

# The History of Babaji's Kriya Yoga in Sri Lanka: A Pilgrims Guide

By M. G. Satchidananda

Babaji's Kriya Yoga is a synthesis of Yoga Siddhantham, the teaching of the Yoga Siddhas. This synthesis was created by Babaji Nagaraj, beginning with what he learned from his first Siddha guru, Boganathar, at Katirgama, Sri Lanka, about 215 A.D. and subsequently from Agastyar at Courtrallam, in Tamil Nadu. It is a synthesis of both Classical Yoga, as recorded in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and Tantra, as recorded in the Tirumandiram written by the Tamil Siddhar Tirumular. