

Grama Sachivalayam: A Paradigm Shift in Rural Governance and Service Delivery in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

The evolution of panchayat raj in India has demanded the innovative mechanisms to enhance efficiency, inclusivity, accountability and decentralized administration. Parallel bodies like gram sachivalayam model in Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a transformative institution that enhanced the service delivery and citizen engagement in rural governance. This paper examines the Grama Sachivalayam's, framework, functions, and its impact on rural local governance.

The Grama Sachivalayam model functions as a one stop solution for various administrative services at the ground level. It ensures accessibility to public services, the effective implementation of welfare schemes, and real-time grievance redressal. This initiative has strengthened transparency, accountability, and participatory governance and helps in bridging gaps between citizens and government. Adding to this, it has organised the effective delivery of welfare schemes and catalysed grassroots-level development, positioning itself as a key mechanism of decentralized governance.

The paper identifies the challenges and their impact on the grama sachivalayam institutions. It highlights the dual role of Grama Sachivalayam as both a service delivery system and a platform for participatory governance. Despite demonstrable progress in fostering inclusivity and accountability, addressing existing limitations is crucial for ensuring its sustained efficacy. This paper also recommends few steps to further strengthen the performance of panchayat raj institutions by implementing the grama sachivalayam model in the other regions of the country.

By creating new parallel body like gram sachivalayam within the existing decentralized governance, this paper identifies the importance for long term sustenance and feasibility of the rural development. It highlights the role of such initiatives in concreting the gaps thereby promoting effective participation driving towards the gram swaraj, which is an objective of Indian Constitution under part IV i.e., Directive principles of state Policy (DPSP). The findings call for scaling similar models to strengthen India's rural governance and empower citizens at the grassroots.

Keywords: Rural governance, Grama Sachivalayam, decentralized governance, service delivery, participatory democracy, transparency, accountability, grassroots development.

INTRODUCTION

In a country as diverse and vast as India, the effective governance lies in its governments ability in ensuring every nook and corner of the country especially the rural heartland where majority

of the citizens are residing. The goal of inclusive governance or good governance are only possible if all the services are available and accessible to every citizen of the country without any inconvenience. To achieve this goal, decentralized governance is best step to ensure that even the remotest villages are not left behind. The Grama Sachivalayam (Village Secretariat) in Andhra Pradesh stands as a testimonial to the vision of bringing a paradigm shift in rural governance and service delivery with list mile connectivity. This paper explores the Grama Sachivalayam as a model of empowerment, examining its significance, challenges, and the paradigm shift it represents in strengthening rural local government.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The role of decentralized governance in improving service delivery and strengthening citizen participation has been widely explored in public administration literature. The Grama Sachivalayam model in Andhra Pradesh (AP) is a unique initiative that aligns with global best practices in localized governance, e-governance, and participatory democracy. Several scholars and policy researchers have analyzed similar models in different contexts, highlighting their impact on transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in public administration.

Decentralization and Local Governance

Decentralization is a key pillar of effective governance, ensuring that services reach people at the grassroots level. Studies by Manor (1999) and Rondinelli (1981) emphasize that decentralized governance structures enhance service efficiency, accountability, and community participation. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) institutionalized Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India to empower local governments. However, research suggests that bureaucratic inefficiencies, red tape, and political influence have often limited the effectiveness of PRIs in service delivery (Sharma, 2018). The Grama Sachivalayam model seeks to address these gaps by offering a structured, technology-driven, and people-centric approach.

E-Governance and Digital Service Delivery:

The integration of e-governance in public administration has been widely studied by scholars like Heeks (2002) and Bhatnagar (2004), who argue that digital governance reduces corruption, improves efficiency, and simplifies access to government services. The Grama Sachivalayam model incorporates real-time tracking, digital records, and automated workflows, making public service delivery more transparent and accessible. Studies on similar models, such as India's Digital India initiative and Estonia's e-Governance framework, suggest that technology-driven governance enhances public trust and service efficiency (World Bank, 2020).

Participatory Democracy and Community Engagement:

Participatory democracy ensures that governance is inclusive and responsive to people's needs. Scholars such as Putnam (1993) and Ostrom (1990) highlight that citizen engagement in governance leads to better policy implementation and resource allocation. The Grama Volunteer

system, a core component of Grama Sachivalayam, has been instrumental in directly connecting households with government schemes, ensuring fair and timely service delivery. This aligns with international best practices such as Brazil's participatory budgeting model, which enhances citizen involvement in decision-making (Goldfrank, 2011).

