Andhra-Odisha Dispute Over 21 Border Villages

Why in news?

Andhra Pradesh recently held panchayat elections in three villages in the Kotia cluster, which is at the centre of a dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

What are these disputed villages?

- The 21 villages, with a population of nearly 5,000, are located on a remote hilltop on the inter-state border.
- These are inhabited by the Kondh tribals.
- The region was once a Maoist hotbed and still reports sporadic incidents of violence.
- It is also rich in mineral resources like gold, platinum, manganese, bauxite, graphite and limestone.

What is the origin of the dispute?

- Prior to April 1, 1936, villages under Kotia panchayat were part of Jeypore Estate.
- In the Constitution of Orissa Order, 1936, the Government of India demarcated Odisha from the erstwhile Madras Presidency.
- The Presidency included the present-day Andhra Pradesh.
- In 1942, the Madras government contested the boundary and ordered re-demarcation of the two states.
- In a joint survey of Odisha, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, seven villages of Kotia gram panchayat were recorded as revenue villages.
- Revenue was collected by the Odisha government.
- But, the exercise left out the 21 villages now under dispute.
- When the state of Andhra Pradesh was created in 1955, the villages were not surveyed by the Andhra Pradesh government either.

What is the administrative position?

- This is the first time Andhra has held panchayat polls in any of these 21 villages.
- But the villages participate in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections for both states.
- They are registered as voters for -

i. Salur Assembly and Araku Lok Sabha seats of Andhra
ii. Pottangi Assembly and Koraput Lok Sabha seats of Odisha

- The villagers enjoy benefits from both states under various schemes.
- For instance, Odisha constructed a gram panchayat office, a village agricultural centre, the office of an agricultural overseer, a boarding school, and a 380-bed hostel.
- It has also implemented MGNREGA, and distributed BPL cards to over 800 families and job cards to 1800 families.
- The Andhra Pradesh government has built roads, supplied electricity and provided rations to BPL families.

What is the current status?

- In the early 1980s, Odisha filed a case in the Supreme Court demanding right and possession of jurisdiction over the 21 villages.
- In 2006 however, the court said that disputes belonging to the state boundaries are not within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.
- So, it ruled that the matter can only be resolved by the Parliament.
- The Court thus passed a permanent injunction on the disputed area.
- In Andhra, Vizianagaram District collector said the three villages are separate gram panchayats and fall under Salur Mandal, hence elections were held.
- A day after Andhra notified the panchayat elections here, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated projects worth Rs 18 crore.
- The Odisha government has also moved the Supreme Court now.

Source: The Indian Express

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