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Center Refuses to Recognize Lingayat as Separate Religion

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The Central Government has rejected the Karnataka government's proposal seeking legal recognition for Lingayats as a distinct religion.

- In March 2018, the Karnataka government accepted suggestions of Nagamohan committee and granted minority status to Lingayats. The proposal was then sent to the Centre for the final approval.
- Central Government has rejected the proposal on two grounds:
 - Lingayat has always been **classified under Hindus ever since the first official census in India in 1871** census and that Lingayat is considered as a religious sect of Hindu.
 - If Lingayat/Veerashaiva will be given the status of a separate religion, **all the members of the Scheduled Caste (SC) professing the said religion would lose their status as SC.**
- In the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Lingayats, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs are included among Hindus, but Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains have been identified by state and central governments as minority religions in 1993, 1963 and 2014 respectively except the Lingayats.

Lingayats

- The term **Lingayat denotes a person who wears a personal linga**, an iconic form of god Shiva, on the body which is received during the initiation ceremony.
- Lingayats are the followers of the 12th-century social reformer-philosopher poet, Basaveshwara.
- Basaveshwara was against the caste system and Vedic rituals.
- The **Lingayats are strict monotheists**. They enjoin the worship of only one God, namely, Linga (Shiva).
- The word 'Linga' does not mean Linga established in temples, but universal consciousness qualified by the universal energy (Shakti).

- Lingayats had been classified as a Hindu subcaste called **“Veerashaiva Lingayats”** and they are considered to be Shaivites.

Separate Religion for Lingayats

- Lingayats had distanced itself from Hindu Veerashaivas because the latter followed the Vedas and supported the caste system, to which Basaveshwara was against.
- Veerashaivas are the followers of the five peethas (religious centers), called Pancha Peethas. These peethas are set up on similar lines to the four peethas set up by Adi Shankara.

Basaveshwara

- Basaveshwara was a **12th century spiritual master in Karnataka**.
- Popularly known as Basavanna, he propagated moral, ethical and spiritual values for a peaceful and purposeful life.
- **He formed a new spiritual institution which was based on democratic principles** to spread universal love and brotherhood. Anyone, irrespective of caste, could become a member as long as they were pious and of good character.
- Basavanna’s mission for the formation of a new society through **Anubhava Mantapa** was based on certain noble principles:
 - There is only one God.
 - Complete surrender to God in devotion.
 - Compassion is the root of all religions. Treat all living beings with kindness and live for the welfare of all.