



Saiva Siddhanta Church

Kauai's Hindu Monastery
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304•USA
Phone: (808) 822-3012; e-mail: ar@hindu.org

TO: Director, Regulatory Management Division
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
111 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20529.

June 10, 2007

RE: DHS Docket No. USCIS-2005-0030
Special Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Religious Workers

Dear Director:

This letter constitutes the comments of Saiva Siddhanta Church. It introduces the Church; explains our use of the R-1 visa; and details the impact of the proposed rule changes on our Church and other religious organizations. It also reviews recent changes by the Chennai Consulate in the interpretation of the R-1's existing rules, which indicate how the new rule is likely to be administered by the consulates.

A second letter (attached) was prepared by the staff of Hinduism Today magazine, a publication of Himalayan Academy, the Church's teaching wing. This second letter gives a point-by-point list of problematic areas of the rule changes and offers our suggestions for improved wording.

Also attached is a letter from Senator Gary Hooser, majority leader of the Hawaii State Senate, in support of our appeal.

Introduction

Saiva Siddhanta Church (<http://www.himalayanacademy.com/ssc/>), founded in 1949, was incorporated under the laws of the United States of America in the State of California on December 30, 1957, and received recognition of its US Internal Revenue tax exempt status as a church on February 12, 1962. Its USA employer identification number is 94-6108645. Among America's oldest Hindu institutions, it established its international headquarters on Kauai, Hawaii, on February 5, 1970. The Church's ministry is dedicated to nurturing its membership and local missions on four continents and to serving the community of Hindus worldwide through the publication and distribution of religious books and Hinduism Today magazine and the construction of Iraivan Temple. The Church has an ordained monastic order and a program to nurture young men from many nations and mold them into religious leaders to later take holy orders as swamis, renunciate monks.

Both the Iraivan Temple project in Hawaii and our monastic order will be substantially impacted by the proposed rule change.

Iraivan Temple Construction

At \$16 million, Iraivan Temple is one of the most expensive Hindu projects undertaken in the United States. Iraivan is a hand-carved, all-granite traditional South Indian temple under construction on the island of Kauai. As of 2007, is half finished. A six-minute video presentation of the temple is enclosed with the mailed submission and is to be included as part of our comments. The temple's website is at <http://www.himalayanacademy.com/ssc/hawaii/iraivan/>.

The massive project started in 1990 with the establishment of a village of 70 stone workers and their families in Bangalore, India, to carve the granite stones. These are then shipped to Kauai and assembled by a team of *silpis*, traditional temple stone carvers, led by a *sthapati*, a supervising temple architect.

We first brought six *silpis* and one *sthapati* to Kauai in May, 2001, on the R-1 visa. This team returned to India, replaced by a second team which arrived on June 13, 2003. That team returned also and we are now working with our third team, who arrived in July, 2005. These were supposed to be relieved by a fourth team in 2007, but changes in the R-1 interpretation by the Chennai Consulate (apparently in anticipation of the revised rules) have resulted in denial of their visas because their professions were not specifically listed as allowed religious occupations. The consulate has also become more strict with regard to qualifications, and other temples have told us their legitimate priest applicants were recently refused.

It is actually fortunate that these refusals occurred now, while changes to the R-1 visa rules are still being discussed. The refusals prove that a literal reading of even the existing rules is adversely affecting Hinduism in the US by excluding workers—*silpis*, *sthapatis* and even priests—who are essential to the Hindu religious tradition and whose presence in the US is needed and sought by legitimate religious organizations. This clearly demonstrates that before any rule changes are adopted, their wording must be sufficiently inclusive to encompass the actual needs of Hindu institutions for religious workers.

Novitiate Monastic Program

The monastic order of Saiva Siddhanta Church is drawn from several countries of the world. When young men from other countries express a strong interest in monastic life, they are placed in a novitiate training program in their home country for two years. After this, they are brought to the headquarters in Kauai to serve the mission of the Church. We have used the R-1 visa for this purpose since its inception. A three-minute video on the monastic use of the R-1 is enclosed with the mailed submission of these comments and is to be included as part of them.

