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For five years, a group of Hindus in the Chicago, Illinois, area (where there are over 30,000 Hindus in all) have weathered stormy challenges in their profound desire to build a beautiful Hindu temple. Today, they are seeing bright skies, for with the gift of a stone image of Lord Ganesha, the worship has begun.

Members of the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago expected to receive a stone image of Lord Ganesha, on order from India, early this year and to install it in a shrine near the temple site. It was felt that the spirit of worship and the grace of Lord Ganesha, the Lord of Obstacles, would bring clarity of mind and help sustain the future work. But, expressed Trustee Dr. Janakiraman, even this date was delayed, and was added to a whole series of postponements. "Everyone is getting discouraged," he confided to Sivaya Subramuniaswami, during the guru's visit there in November. Gurudeva's response was positive and encouraging: "Ganesha certainly doesn't want that. He will come tomorrow." The very next day, a handsome, 3-foot-tall granite murthi, weighting over three hundred pounds, arrived at the Chicago airport. It was shipped from Flushing, New York, where the Deva Seyon family had worshipped it with regular pujas in their home for the past two years, since acquiring it in Mahabalipuram, India. Just days earlier, they had presented it to Gurudeva for his 56th Jayanthi. Joy raced through the hearts and minds of the core group of Temple members, who now felt the Gods responding to their sincere efforts to build them a home. Mr. Rajagopalan received the Deity at his home, and there the first abhishekham was performed on the evening of Friday, November 12th. About thirty people attended. Since that ceremony, Mr. Rajagopalan has kept his home open, as a temple, for devotees to come and worship. His family performs puja twice a day, morning and evening, and on Sunday an abhishekam is held, for which devotees take turns bringing the multifarious provisions. The advent of this Deity, Mr. Janakiraman reports, has brought a harmony among the group never experienced before. Problems are solved easily. He says that many in the community regard Ganesha as a wonderful boon-giver and they have named Him "Siddhi Vinayaga." Cases of surprise good fortune are not uncommon.

Five years of planning, though slow, taxing and tedious, have brought impressive results. Today, members of the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago may joyfully boast the production of a large, three-dimensional model of the temple-to-be. The five-million-dollar complex includes a community center, large auditorium, staff housing, guest housing, offices and picnic shelters. In 1982, full purchase was made of a wooded 17-acre site, just south of Chicago, surrounded by a running stream and picturesque countryside, and adjacent to government-owned land. Construction is to begin in the spring of 1983, at which time the larger Ganesha murthi, enroute from India, will be installed in the main temple and three smaller one currently being worshipped settled in a pavilion near the temple.

One can easily sense the concern for the children behind the prodigious project. One member explains: "We are realizing, more than ever, that our children are getting older every day. While they are young and open we want them to get the impressions of the temple and Hindu beliefs and culture. Once they'd are teenagers, it is much harder to impress them. We have no time to lose."

"But will our children really follow the Hindu religion?" wonder many parents. Siva Murugaswami, who accompanied Gurudeva to Chicago, asked young Balu Natarajan, how he feels about the temple. "I can't wait until it's built!," he exclaimed. "We can come all the time because we live only five miles away." Asked how he would feel if no temple were built, he stated, "I wouldn't really know of what religion I am. I couldn't picture in my mind the religion." Questioned why he thought his parents and elders were trying so hard to build the temple, he said, "They thought about us." Asked what he felt was the basic difference between a cultural hall and a temple, he pronounced, "In the temple they are really praying, and in the cultural hall they are just talking about it. In the cultural hall they are learning. Then they go to the temple and practice what they learned." Siva Murugaswami asked 12-year old Shyam Krishnan, who had just returned from India, if he sees differences between Hinduism and the other major religions. "Oh yes," he explained, "the Christians only believe in Jesus Christ. We believe in many Gods. Also, we believe in karma and reincarnation." Balu forwarded an interesting vision for the future state of Hinduism in America: "In 100 years, the Christians will be more like us. "They are learning a lot from us now, like yoga. Also there will be a lot of temples." Asked if he and his peers would keep the religion strong in the future, he smiled, "Oh sure, we'll protect the temple. It's our religion. Why should we not want to help it keep going?"