Impact of Grama Sachivalayam on Service Delivery:

Government reports and independent evaluations indicate that Grama Sachivalayam has significantly improved rural service delivery in Andhra Pradesh. The six-step validation process for welfare schemes ensures that only eligible beneficiaries receive government benefits, eliminating political bias. Studies on similar rural governance models, such as Kerala's Kudumbashree program and Bangladesh's Union Digital Centers, highlight that localized service centers improve efficiency and inclusivity in governance (UNDP, 2019).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- I. To Analyse the concept of Rural Local Governance in India in India and impact of parallel bodies on it
- II. To Examine the need, importance, advantages and challenges with the concept of Grama Sachivalayam in Andhra Pradesh
- III. To analyse the organisational structure and functions of grama Sachivalayam.
- IV. To understand the Realtime functioning of grama sachivalayam in rural areas.
- V. To examine further measures for its scalability and sustainability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper tries to take on a holistic approach by covering various aspects regarding the role and importance of Grama Sachivalayam in rural governance and service delivery in Andhra Pradesh. The study includes Quantitative data from various reports published by the government of Andhra Pradesh and different bodies. It also includes insights from secondary sources such as journal articles and studies Grama Sachivalayam, Decentralized Governance and participatory democracy. Moreover, the study involves a doctrinal approach by analysing the existing statutory provisions such as The 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992, the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, and various government policy frameworks. The Primary sources also include the various Chapters, Parts and Articles of Indian Constitution. Additionally, a case study approach was used to analyze the implementation and effectiveness of Grama Sachivalayam. A comparative analysis of pre- and post-implementation service delivery metrics was conducted, focusing on accessibility, transparency, and efficiency. This methodology ensures a comprehensive assessment of the initiative's success while identifying areas for further improvement and potential replication.

RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE & THE PARALLEL BODIES

In India Rural local bodies are grass root democratic organisations which are responsible for local governance in India which helps the rural people to get their services done at local level itself. The provisions of the Indian Constitution and the various state panchayat statutes establish and regulate these local bodies, also referred to as panchayats. In India, rural local bodies are essential to the growth and administration of rural areas. They are in charge of developing the area as a whole and giving the villages access to essential facilities and services.

Parallel bodies are groups established by government agencies and communities to carry out certain functionalities concurrently, whereas the constitutionally established panchayat raj institutions discharge the same functions and responsibilities. While the Panchayati Raj institutions established by the constitution are in a position to carry out the same set of duties in the same geographic area, parallel bodies are organisations formed by communities and government ministries to carry out specific tasks in parallel. The parallel bodies fall into one of the following general categories.

- i) Centrally sponsored schemes' committees
- ii) Locally based groups
- iii) Two-tier parallel bodies and three-tier Panchayats

In the Panchayati Raj system of government, the fundamental administrative units are grama panchayats. The three levels are district, mandal, and village. "Panchayat raj" is a relatively recent phrase that was coined during the British government. "Raj" literally translates to "government" or "regulation." The basis of India's political system is Panchayati Raj, a decentralised system of governance in which each community is in charge of its own affairs, as promoted by Mahatma Gandhi. The phrase "Grama Swaraj" (Village Self-governance) was used to describe this mindset.

As laws were created in several states to create Panchayats, state governments adopted it in the 1950s and 1960s. The 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution, which was made in 1992 to accommodate the concept, also supported it. The Amendment Act of 1992 grants the panchayats more authority and responsibility to prepare plans for social justice and economic development as well as to carry out such plans in connection to the twenty-nine topics stated in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.



Figure 1: Building of Grama Sachivalayam in Andhra Pradesh

GRAMA SACHIVALAYAM A REVOLUTIONARY SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

As part of the celebration of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birthday on October 02, 2019, the Andhra Pradesh government implemented a new administrative structure. In rural areas, the system is called grama sachivalayam, and in urban areas, ward sachivalayam. They have created 3,786 ward secretariats and 11,158 village secretariats throughout the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Grama/Ward Sachivalayam's primary goal is to provide the underprivileged and destitute people of Andhra Pradesh with state and federal welfare programs and schemes.

Evolution of Grama Sachivalayalu

The then Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh on number of occasions has declared that the Government is committed to revamp delivery systems in the State with an aim to improve living standards of the people through the concept of NAVARATHNALU as core theme of governance. To achieve this objective, Government established a system of Village Secretariats on 2nd October, 2019, consisting of required functional assistants to strengthen Gram panchayats and provide services for every 2000 population in the state. 15,004 Secretariats across the State for Village/Ward Governance to provide services at people's doorsteps are available from 02/10/2019.

An unprecedented village and ward secretariat system has been implemented by the Andhra Pradesh government. With the primary goal of preventing corruption and prejudice and bringing the administration closer to the people, the secretariat system was established by the state's the then-chief minister, Shri YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Approximately 500 services

pertaining to 35 government agencies are offered by ward secretariats and villages. The issue of any worthy individual being deprived of government assistance will no longer exist. Making every impoverished person smile is the goal of our government. People should take use of the village secretariats that have been established for their benefit.

Need for Village Secretariat System:

- 1) The Village Secretariat System is required, and the delivery systems must be reorganised to serve as an efficient means of providing services.
- 2) An effective and reliable channel for putting NAVARATHNALU into practice
- 3) Accountability and transparency in providing citizens with government services Openness and transparency
- 4) Make sure that the departments that offer services at the village level are in agreement

Goals for the Grama Sachivalayam:

1. To guarantee the delivery of Navaratnalulu and offer a range of government and other services to citizens' doorsteps via a single window method.
2. Facilitate the convergence of all line departments that offer village-level services.
3. Preparation and timely implementation of village plans.
4. Establishing a clear citizen charter that holds field level employees accountable to Grama Panchayats or the Grama Sabha and assigns them roles
5. Combine the village secretariat system with the village volunteer organisation to enable them to effectively serve the public.

Area of Operation of Functional Assistants:

- 1) Population unit of about 2000 persons is taken as the base, for provision of services by one team of functional assistants.
- 2) Rural areas (other than Agency areas)
 - A. whole Grama panchayat (GP) is regarded as a single entity and a single team of functional assistants will be assigned if the GP population is greater than 2,000 but less than 4000.
 - B. For administrative convenience one grama Sachivalayam will provide services to one or more grama panchayat of the population is less than 2000.
 - C. In case of large panchayats with large population additional staff will be provided with adequate resources for its functioning

D. In larger Grama Panchayats, where more teams of functional assistants are suggested, their operational area will, to the greatest extent feasible, coincide with revenue villages. This will allow the revenue and survey departments to provide services efficiently.

3) Hilly & tribal areas: When assigning a team of functional assistants to one or more smaller Village Secretariats in hilly and tribal areas, consideration should be given to distance and mountainous tracts as needed. The rule of 2000 population will be relaxed in tribal areas for effective delivery of services to tribal population by considering their geographical conditions.

There are a total of 15,005 secretariats. Of this - 3842 ward secretariats and 11,163 in villages. Total employees - 134694. Total volunteers - 252389. Total services - 540.

S. No.	Designation	Nature of Duty	Line Department
1	Panchayat Secretary (Grade V)	Primary Functions-Executive Officer of the Panchayati, 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
4	Welfare & Education Assistant	Delivery of Welfare Schemes and Inspections of schools regarding Non-Academic activates like Mid-Day Meal implementation etc.	Social Welfare/Tribal Welfare
5	Agriculture/ Horticulture/ Sericulture Assistant	RBK Kendra Integrated Village Plan - Departmental Schemes/Services etc..	Agriculture and Cooperation
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,	Revenue

		Maintaining all survey registers etc.,	
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

*Table 1: Functionaries of Grama Sachivalayam***GRAMA SACHIVALAYAM A ROAD WAY TO EFFECTIVE LOCAL GOVERNENCE**

Local governance plays a vital role in ensuring participatory democracy, accountability, efficient service delivery and inclusive governance. The government of Andhra Pradesh has recognised the need and relevance and introduce a new model to ensure a robust administrative system called Grama Sachivalayam in 2019. This model is like an effective pathway to ensure effective local governance. This system of governance is working on ground level with two views

As A Unit for Service Delivery:

The rural governance in India is facing challenges due to the bureaucratic inefficiency, Red tapism and corruption which ultimately result in delay of service delivery and making it difficult for the rural remote citizens to access the government services. To address these problems the govt of Andhra Pradesh introduced an initiative called Grama sachivalayam to bring the governance at the foot step through which the people are getting the benefits of the schemes at their door step.

One of the important features of this initiative is the village volunteer system where the volunteer will visit the beneficiaries house and deliver the services. The best example is the people are getting the all type of certificates issued by various levels of government at their door step with the help of the village volunteer. The elderly people, physically challenged people are getting their pension early in the morning at their door step and they have no longer to in a que line for hours. Ensuring dignity and convenience.