A new requirement of the R-1, that a religious vocation requires a formal "lifetime" commitment would eliminate our program for alien monks. The reason is simple: we don't expect anyone to make a formal lifetime commitment to

monastic life after just two years of study and participation, no matter how serious their intent is. We only offer such vows after six to twelve years of preparation. The proposed rule change makes it impossible for any novitiate, not just of our order but others as well, to serve in the United States.

The Church also has a lay order of men who for one reason or another are not eligible for lifetime vows. They are fully committed to the life as a monk, but they do not take lifetime vows. Similarly, the Catholic Church has lay orders whose members also never take lifetime vows. The proposed rule change requiring a “lifetime” commitment would exclude any alien from our lay monastic program, thus seriously hindering our ability to serve our membership and the Hindu community at large.

Existing R-1 Visa Rule Tightened in 2007

As already stated, the changes have become a particular concern to us because on March 20, 2007, R-1 visas were refused at the Chennai consulate for our next crew of stone carvers for our Iraivan Temple project. The reason given by the consulate officer was that R-1 visas were no longer being given for *silpis*, as these temple workers are known, and that they would have to apply under the H2B category (non-agricultural seasonal worker, such as hotel staff)—for which these traditionally-trained craftsmen might not qualify despite their unique skills. Also, the one-year H2B visa is not neither intended nor suitable for workers essential to a project slated to take another decade to complete.

We understand that when the R-1 visa was first issued in the 1990s, Dr. Ganapati Sthapati, the foremost temple architect in India and designer of Iraivan temple, went to the Chennai Consulate and explained the nature of Hindu temple construction and the traditional *sthapatis* and *silpis* who build them. In the Hindu religion, these are religious occupations. The temples are consecrated structures designed and built according to Hindu scriptures, the *Silpa Shastras*, which dictate every aspect of their design and construction. A traditional temple is very ornate, as can be seen in the photos of Iraivan at the previously mentioned website. The *sthapatis* and *silpis* are trained for years to carve and assemble the stones, which range in weight from a few hundred pounds to ten tons. The entire Iraivan temple is comprised of more than 3,000 individually carved stones totally more than six million pounds. No construction company in the United States is capable of building such a structure, leave aside the fact a Hindu temple should be built by Hindus. We understand that, as a result of Dr. Ganapati Sthapati’s explanation, the Consulate agreed to include *silpis* and *sthapatis* as religious workers. And since that time, we have brought in several teams on the R-1 visa, as have a number of other US Hindu temples.

As already mentioned, the Chennai Consulate has recently implemented a strict, literal interpretation of the rules, resulting in the rejection of visas for religious workers with qualifications identical to those who had been granted the visa in the past. This literal interpretation is understandable in light of the fraud investigation, but legitimate applicants have been refused, with no easy path of

appeal.

A major part of the problem is that the rules were written in terms of the Christian and Jewish religions and do not properly encompass legitimate religious workers of other faiths. The proposed rule changes now under consideration give us the opportunity to correct this bias which has substantially burdened the practice of Hinduism in America. The bias has resulted in Hindu priests, monks and specialized workers being denied the R-1 visa, while granting it to the priests, ministers, monks and specialized workers essential to the Western faiths. It is imperative that the new rules use inclusive language that reflects the actual types of religious workers found in the various religions, and not just those of Christianity and Judaism.

Our appeal is for equity under the law.

With respect,

SAIVA SIDDHANTA CHURCH

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Rev. Swami Arumugam Katir" in a cursive script.

