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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Majoritarian Shadow Over Adivasi Identity and Faith

THE HINDU

1 June 2026

SOCIAL ISSUES

POLITY

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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The Majoritarian Shadow Over Adivasi Identity and Faith

 The Hindu

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GS2

GS1

 Source: ujjyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs


INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The Constitution defines ST status by ethnographic criteria, not religion. Does introducing a religious test for reservations open a Pandora's box for all reservation categories?"

The RSS-affiliated demand to delist Christian-converted Adivasis from ST benefits distorts the constitutional principle that ST identity is ethnographic, not religious. The editorial argues this advances a majoritarian agenda while obscuring the real Adivasi crisis: Forest Rights Act dilution and displacement by mining.

THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

ST status is defined by ethnography, not religion — introducing a religious test fractures the constitutional framework and diverts from the genuine Adivasi agenda of land and forest rights.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

| PROVISION | DETAIL |
|-----------------------|--|
| Article 342 | President specifies STs by reference to ethnographic criteria — region, community, social and educational backwardness; no religious criterion |
| SC Order 1950 | Restricts SC status to Hindus (extended to Sikhs 1956, Buddhists 1990); no parallel restriction for STs — deliberate constitutional distinction |
| Fifth Schedule | Administration and control of Scheduled Areas (predominantly tribal); gives tribal communities land protection |
| PESA, 1996 | Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act — extends local self-governance to tribal areas, with gram sabhas having significant land and resource rights |

THE REAL ADIVASI AGENDA

- ❶ **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006** — recognises individual and community forest rights; implementation remains patchy.
- ❷ **Mining displacement** — large-scale mining leases on Fifth Schedule land without adequate FPIC.
- ❸ **Land alienation** — despite legal protections, tribal land continues to be transferred through informal and legal mechanisms.

UPSC RELEVANCE

| PAPER | RELEVANCE |
|----------------|---|
| GS2 | Social justice — ST reservation; Article 342; Fifth Schedule; PESA; FRA |
| GS1 | Indian society — tribal communities; ethnographic identity |
| Prelims | Article 342; Fifth Schedule; PESA 1996; FRA 2006; SC Order 1950 |

Source: The Majoritarian Shadow Over Adivasi Identity and Faith — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The RSS-affiliated demand to delist Christian-converted Adivasis from Scheduled Tribe benefits distorts the constitutional principle that ST identity is ethnographic and not religious, advances a majoritarian agenda under welfare language, and diverts attention from substantive Adivasi concerns — Forest Rights Act dilution and mining displacement.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The Constitution nowhere makes ST status conditional on religion; Article 342 allows the President to specify STs by reference to ethnographic criteria (region, tribe, community, social and educational backwardness) — not religious affiliation.
- SC/ST status and reservation were designed to address structural social disadvantage; a religious test would divide communities along lines the constitutional framers explicitly

avoided.

- The real Adivasi crisis — displacement from forest land, dilution of the Forest Rights Act, mining leases on tribal land — is largely absent from the debate that fixates on conversion.

COUNTER

Some argue conversion to Christianity or Islam, which have their own internal social-support structures, diminishes the disadvantage that reservation was designed to address, and that a periodic review of the ST list is legitimate.

WAY FORWARD

Uphold the ethnographic basis of ST identification; strengthen FRA implementation and PESA provisions; address real Adivasi vulnerabilities rather than importing religious identity into reservation policy.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"ST identity is ethnographic, not religious — and any attempt to link faith to reservation status undermines both constitutional principles and Adivasi interests." Critically examine. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Scheduled Tribe status in India is a constitutional recognition of ethnographic, socio-cultural, and geographic marginality — not a religious identity. The demand to delist Christian-converted Adivasis conflates the two, introducing a religious test that the Constitution deliberately excludes.

BODY

Article 342 of the Constitution empowers the President, after consultation with the Governor, to specify Scheduled Tribes for any State or Union Territory by reference to criteria including geography, social customs, and backwardness — not religion. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, does

restrict SC status to Hindus (later Sikhs and Buddhists), but no parallel restriction exists for STs — an omission that reflects the framers’ recognition that tribal identity is distinct from the caste-based social structure that the Hindu order maintained.

Adivasi communities retain their ethnographic distinctiveness — language, land relations, customary law — regardless of their formal religious affiliation. The campaign to delist converted Adivasis thus introduces a religious test into a category deliberately kept ethnographic.

More importantly, it displaces attention from the real Adivasi crisis: the dilution of the Forest Rights Act 2006 implementation, large-scale mining leases on Fifth Schedule lands without adequate FPIC (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent), and displacement without adequate rehabilitation.

CONCLUSION

The constitutional logic is clear: Scheduled Tribe status addresses ethnographic and social disadvantage — not religious alignment. Strengthening FRA implementation, enforcing PESA rights, and ensuring Adivasi communities benefit from land and forest governance is the legitimate policy response to Adivasi welfare — not importing religious tests into reservation.

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