Grama Sachivalayams are offering a wide range of government services in various fields like Revenue, Agriculture, health & sanitation, Education, Social Welfare, Housing & Infrastructure and so on. Starting from student scholarships to issuing house deeds, Ration to Revenue a wide range services are available under a single roof in their own panchayat i.e., Village Secretariat. Earlier the people need to make a frequent trip to mandal offices to get the government services and the benefits.



Figure 2: Service Delivery Through Grama Sachivalayam in Rural Andhra Pradesh

Before the introduction of the grama sachivalayam, where there is a huge political influence in getting the schemes and the real beneficiary was neglected if they are not belonging to the leading party. But, this current system completely free from political influence ensuring fairness and transparency in the effective delivery of services. Any eligible citizen who is passed the eligible conditions with the six-step validation will get the scheme which uplifting the equity and social justice.

As A Unit of Decentralized Administration and Participative Democracy:

Gram sachivalayam are functioning as a single window administrative hub at the local level by making governance more people centric, accountable and transparent. It strengthening the commitment of the govt towards providing the Good Governance to the citizens by establishing grassroot level administrative unit ensuring the effective service delivery and community

engagement. Grama Sachivalayam has become a model for participative democracy, where governance is not just for the people but also by the people.

The major objectives of Grama Sachivalayam in Participative Democracy are as follows

- I. Enhancing Citizen Participation – Encouraging people to be active stakeholders in local governance.
- II. Decentralizing Decision-Making – Shifting administrative power closer to the grassroots level.
- III. Improving Public Service Delivery – Ensuring timely access to government schemes and benefits.
- IV. Promoting Transparency and Accountability – Reducing corruption and increasing public trust.
- V. Strengthening Local Self-Governance (LSG) – Supporting Gram Panchayats in effective administration.
- VI. Employment Generation – Creating jobs for local youth through Grama Volunteers and staff appointments.

Digital Governance for Public involvement:

Grama Sachivalayam is one of the initiatives in showcasing the commitment of the government in strengthening the digital services in even in remote rural areas by providing the digital governance. Where the citizens can enjoy the real time service tracking and online application processing to ensure transparency and Red tapism.

As part of grievance redressal mechanism, the citizens are having access to file complaints online and receive time bound resolutions under the Spandana portal and even through 1902 helpline number and toll-free number 1800-425-4440. ([Spandana Grievance and Service Status Check in Andhra Pradesh | National Government Services Portal](#))

Doorstep Governance with Village Volunteers

The Grama Volunteers concept is the strengthening the commitment of Govt. of AP in ensuring efficient service delivery by bringing government schemes directly to citizens. This model enhances accessibility, transparency, and inclusivity, benefiting the elderly, disabled, and marginalized communities. Volunteers bridge the gap between government and people, providing timely assistance without bureaucratic delays.