Rev. Swami Arumugam Katir



Hinduism Today
Kauai's Hindu Monastery

Editorial Offices
 107 Kaholalele Road
 Kapaa, Hawaii 96746•USA
 Phone: (808) 822-7032, ext 227 Fax: (808) 822-4351
 WWW: <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/>
 E-mail: ar@hindu.org

TO: Director
 Regulatory Management Division
 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
 Department of Homeland Security
 111 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., 3rd Floor
 Washington, DC 20529.

June 10, 2007

**RE: Recommended Adjustments and Additions to the Proposed Rules
 DHS Docket No. USCIS-2005-0030
 Special Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Religious Workers**

Dear Director:

This letter constitutes the specific recommendations prepared by the editors of *Hinduism Today* magazine, in consultation with the Hindu American Foundation and the Council of Hindu Temples of North America, regarding the proposed rule changes to the R-1 Religious Workers Visa based on the impact they would have on Hindu organizations. *Hinduism Today* is published by Himalayan Academy, an educational 501 (c) 3 nonprofit corporation founded in 1965 which is the teaching and publishing wing of Saiva Siddhanta Church. Its federal ID number is 23-7062033. The magazine's website is at <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/>.

Introduction:

We have studied the proposed changes to the R-1 visa and consulted with other Hindu organizations to develop this comprehensive analysis of the impact of the rule changes upon our Church and Hindus in general in America. As one of the oldest Hindu institutions in America and as publishers of *Hinduism Today*, the world's foremost Hindu magazine, we are uniquely qualified to understand the impact of the proposed rule changes on American Hindus.

We and other Hindu organizations in America are in complete accord with the intent of the proposed amendments to the USCIS regulations regarding the special immigrant and nonimmigrant religious worker visa classifications. Clearly, something must be done to reduce or eliminate the rampant fraud that has existed in the use of this visa classification. We would point out, however, that the incidence of fraud with regard to this visa should not be entirely blamed upon religious institutions, which implies that such institutions are likely to commit fraud. In many cases, the applicant was the source of the fraud, claiming employment at a religious institution in the US that did not exist, or

*The Hindu Family Magazine Affirming the Dharma and Recording the
 Modern History of Nearly a Billion Members Of a Global Religion in Renaissance.*

that had not offered him a job. Religious institutions have a legitimate need for alien religious workers, and have every motivation to obey the rules. The high level of fraud was made possible by the lack of verification of both employer and employee in the original rules—an oversight finally being rectified by the proposed rules.

We endorse, or at least do not object to, most aspects of the rule changes, even though the filing of Form I-129 will cause increased paperwork and delay, and the on-site inspections could raise church/state separation issues if not limited in scope. As these burdens will be suffered equally by all religions, we do not take exception to them.

Most Hindu temples and religious organizations bring religious workers directly associated with the temple. Some religious workers perform the rites of worship, teach and counsel devotees. Others build, beautify and renovate the temple. Generally speaking, Hindu temples and organizations in the US are not presently engaged in social service projects, such as the running of hospitals or shelters, that require large numbers of religious workers. Except for special festival occasions, a temple would employ five, ten or twenty religious workers, but not one hundred. Similarly a construction project might require a dozen or more workers for an extended time, but not hundreds.

In making the specific suggestions we have for revisions, we have attempted to do so in ways which do not increase risk of fraudulent use, but still accommodate the differing structure and needs of an Eastern religion.

There are four areas of specific concern in the proposed rule changes:

- 1) the definition and examples of “religious occupation” do not encompass traditional Hindu occupations;
- 2) the documentation requirements for priests do not relate to the Hindu system of priest training;
- 3) the requirement that a religious worker be of the same “denomination” as the sponsoring organization does not reflect Hindu traditions;
- 4) the requirement of a “formal lifetime commitment” to qualify for the religious vocation category would automatically exclude novitiate members of monastic orders;

Excessive Burden on the Practice of Religion

Hindu temples and institutions in the United States stand to be adversely impacted by proposed changes to the R-1 religious worker visa category. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 states, in part, “Government shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability.”

