new edifices for Sachivalayam. The government should enact legislation to apply these plans and concepts in future administrations as well. In several locations, the sachivalayam has been erected in a temporary structure. A permanent building is required for this sachivalayam.
2. This approach should be disseminated nationwide and executed throughout India to ensure the successful delivery of welfare programs to the impoverished and disadvantaged.
3. The Government approved housing for 3,500,000 individuals in Andhra Pradesh, however construction has not commenced. The Government should assign this task to sachivalayam personnel to oversee the activity.
4. The personnel of Grama Sachivalayam and village volunteers must exhibit greater accountability when approving cards for individuals. Individuals consistently seek to receive government programs at no expense. However, these services pertain to financial services and augment the government's burden.
5. Enhance internet speed in tribal regions to ensure transparency and accountability in the provision of government services.
6. The ward volunteers and Sachivalayam staff necessitate enhanced capacity building on social issues through expert social workers.
7. Grama/Ward Sachivalayams are effectively serving the community. The government should install CCTV cameras in Grama Sachivalayams to enhance transparency. Establish a telecommunication system for disseminating updates and information regarding various government schemes and services to the public.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Eleven thousand one hundred fifty-eight village secretariats and three thousand seven hundred eighty-six ward secretariats have been created throughout the state. Recruited 126,000 diverse staff members and 280,000 ward/village volunteers to operate in Sachivalayams. This initiative penetrated grassroots levels and assisted numerous individuals residing below the poverty line. The inhabitants of the tribal regions are content with this approach and are readily accessing government welfare and development programs. The local volunteers are promptly disseminating information regarding welfare and development programs and assisting the underprivileged in applying for and accessing the schemes. The Grama Sachivalayam initiative is very beneficial for the impoverished and disadvantaged, and it would be advantageous to implement this system nationwide throughout India.

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