

[Dissidents Attempt Ouster of Los Angeles Temple Board](#)

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Sri Venkateshwara temple in Calabasas, California, lies just a few miles from the Malibu beachfront homes of the Hollywood movie stars. And like the turbulent lives of those rich and famous, this temple has been going through some difficult times - and in the process providing a case study in the potential catastrophes of temple management.

The immediate problems involve the board of director's attempt to fire the priests who have worked for the temple since its opening, and the actions of a group of dissident members - the "Save the Hindu Temple Committee" - to wrest power from the board, whose central members have held power from the temple's inception.

Both situations are an object lesson for other temple societies. The "problems" with the priests arose, depending on who one talks to, either from inadequate compensation and the management's mistreatment and excessive demands upon them, or from the priests' failure to remain out of the temple politics and responsibly dispatch their duties as employees. Whatever the cause, matters became serious in 1990 when the priests - Sri R. Narasimha Bhattar and Sri Samudrala Krishnamacharyulu - resigned in protest from the temple with 72-hours notice. Substitute priests were found, but a compromise was reached with Narasimha and Samudrala to continue on, though no longer on the original (but non-contractual) agreement that they be the permanent priests of the temple. Instead. The board of directors decided to go with fixed terms of service and institute a program of rotating priests from institutions in India.

Under this program Samudrala was terminated November 13, 1991 and Bhattar would have been terminated February, 1992. A compromise just worked out continues both priests' service to February of 1993. It may also be true that rather minor problems with the priests became the focus and battleground for a larger, longstanding disharmony between rival temple factions.

In 1984 the board of directors themselves set in motion a second part of the crisis which just befell them when they amended the temple bylaws to limit directors to two three-year terms, causing all directors to end their terms by 1990 at the latest. That deadline plus the reluctance of the newer members to again stand for elections meant in 1990 a total break in continuity between the existing board and the next - a difficult transition for a multi-million dollar institution.

A compromise was adopted last year to allow the present board to continue for another year. However, the Save the Hindu Temple Committee was not happy with this, particularly since it meant the board could go through with the termination of the priests, whom the Committee wanted to retain on permanent status. The Committee tried unsuccessfully on January 26, 1992, to call a meeting of the general membership to summarily replace the board.

Overall the temple's problems result from unforeseen consequences of policies regarding the priests, director's terms and members. The Hindu community prays that all the current problems can be peacefully resolved.

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