In the rule proposal, this requirement is discussed on page 10 and the conclu-

sion made, “USCIS does not believe that the requirements proposed under this rule (as discussed below) would substantially burden the free exercise of religion and therefore this rule should not raise any concerns under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993.” As part of the USCIS justification for this conclusion, it states, “The proposed rule does not make any distinction that is known to be based on the substance of an individual’s religious beliefs.”

In the case of the practice of the Hindu religion in America, this statement is clearly erroneous as even the existing R-1 regulations are entirely framed in the terminology and ecclesiastical structure of Christianity and Judaism. This bias was noticed when the bill creating the category was introduced in Congress in 1992 and efforts made at the time to make the religious worker definitions more inclusive. The efforts were only partially successful. There is no adjustment in the proposed rules for the different structure of the Hindu religion, its priesthood or ways of worship. This was perhaps inevitable, as such matters are unfamiliar to the rule-makers. Our intent here is to correct that unfortunate situation, since American Hindus stand to be substantially burdened by some of the proposed changes.

1) Religious Occupation Definition

The following is an extensive (though not exhaustive) list of required occupations for the operation of a Hindu temple and the practice of the Hindu religion. By “priest,” we mean someone specifically trained and ordained through the Hindu rite of *diksha* (initiation) to perform the Hindu rites of worship that take place both inside and outside the temple.

1) priests who perform or assist with rituals in the temple, for example, *acharyas*, *archakas*, *purohits*, *vaidikas* and *paricharakas*;

2) priests who perform the rites of passage such as weddings and funerals, and other rites such as house blessing;

3) priests (*pachakahas*) who specialize in the preparation of food to be offered to the temple Deities and later distributed to the devotees as *prasadam* (blessed food);

4) artists who accompany the regular worship in the temple or on festival occasions, for example, singers (such as *oduvras*), conductors of bhajan (group lead and response singing) and instrumentalists such as players of the South Indian *nagaswaram* (a reed instrument) and *tavil* (drum);

5) teachers, theologians, monks, nuns and ministers of Hinduism (swamis, pundits and shastris), scriptural experts, translators and astrologers (who advise on the date and timings of temple rituals in accordance with the Hindu calendar);

6) master craftsmen, *karana palakas*, for example, *sthapatis* (architects who design and recommend renovations for temples), *silpis* (stone sculptors and masons who carve and build the temples), carpenters (to custom construct on

site the temple chariots and other wooden religious accouterments used in the temple); and jewelers (to custom make on site silver, gold and bejeweled ornamentations for the temple's Deities).

Occupations 1, 2 and 3: The present and proposed definitions use the term "liturgical workers," but do not even include the word "priest." Fortunately, a Hindu priest is clearly a "liturgical worker" and hence included. It would, however, be more encompassing to explicitly include the word "priest."

We propose that "liturgical workers" be changed to "priests and liturgical workers."

The priests described under 1 and 2 above clearly fall under liturgical worker, but the type of priest of item 3, the *pachakaha* who prepares food which is offered in the worship is not. Such a priest for the Hindu Temple in Flint, Michigan, was refused an R-1 visa in February, 2007.

We note that a new example of religious occupation has been added in the proposed rules, that of "ritual slaughter supervisor." Though rather different in concept and execution, so to speak, from the vegetarian preparations by a *pachakaha*, both are involved in the consecration of food. The ritual slaughter supervisor -- a shochet in Judaism -- is a recognized religious position, parallel to the *pachakaha* in Hinduism. The process of blessing food offerings in a Hindu temple has similarities with that of the blessing of the wine and wafer in the Catholic Eucharist. Indeed, in the Armenian Church, only the priests are allowed to make the wafer, as was also the case in earlier Catholic history (see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01349d.htm>).

We propose, therefore, that in the examples of religious occupations "ritual slaughter supervisor" be replaced with "religious food preparers" or a like wording that encompasses both the pachakaha and the shochet.