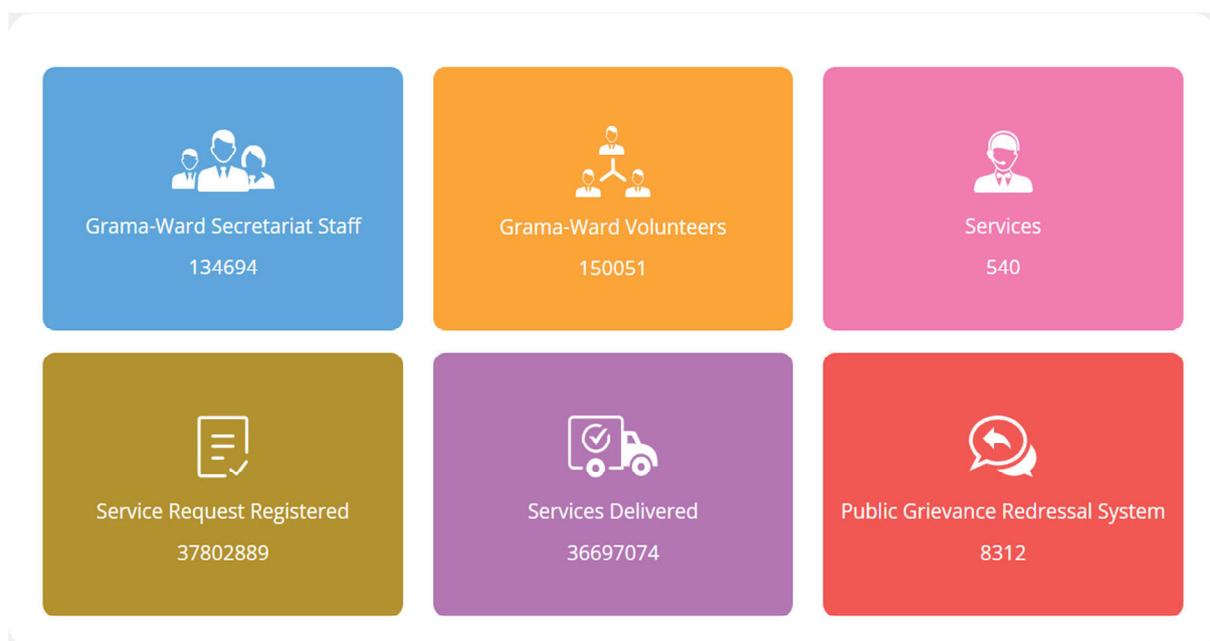


Figure 3: GSWS Dashboard గ్రామ-వార్డు సచివాలయము

Initially the govt of AP has appointed approximately 2.6 lakh (260,000) village and ward volunteers under the Grama/Ward Volunteer System. Each volunteer is responsible for serving 50 households, ensuring efficient last-mile delivery of government services directly to citizens' doorsteps. But after the 2024 AE, because of the electioneering and change of Govt. from YSRCP to NDA (TDP+JSP+BJP) currently, there are 150051 volunteers are offering the services (As per the GSWS Dashboard).

CONFRONTATIONS FOR ITS SCALABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Grama Sachivalayam system in Andhra Pradesh, aimed at decentralizing governance, faces challenges including constitutional concerns, financial constraints, manpower inefficiencies, data misuse, and local resistance.

Against the Spirit of Constitution: The village secretariat system was formed without the participation of elected ward members or sarpanch which diminishes the spirit of local self-governance with the 73rd constitutional amendment act which grant constitutional status to

rural local bodies. the powers of sarpanch and ward members, were diminished with induction of grama sachivalayam.

The CAG said, "We recommend that the government should form Ward Committees and integrate Ward Secretariats with Ward Committees and Area Sabhas to realise self-governance."

Financial Constraints: This system needs high financial resources for its establishment, maintenance. The government appoints 12 persons for a village as permanent employees with at a cost of public exchequer which need huge finances. But, in a state like Andhra Pradesh it is difficult to allocate huge budget by balancing with the welfare and other CAPEX the state requires.

Improper Utilization of Manpower: There are concerns about the underutilization of manpower within the Grama Sachivalayam system. Many employees lack day-to-day tasks, leaving them with little to do despite huge expenditure. This inefficiency has created an additional financial burden on the government.

Fading out of Mee Seva Centres: Establishment of Grama sachivalayam makes the age-old systems like Mee seva/E seva went into a state of disorientation. Because, once most of the services were done by these Mee Sevas. So, this concept is urging the people who financially relied on Mee Sevas to search for other sources of revenue.

Possibility of GSWS Data Misutilization: The Grama Sachivalayam Welfare System (GSWS) serves as a central hub for collecting real-time data at the ground level, with volunteers deeply integrated into the local communities. volunteers are well aware of the behaviour and their political affiliation as they maintain regular contact with the villagers and are themselves local to the area. So, this data might be misutilised for the political purpose by the people who are in power.

Lacking of Public Awareness and Outreach: People have no proper awareness towards services provided by Grama Sachivalayalu as the literacy rate in villages is less than urban areas. The remotest villages are still not aware of all the services providing by the government at their footstep i.e., at grama sachivalayam.

Resistance from Local Leaders: The introduction of the Grama Sachivalayam system has faced opposition from some traditional local leaders who were accustomed to having more control over local governance. These leaders felt that the new structure diminished their authority and influence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Grama Sachivalayam system, while a commendable step towards decentralizing governance and ensuring efficient service delivery in rural areas and acting as a one stop solution for a delivery of various administrative and welfare services, faces several challenges that hinder its full potential. The concerns related to constitutional principles,

financial sustainability, manpower utilization, and the misuse of data highlight the complexities of implementing such an initiative. Additionally, the lack of awareness among the public and resistance from local leaders further complicates its success. For the Grama Sachivalayam to truly become a model for rural governance, it is imperative to address these issues by fostering better integration with local political as well as the existing administrative structures, ensuring financial viability, and enhancing public outreach. Only through these efforts can the system achieve its objective of empowering rural communities and fulfilling the promise of decentralized governance envisioned in our Constitution.

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