

Demand for Separate Lingayat religion

Why in news?

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The Karnataka government decided to recommend to the Centre to grant religious minority status to the Lingayat community.

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What is the state government decision?

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- Lingayats account for nearly 17 per cent of the state's population.
- The demand for separate religion tag and minority status is a long pending demand of the Lingayat community.
- The State Cabinet has decided to accept the recommendations of the state minority commission in this regard.
- The religious minority recognition will thus be granted under the Karnataka Minorities Act.
- The status will cover two factions of the community — Lingayats and Veerashaiva Lingayats.
- The State Cabinet also decided to forward the demand to the Centre for notifying under the Central Minority Commission Act.

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Who are the Lingayats?

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- The Lingayats are strict monotheists.
- They instruct the worship of only one God, namely, Linga (Shiva).

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- 'Linga' here does not mean Linga established in temples.
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- It is rather the universal consciousness qualified by the universal energy (Shakti).
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- **Status** - Lingayats are currently classified as a Hindu sub-caste called "Veerashaiva Lingayats".
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- There is a general misconception that Lingayatism is a subset of Shaivism, which is itself a sect of Hinduism.
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- There is also a misconception that the Lingayats are Shudras.
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- But textual evidence and reasoning suggests that Lingayatism is not a sect or subset of Hinduism, but an independent religion.
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How did it evolve?

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- The community actually evolved from a 12th century movement led by social reformer and philosopher-saint Basavanna.
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- It emerged as a reactionary force against Hinduism.
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- In essence, Lingayats remain staunch worshippers of the Hindu God Shiva.
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- But they strongly protest against Hindu social practices such as caste discrimination and wearing of the sacred thread.
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- As, caste discrimination is central to the post-Manu Hinduism.
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- Basavanna and his associates thus asked their followers to not observe it.
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- The Basavanna movement helped downtrodden sections of Hindu society break the chains of caste and seek the truth themselves.
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- A person undergoing initiation in Lingayatism will be given an ishtalinga.
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- The person henceforth becomes superior and therefore, all Lingayats must be treated as equal.
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Why is the demand for separate religion status?

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- The argument for Lingayats being a separate religion has existed in the mainstream for over seven decades.
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- **Complexity** - The status is complicated because the Lingayats still ascribe to some of the aspects of Hinduism.
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- The demand was also weakened by its subsumption within the Veerashaiva nomenclature.
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- This happened after large number of Hindu Veerashaivas embraced Lingayatism while continuing to follow Hindu practices.
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- **Relevance** - Writings by Basavanna 800 years ago prove that Lingayats were a religious entity separate from Hindus.
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- But the teachings of Basavanna are slowly losing their distinct place in society.
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- **Concern** - The increasing subsumption within the Veerashaiva and Hindu nomenclature, and decreasing importance for Basavanna's preaching are concerns among the Lingayats.
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- The identification as a separate religion is thus seen as a crucial need at this juncture, for Lingayatism to survive.
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- **Dichotomy** - In the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Lingayats, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are included among Hindus.
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- But Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains were identified by state and central governments as minority religions in 1993, 1963 and 2014 respectively.
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- Only Lingayats remain unrecognised under a separate religious status.
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- **Demand** - Several massive rallies and meetings are organised, calling for the status of an independent religion.

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- There is a demand that the community be identified only as “Lingayat”, and not “Veerashaiva Lingayat” in caste certificates.

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- Once recognised, Lingayats would be able to avail benefits under Articles 25, 28, 29 and 30 of the Constitution.

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- The provisions under these deal with freedom of religion and rights of minorities.

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Source: The Hindu

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