

The Andhra-Odisha dispute over 21 border villages

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In News: On Saturday, Andhra Pradesh held panchayat elections in three villages in the Kotia cluster, which is at the centre of a dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. This is the first time Andhra has held panchayat polls in any of these villages.

The Villages

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

The History of Dispute

- Prior to April 1, 1936, villages under Kotia panchayat were part of Jeypore Estate.
- In the Constitution of Orissa Order, 1936, published in the Gazette of India on March 19 that year, the Government of India demarcated Odisha from the erstwhile Madras Presidency with the latter including 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 and 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.

Present Situation Kotia Dispute

- Odisha and Andhra Pradesh are locked in a territorial dispute over Kotia gram panchayat since 1960. Disputes pertain over 21 villages in Kotia gram panchayat.
- Residents of Kotia panchayat receive benefits from both Pottangi block in Koraput and Salur in Vizianagaram district of Andhra Pradesh. They depend on both the blocks for their day to day activities.
- This is the first time Andhra has held panchayat polls in any of these villages.
- But the villages participate in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections for both states. They are registered as voters for Salur Assembly and Araku Lok Sabha seats of Andhra, and 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.