Globe-Trotting Publisher
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When T.R. Ramachandran took on the religious sadhana two years ago of publishing Sringeri monastery's bi-monthly magazine, he had his work cut out for him. A scholarly publication written by professors, Tattvaloka had an anemic subscription list of just 400 brave souls willing to scale its lofty academic heights six times a year. But Ramachandran brought to the job a determination to serve religion full-time and a piece of experience hard to beat: a decade at Reader's Digest, the world's most popular magazine - circulation one-hundred million.

Actually, Sri Ramachandran told Hinduism Today, a life of quiet religious retreat was more what he had in mind in 1986 when he went to the present head of Sringeri Mutt, His Holiness, Sri Bharati Teertha Sannidhanam, and said that he "wanted to do Vedanta full time." The erudite, multi-lingual and progressive guru had just the assignment. "Publishing is your sadhana, why don't you do Tattvaloka?" he asked.

Ramachandran unfolded his story to Hinduism Today's staff during his November visit to our Hawaii editorial offices. He was just completing the last leg of a six-week promotional tour through England and America.

A 55-year-old bachelor, Ramachandran is the right man for the task he now performs for Sringeri Mutt, the first of the four peethams or monasteries founded by Adi Sankara in the 8th Century. He was born in a Smarta brahmin family in Tirunelveli district, 15 miles north of Cape Comorin, the southern tip of India. After graduating from Madras University with an MA in economics, he began his professional career with a Calcutta financial weekly, then worked for the United States Information Agency. That's when the Reader's Digest tapped him for their new Calcutta office and later promoted him to their Bombay headquarters. A further break got him a private sector job in Hong Kong, from which he joined the Hong Kong government's publishing department. He retired two years ago and returned to Bombay with enough money to meet the future needs of himself and

his mother.

Wasting not a moment after receiving the Sannidhanam's divine orders, he dove into the production of Tattvaloka. He said, "Morning to evening, not knowing night or day, I produced it single-handedly. Within ten months I was able to hit the target of 4,000 copies. Now I see the time has come to set up an office."

He explained the need for an office, "I don't want to go from 400 to 4,000 and keep quiet about it. I want it to become 400,000. I worked for the Reader's Digest, and I want to project that same planning and work into this channel."

His US fund-raising wasn't too successful for one specific reason, Ramachandran explained, "Almost every other place in the West built the nucleus of a temple or they're trying to build one. This came as a direct response to my fundraising campaign when they all said, 'We are committed to the hilt, so much money going to the temple over the next years.'"

Undaunted, he plans to return to Bombay, borrow the money and purchase the office space anyway. "All my expertise lies in marketing and support, but now 80% of my time is spent on production. As soon as a few people are appointed, I can devote my time to advertising and marketing, which will bring in a lot of revenue." Among the other benefits of Ramachandran's success with Tattvaloka is his setting a standard of professional production and business-like management of our Hindu religious publications, an approach which will assure their continued existence and quality into the indefinite future.

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