Occupation 4: The examples of religious occupations related to music are "choir directors, music ministers, cantors." The first two terms are specifically Christian in concept; the third is both Christian and Jewish. Hindu temple music traditionally includes both singers and musicians, as well as individuals who would easily be classified as music ministers, i.e, they both sing and preach. We are not clear if the meaning of "music ministers" is to include only the leader of the musical aspect of the worship. Has the R-1 been issued for groups of highly trained singers, such as traveling choirs, whose singing is their ministry? Without clear directions, consular officers may not interpret the existing wording to include the *oduvans*, bhajan leaders and nagaswaram and tavil players, especially the instrumentalists, even though these are specific and essential temple occupations.

We propose the examples of "choir directors, music ministers, cantors" be expanded to "choir directors, music ministers, cantors, group singing leaders, singers and instrumentalists who traditionally accompany public ritual worship."

Occupation 5: We believe the existing wording both under “religious occupation” and “minister” easily encompass these teachers of Hinduism and have no suggestions for change.

Occupation 6: It is this area that, with the change in interpretation at the Chennai consulate, has become especially troublesome to Hindus. Some explanation is needed, as generally the Christian and Jewish places of worship do not require such specialized master craftsmen.

Hindu temples built in the United States have ranged from simple meeting halls with the Deity statues at the front to the large temples serving tens of thousands of worshippers, such as Chicago, Pittsburg, Houston and the all-stone Iraivan Temple in Hawaii being entirely hand-crafted out of granite.

The traditional temples are built according to Hindu scriptures which dictate every detail of the complex and ornate structures. The temples in the northern US tend to be a modern building within which is enclosed the traditional sanctum made in plaster or stone; those in the southern states may be built entirely in traditional style.

There exist no artisans in the US trained in creating the traditional aspects of the temples, including the ornate plaster work, carving of the Deity statues, stone sculpting, silver, gold and jewelry work and creation of wood accoutrements. If Hindus are not allowed to bring in these specialized artisans (architects, stone sculptors, masons, carpenters, metal workers and jewelers), the traditional temples cannot be built.

We must also consider the need for ongoing maintenance which may require artisans and the fact that every twelve years, a Hindu temple is thoroughly renovated and reconsecrated.

We propose, therefore, that the following wording be added to “religious occupations.” “Religious occupation includes religious master craftsmen” [or “religious artisans,” or just “artisans”] who are essential to the construction, maintenance or renovation of places of worship or objects used in worship. Examples of occupations that can qualify include architects, stone sculptors, masons, carpenters, metal workers and jewelers who are specialists in religious work.”

2) Documentation

In a religion in which many religious professions remain hereditary, it is indeed a challenge to supply the kind of documentation USCIS has come to expect from Christian ministers trained in theological seminaries, as discussed under Attestation, sections 8 and 9 on qualifications of a minister and prior employment.

Many Hindu priests are trained in *gurukulams*, special schools just for them,

from the ages of 6 or 8 until 16 or 18, at which time they are fully trained Hindu priests. The *gurukulams* of India do issue certificates to their graduates, but whether these documents are acceptable to a counsel officer is another question. As the *gurukulams* are small and independent, one could not easily verify the authenticity of any particular certificate.

The same is true for the temple architects. The Iraivan Temple has had its next supervising architect refused an R-1 visa as “unqualified” for the position when he is, in fact, extraordinarily qualified. He doesn’t speak English, but came with documentation in English. This gifted artisan was summarily dismissed from the interview within two minutes.

In the proposed rules, this problem is partly alleviated by the requirement that the employing organization must attest to the qualifications of the person they intend to hire. Such attestation does not, of course, relieve the consular officer of making his own judgment of the person applying, and we do not believe it should. Still, creative allowance has to be made for an ancient tradition like Hinduism which is not as regimented as more recent religions.

The proposed rules also require evidence of prior employment in religious work. This is fair and can be met by Hindu religious workers, within the framework of Indian methods of recording employment and wages.

