

[Kanchi Shankarachariya Tells U.S. Hindus](#)

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"No More New Temples"

Hindus in America were riding the wave of success, having completed three major temples just following the fireworks of Lady Liberty's 200th birthday. Major newspapers splashed page-one photos of what looked remarkably like new India, smiles beaming on the faces of ecstatic worshippers, their hearts soaring as they realized they had brought their homeland home. Back in India, the senior Shankaracharya of Kanchi had been pondering the tremendous growth these events reflect and sent a message to these proud people through N. Janakiraman of Chicago, who told it to Hinduism Today.

He said to spread the word that "There is no need for any more new construction of temples with the installation of idols in the United States." His rationale involved three factors: 1) the claim that Hinduism was not originally grounded in temple worship but in homa rites; 2) the risk that Hindus could, as in wartime, be driven out of this or any foreign country and be forced to leave these structures behind; and 3) the growing problem in getting qualified priests even for the existing temples.

The last point, Dr. Janakiraman explained, is the most pressing one. Indeed, every temple in the US is feeling the crunch between sluggish US and Indian Immigration departments and reticent, often untrained priests. As no temple can go unattended for even a day, the pressure especially builds when priests already in service want to go home or take a vacation or medical break, and local resident Brahmins must take over on top of their regular professions. The Shankaracharya's approach is ultra-conservative. Rather than promote temples and solve the problems of success, he prefers to discontinue growth. But it is more, too, for at the root of the statement is the belief, specific to the Smarta Sampradaya which the elder pontiff represents, that idol worship is not necessary. There also is the conviction that he has the authority to speak for all Hindus. Not everyone would agree.

As Hinduism underwent its growing pains in America, the Kanchi Acharya, Sri Chandrasekarendra, was not alone in providing guidance and blessings. From the Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii, Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniaswami encouraged, counseled and helped choose temple sites. He also gave Ganesha idols to establish the worship at five temples: Houston Meenakshi, the Sita Ram temple in Chicago, Livermore's Siva/Vishnu temple, the Bethesda Muruga temple and the Maha Ganapati temple in Edmonton, Canada, not to mention establishing the Kadavul temple in Hawaii and Palani Swami temple in San Francisco.

The two gurus have not always seen matters alike, the latter's desire to promote orthodoxy in the West clashing with the former's urge to promote eclectic/liberal Smarta Hinduism. In response to the present message from Kanchi, Gurudeva pointed out that the Shankaracharya can speak only for the Smartas; and that therefore we may not have any more Smarta temples in the U.S. But he can't speak for the Saivites or Vaishnavites, and these denominations can and should continue to fill the need for more temples in each area of the country so that the children have the benefit of their traditional religious heritage. India has, at rough estimate, some 1 million temples. The U.S., with 3 times the land area and nearly 1/2 million Hindus, now has less than 50.