



VILLAGE SECRETARIAT SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract:

Villages play an important role in deciding social structure and living standards of the people. Article 243G vests powers in the State Legislatures to endow Panchayats with such powers and authority to function as institutions of self-government. As per the 73rd Amendment, AP Government enacted AP Panchayat Raj Act 1994. The Act provides for the creation of three tier system of local governance - gram panchayat at the village level, Mandal Parishad at the intermediate level and Zilla Parishad at the district level, with required powers and functions contained in Schedule XI of the Constitution. Panchayats are responsible for preparation of plans and their execution for economic development and social justice related to 29 subjects under Eleventh schedule of the constitution.

Panchayat Institutions are vehicles of political empowerment of people at the grass root level for shaping their own destiny. A vast majority of people are living at the grassroots level in the rural and remote areas Without any touch of the modern day. To strengthen these institutions, the Andhra Pradesh government introduces village and ward secretariats at grassroots level. These secretariats are meant to bring all the services offered by the government to the doorstep of the beneficiaries and for targeted beneficiary identification. All the line departments of government are extended to the panchayat level with village functionaries representing their respective line departments. In this article the focus is laid on the efficacy and main objectives of this system in promoting grassroots governance.

Keywords: Services delivery, Transparency, Accountability, Participation, Good Governance

Introduction:

Almost till the middle of the 19th century, the villages in India were more or less self-contained, isolated, and self-sufficient units. The inhabitants of the village had very little to do with the people outside. All their essential needs were satisfied in the village itself. This is the dream of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, to see villages as self-sufficient republics for real prosperity. In this world of globalization and centralized administration the incumbent state government of Andhra Pradesh introduced village and ward secretariats to promote grassroots governance and deliver services to the people swiftly in the state.

The 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 would establish a system of Village Secretariats consisting of required functional assistants to strengthen Gram panchayats and provide services for every 2000 population in the state.

The office of Gram Panchayat will be termed as "Village Secretariat". Each Village Secretariat will be provided with a Panchayat Secretary who functions as the Secretary/convener of the Village Secretariat. The Village secretariat consisting of Panchayat Secretary & functional assistants shall be responsible to aid and assist Gram Panchayat(s) in performing its functions, while preserving the autonomy of Gram Panchayats. Subject to administrative convenience, Functional Assistants working under a Village Secretariat may cater to the needs of two or more contiguous Village Secretariats. The Village secretariats shall have such number

of functional assistants working under the supervision of the Gram Panchayat. All the functionaries at the Village Secretariat shall act as an integrated workforce to deliver multiple services. There are fourteen village functionaries in the village secretariat even though few functionaries like fisheries assistant, sericulture assistant, animal husbandry assistant, energy assistant and horticulture assistant are recruited only if they are necessary in that village. Except the above, remaining all functionaries are recruited into every village secretariat like Panchayat Secretary (PS), Village Revenue Officer (VRO), Village Surveyor (VS), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), Village Agriculture Assistant (VAA), Mahila Police & Women & Child Welfare Assistant, Engineering Assistant, Welfare & Education Assistant (WEA), Digital Assistant.

Along with the above village functionaries for every 2000 population within that same population for every 50 household's one volunteer will be there who will coordinate with village functionaries regarding all welfare schemes and services from government with respect to his fifty households. The introduction of the village secretariat model not only ensured that the benefits of the government's various welfare schemes reached the beneficiaries, but also helped in providing recruitment of thousands of jobless youths. With this system at the grassroots level there are no major corruption charges claimed by the opposition on ruling government till now. So with this system desired transparency and targeted beneficiary identification is also achieved. The primary objective of the incumbent state government is also to bring a targeted beneficiary system and effective system to deliver the services offered by the government to eligible people. The following are the functions of village secretariat functionaries.

1. Each Functional assistant shall maintain and be the custodian of the department specific records. They shall submit the records to the Gram Panchayat as well as to the respective departments for verification/ Inspection/ Audit on intimation or request.
2. The Functional Assistants shall be responsible to their regular Supervisory Officers of the concerned line Departments in technical aspects.
3. All the Village Secretariat Functionaries shall take follow up action on the grievances received under 'Spandana' and other grievances at GP level.
4. All the Village Secretariat Functional Assistants in coordination and with convergence shall ensure the implementation of following enactments in the Local Government area.
 - ❖ Protection of Government/ Gram Panchayat Properties
 - ❖ Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1956
 - ❖ Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
 - ❖ Weights and Measures Act, 1976.
 - ❖ Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986
 - ❖ WALTA Act 2004
 - ❖ Domestic Violence Act, 2005
 - ❖ The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

The schemes implemented by the state government come under a single umbrella term known as Navaratnalu.



Figure 1: Navaratnalu Welfare Schemes

1. **YSR Rythu Bharosa:** The YSRCP promises to offer Rs 50,000 financial assistance to farmers. Starting second year, each farmer family gets Rs 12,500 per year, in addition to zero-interest loans and free bore wells. Cold storage and food processing units in every constituency are among a list of benefits promised to the farmers.

2. **Fee Reimbursement:** The party, if elected to power, plans to provide a Comprehensive fee reimbursement scheme, in line with late Chief Minister Dr. Y S Rajasekhara Reddy's vision. In addition to complete fee reimbursement, every student gets an allowance of Rs 20,000.

3. **Arogyasri:** The Arogyasri scheme would be applicable to all medical treatments of above Rs 1,000. Regardless of the location of the hospital, all medical expenses would be borne by the government.

4. **Jalayagnam:** Under this scheme, lakhs of families would benefit from the irrigation projects. Completion of Polavaram project on a war footing is one of the main agenda.

5. **Ban on Alcohol:** The YSRCP promises to put in place a ban on the sale of alcohol across the State in three stages.

6. **Amma Vodi:** With a view to encouraging families with school-going children, the YSRCP promises to provide Rs 15,000 towards assistance to all the mothers who send their children to school.

7. **YSR Cheyutha:** All loans pertaining to the women's co-operative societies would be waived. In addition to zero-interest loans, through YSR Cheyutha, the YSRCP intends to support all women from SC, ST, BC and Minority Communities, who are aged above 45.

8. **Houses for the Poor:** In five years, the YSRCP promises to build 25 lakh homes for the poor.

9. **Pension Hike:** The eligibility age criteria of 65 years for the pensions reduced to 60 years. Senior citizens above 60 years of age will get Rs 2,250 while the physically challenged people get Rs 3,000 as a pension.

Along with above mentioned schemes many other welfare programs like YSR Vahana Mitra for all Auto and Taxi drivers, Jagananna Gorumudda (nutritious food for school children) are also implemented through village secretariat functionaries. The services delivered in the village secretariat are time bound in nature and the mechanism is termed as Service level Agreement. If the services availed by the people are not delivered by the village secretariat within defined time, then those service requests will be shown under beyond SLA (Service Level Agreement) for which the respective village functionary need to give valid explanation.

All these welfare schemes are effectively implemented by the state government with these newly introduced village secretariats at grassroots level of the administration.

Conclusion:

The idea behind the Village Secretariat system is to ensure that its services reach people on the ground, and to strengthen the existing Panchayat Raj system. The incumbent state government's main idea is to promote grassroots governance and for that cause this system is being utilized.

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