The subsequent site visit to the institution allows the USCIS to see for itself whether the person is performing the job he was hired for, and allows the institution to establish a track record of honesty which can be referenced.

Obviously, proper documentation goes to the heart of fraud prevention. But, temples have already sent qualified applicants with proper documentation who were rejected. This is not fair to Hindus.

We propose in Attestation, section 8, that the last sentence read, “and evidence of the alien’s completion of the denomination’s requirements for ordination, giving due allowance for traditional systems of theological training.”

3) Denomination requirement

The concept of membership in a denomination is a Christian and Judaic concept and does not relate well to Hinduism. Hinduism certainly has denominations. The major ones are the Saiva, Shakta, Vaishnava and Smarta traditions. Within these there are sub-denominations such as Kashmir Saivite, Vallabhacharya sect of Vaishnavism and Kabir Panth. But these denominations, which may have existed for thousands of years, have no specific creed that must be adhered to, no central administrative authority, and definitely no membership rolls.

Christianity in particular is strongly denominational because it has evolved through a series of splits caused by doctrinal differences. Hence the Nestorians

split off from the early church following the Council of Ephesus in 431. In the the Great Schism of the 11th century, the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Churches went their separate ways. And so on it continued through the Reformation, and even continues today as we are witnessing the likely breakup of the Anglican Church over doctrinal differences. Some years back, the World Christian Encyclopaedia estimated there to be more than 22,000 Christian denominations.

This category is problematic for Christian activities which cut across denominations, such as a Christian radio station which carries preaching from several denominations. Even the evangelical movement is cross-denominational and are complaining about this restriction. It is also an issue with the Buddhists, where the religion tends to group along regional and linguistic lines and not as a result of theological differences.

Hinduism evolved in a different way from Christianity. The various denominations have substantial regional and linguistic origins. Subsects are often founded by specific saints. In most cases, these subsects are not considered a “split” from the denomination, but rather the formation of more specific schools within it. Occasional splits on doctrinal differences do occur, for example with the followers of the 19th century saint Swaminarayan among whom a significant branch split off in 1907.

The statement in the proposed definition that “members of a denomination must share...” contains concepts which do not apply to Hinduism as its beliefs and practices are not that formalized. Many Hindu priests are intentionally trained to be able to perform ceremonies for all the different Hindu denominations.

In the American context, most Hindu organizations do not have an exclusive membership. Many Hindu institutions in the USA are nondenominational, i.e. cater to Hindus of all denominations. This is because the Hindu population in most geographic areas is small and a one place of worship for all Hindu denominations is the only practical solution. It is also common for Hindus to participate in the activities of a number of Hindu organizations of differing denominations.

In the case of religious workers such as temple craftsmen, it is not expected in India that they belong to the denomination of the temple they are working on. The temple architects in particular are trained to build the temples according to the scriptural requirements of the specific denomination, regardless of the denomination they themselves belong to.

Because of this difference in the concept of denomination, the following requirement does not work for Hindu institutions: “that for the two-year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition, the alien must have been a member of the same religious denomination as the United states employer that seeks to employ him or her.” The wording of the original R-1 visa, “For purposes of this definition, an interdenominational religious organization which

is exempt from taxation pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 will be treated as a religious denomination” can be restored and expanded upon to encompass the Hindu tradition. The proposed rule deletes any mention of interdenominational religious organizations.

We propose the requirement be reworded as follows: “that for the two-year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition, the alien must have been a member of the same or an affiliated religious denomination as the United States religious organization that seeks to employ him or her. For the purposes of this clause, the alien’s interdenominational membership within the same religion as the interdenominational religious organization which is exempt from taxation pursuant to section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, will be treated as belonging to the same religious denomination. For religions the practice of which in the United States is strongly nondenominational, the alien need only be a member of the same religion.”

