

[Government Plan To "Lock up" Deities Meets Objections](#)

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Government Plan To "Lock up" Deities Meets Objections Using Temple Funds for Welfare Also Decried by Hindu Devotees

Krishnaswami, V. The Hindu Religious and Cultural Endowments Department has a proposal to construct idol safety deposit complexes at Thiruvannaikkaval Temple at Tiruchi and the Nellaippar Koil at Tiruvelveli. There is also a move for the creation of a \$20-million endowment which would ensure an annual income of \$1/4-million, and to appoint ex-servicemen as security staff to important temples which are not financially well off to provide protection for priceless idols and jewelery. The idols in the safety complex will be shown to the public on specific occasions.

This move has been decried by the former acharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Sri Jeyendra Saraswati. Before his recent abdication, he told press that the talk of protecting the idols is only a disguise and the real intention is to disrupt daily worship in the temples. Under this scheme, he noted, the utsavamoorthi (parade deity) in all temples would be kept in the complex and taken out only during festivals. He questioned the practicality of this move and contended that in effect no temple would be able to conduct its festivals. Moreover, even daily worship would be disrupted as there would be no utsavamoorthi.

For many centuries in Tamil Nadu it has been the practice in all temples, big or small, to have two sets of idols, one (called the moolavar) carved out of stone and permanently fixed inside the sanctum sanctorum, and the other made of metal for use during festivals for being taken out in procession. As far as a Hindu devotee is concerned, the same sanctity is attached to the moolavar and the utsavar. It is argued that if the festival deity is removed and kept in a hall with other idols, it will be reduced to a mere exhibition piece devoid of all sanctity. This act, according to many Hindus, is interference in their religious faith. They state that the temple priests, if kept in good spirits by prompt payment of their salaries, can protect the idols.

Expressing himself against the government interference in day-to-day functioning

of Hindu temples, Jeyendra lamented that more and more states had started following the examples of southern states in gaining control over temples.

Another question being debated is whether temple funds can be diverted for social welfare purposes. Though the Tamil Nadu government feels there is nothing wrong in spending surplus funds for the benefit of the poor, there is strong opposition to this move. The All-India Brahmin Federation has objected to the diversion of temple funds and those of religious institutions for the establishment of tourist bungalows and luxury hotels. The Federation urged that all such funds be used only to aid temples with meager incomes, restore dilapidated temples or to promote Sanskrit and Vedic study.

The Federation urged the government to also give compensation for lands taken from Hindu temples and institutions under the new land reform laws. It pointed out that as a result of inadequate compensation, many institutions are on the verge of closure. Temples are languishing, unable to even perform daily pujas.

At a press conference on July 4, 6 weeks before his abdication [see page 1 story], Jeyendra said he felt the answer to the problems plaguing society was a "movement for spiritual national and economic development." After four days of meditation at Tirupati temple, he said the Lord had given him the green signal to launch a Vivekananda-type national awakening movement. Math sources reportedly told The Hindu that he had planned his abdication for some time to free himself to take on this new role.