Lingayats' demand for a separate identity

Why in news?

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Recently the Lingayats held a massive rally at Bidar, Karnataka demanding separate religious status.

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Who are the Lingayats?

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- Lingayats are popularly known as “Veerashaivas”.
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- They are followers of Lingayatism, a distinct shaivite religious tradition founded by Basaveshwara, a 12th-century social reformer, Kannada poet, and philosopher.
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What is the recent demand?

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- A section of the Lingayat community seeks legal recognition as a faith outside all-subsuming Hinduism.
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- They demand for assertion of the **Lingayat caste identity** in opposition to a Hindu religious identity.
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- They claim that though Lingayats worship Shiva, the concept of ‘Ishta Linga’ or personal god and rules of conduct prescribed by Basaveshwara cannot be equated to the Hindu way of life.
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- They emphasize that Basaveshwara defied the caste system and Vedic rituals which are part and parcel of the established Hindu order.
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- However, another section of the Lingayats argue that Baseveshwara's

propositions were reformist and they were not aimed at breaking away from the Hindu fold.
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Is the issue politically significant?

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- The demand for a separate identity is a 40-year-old wish and it has only become louder now with The Akhila Bharata Veerashiva Mahasabha raising it with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.
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- Lingayats constitute around 17% of the population in Karnataka and are listed in the Other Backward Classes category.
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- With less than a year left for the Assembly elections in Karnataka, the Lingayats issue has raised concerns among the political parties.
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- Especially, the lingyats comprise a strong vote base for the BJP.
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- This is a crucial issue for the BJP as assenting to the demand would be a diversion from its Hindutva agenda and not doing it would anger a large section of its voters.
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Source: The Hindu

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