4) Religious Vocation

The proposed rule states in part, “Religious workers in a vocation are those individuals who have made a formal lifetime commitment to a religious way of life.” The phrase “a formal lifetime commitment to a religious way of life” is ambiguous. Does it mean that any vows taken must be for a lifetime? Does it mean that the individual intends to pursue his or her vocation for a lifetime, but that the vows may be for a shorter period?

In the Catholic orders, vows are given for a fixed period of time while the person is under training. When fully qualified, the person may take lifetime vows. But some lay orders, such as the Sisters of Charity, never take lifetime vows. The Catholic Church is also very concerned about this change.

Within Hinduism, a formal lifetime commitment is taken by the sannyasin or swami after a period of novitiate training and religious work, similar to the training of a Catholic priest. Several US Hindu organizations, including the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Saiva Siddhanta Church, the Divine Life Society, Ramakrishna Mission and others, have monastic orders, members of which may come from any country. All require a period of novitiate experience under short-term vows, as taking lifetime vows is quite a serious step and needs years of proper preparation. Candidates are expected to enter the novitiacy with the full intention of making it a lifetime commitment, but time is allowed to pass for this intention to mature before the lifetime vows are given. During their novitiate training, they do various kinds of religious work at their organization’s centers. It would seriously impact the operation of all these mentioned organizations if only their ordained monks and nuns with lifetime vows could come on the R-1 visa.

There are also lay brother or lay sister traditions within Hinduism whereby the person is fully committed to the religious life, but does not take lifetime vows.

A person may enter a lay order for various reasons, such as coming to a religious calling later in life, or not being qualified for the rigorous training of an ordained minister or priest. The rules need to allow both for novitiates and for lay brothers or sisters to come to the United States and do religious work at their respective institutions.

We propose that the definition say: "Religious workers in a vocation are those individuals who have made a formal commitment to a religious way of life." Alternatively, if the word "lifetime" is felt essential, it should refer to the individual's commitment and not his vows: "Religious workers in a vocation are those individuals who have the intention of pursuing a lifetime commitment to a religious way of life."

Thank you for your kind consideration of our suggestions.

Yours in peace,

HINDUISM TODAY MAGAZINE

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Swami Arumugam Katir". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular background.

Rev. Swami Arumugam Katir
Managing Editor



The Senate

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

June 1, 2007

Director, Regulatory Management Division
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
111 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20529

Re: Revised Rules for the R-1 VISA

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to support the positive consideration of the Saiva Siddhanta Church's request for inclusive language in the proposed revised rules for the R-1 visa. It is my understanding that not only Hindus, but also Buddhists, Catholics and Methodists on Kauai, have expressed concern at a recent interfaith meeting about the changes. Certainly it is necessary to improve the scrutiny of who receives this visa, as the original rules made fraudulent use easy. But at the same time, we should not deny the rights of American citizens to freely practice their faith and, when needed, bring in the specialized religious workers necessary to do so.

I have known of Saiva Siddhanta Church and interacted with its members and leadership over the past 20 years. My Kauai home and permanent residence is only a few miles from their Kauai property and temple. They were established on Kauai in 1970 and have been considered valued members of our community ever since, participating in the forward-looking "Vision Kauai" project of community leaders, assisting with the mayor's anti-drug program and helping establish the Kauai Aloha Endowment. I was the guest of honor at their open house in July, 2003 and was very impressed with the progress of the Iraivan Temple. The stone temple under construction was remarkable to inspect at that time, and it has come along steadily ever since.

Thank you in advance for any assistance you might be able to offer on this very important and timely matter.

Sincerely,

Senator Gary L. Hooser
7th Senatorial District of Kaua'i & Ni'ihau

CM:GLH

Cc: Saiva Siddhanta Church

Hawaii State Capitol, Room 214 • 415 South Beretania Street • Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: 808-586-6030 • Fax 808-586-6031 • Toll-free from Kaua'i: 274-3141+66030
E-mail: senhooser@capitol.hawaii.gov