

## **Kriya Babaji and the Ancient Kataragama Shrine**

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At a time when the quest for peace and harmony has become a watchword among warring communities in Sri Lanka and the world over, it is appropriate to examine the unique sanctity of that great heaven of peace that glitters on the southern coast of Sri Lanka, the hoary sylvan shrine of Kataragama.

Kataragama is hailed as the abode of God Saman, the protector of Sri Lanka, or the seat of Lord Skanda, the great destroyer of Asuric forces. It is hidden from our view, behind the seven veils of Kataragama Devale and is radiating mighty spiritual forces for the welfare of the world, through the golden yantra plate lodged in the Sanctum sanctorum, through the purifying waters of the Menik Ganga that skirts the sacred shrine and through the peaks of the seven hills of Kataragama that dominate the landscape for miles around.

Significant references to Kataragama have been made in the book entitled, *Babaji and the 18 Siddha Tradition*, written by Marshall Govindan of Montreal, Canada. This book is considered accurate and comprehensive exposition of the ancient Kriya Yoga tradition published in English to date.

The author Marshall Govindan states that his interest in the Siddhas began with his initiation into Babajis Kriya Yoga at the International Babaji Yoga Sangam center in Los Angeles in 1970, from the great Yogi in whom Babaji showered His love and grace, S.A.A. Ramaiah. Govindan spent nineteen years under the tutelage of Yogi Ramaiah (Yogiar). During these two decades, from his travels in India, Srilanka and Mayalasia, Govindan gathered material about the Siddha tradition. It was in 1989, that he was finally inspired to write a book, which would introduce to the world, the greatness of the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition, a tradition not only of techniques for spiritual transformation but also one which propounds an world-view approach towards a life which views all countries, all peoples, as One.

The Author states that during his visit to Srilanka he made several pilgrimages to the Kataragama Shrine to investigate any details available related to the traditional story of the Kriya Babaji's visit to Kataragama in 214 A.D., as a 16 year old chela by the name of Nagaraj and his meeting with his first Guru, Siddha Boganathar. Siddha Boganathar is one of the perfected human beings who lived over thousands of years and one of the 18 Siddhas pertaining to the present cycle of four yugas, namely Sathya, Treta, Dwapra and Kali Yugas in their descending and ascending arcs, lasting 24,000 years. Siddha Boganathar is known in Srilanka for inscribing a mystical Yantric geometric design on a golden plate and installing it at the sanctum sanctorum of Kataragama Devale.

There are those who believe that Boganathar was at one point, the same soul as that of Lao Tsu, the founder of the great world philosophy of Taoism. This would have been sometime prior to him coming to Srilanka to install the golden plate. Such is perhaps the glory of such Supreme Souls.

Govindan says that much of he writes concerning Babaji's birth in 203 A.D., on Karthikai Deepam day during the ascendancy of the constellation (nakshetra) Rohini, and about his visit to Kataragama in 214 A.D. was revealed in the books written in 1952, by Babaji's disciple V.T. Neelakantan. These books were written when Babaji materialized in physical form on several occasions in the puja room of Neelakantan at No. 9, Surammal Lane, Egmore, Madras and dictated verbatim, the contents of three mystical publications, which Babaji wanted published for the benefit of the world. (V.T. Neelakantan was a foreign correspondent and essayist and close friend of Jawaharlal Nehru and a student and admirer of Mrs. Annie Besant, the well-known Theosophical leader).

Regarding the sojourn of Kriya Babaji at Kataragam in 214 A.D. as a 16 year old Nagaraj, the author states the following: "Sitting under a large spreading banyan tree with him (Siddha Boganathar) for six months Nagaraj performed intense Yogic *sadhana* particularly various Dhyana Kriyas into which he was initiated by Boganathar. The *tapas* was done for long periods without a break, initially for 24 hours and later for days, weeks and up to 48 days at a stretch. "The various mediation kriyas unchained his mind from the limiting processes of the thinking mind, allowing his consciousness to expand and realize its identity with an undifferentiated absolute Reality."

The author further states that on his visits to Kataragama he traced the "sacred spot where Babaji practiced austerities under the large banyan tree. Unfortunately, some twenty years earlier, an insensitive man cut down this tree. A few days later, the man went mad and hanged himself. In 1989, a small shrine was built on the spot where the banyan had grown, which is near the front gate of the Temple of Theivanai Amman, Lord of Muruga's consort, in the Kataragama temple complex. The Theivanai temple priest make daily offerings in the Babaji shrine."

Govindan describes the journey made by Babaji back to South India and his visit to Cuttalam to seek the final initiation in Kriya Yoga from the legendary Siddh Agastiya (who was Boganathar's Guru). There Babaji did intense *tapas* for 48 days and was blessed by Agastiya and told to settle in Badrinath in the Himalayas and become the greatest Siddha the world had ever known, with even the cells of his physical body divinized. (Babaji can still appear today, even though it is over 1800 years, since his physical birth in 203 A.D.)

Babaji made it his mission to assist suffering humanity in their quest for God-realization. Usually he does so anonymously. Those helped by him generally do not know the source of their assistance. According to Lahiri Mahasaya, just by reciting Babaji's name with reverence, a person receives a spiritual blessing.

**C. Shanmuganayamgam, Convenor, Thinkers' Forum, Meditation Group, Sri Lanka** tells of meeting with the great masters of Yoga, Paramahansa Omkara Swami and Yogi Ramaiah in 1956. The three met again in 1957, when the young man was invited to accompany them to perform a special Yagam in Colombo and also visited with them in Kataragama, where they bestowed blessings on the people by sonorous chanting of the AUM mantra.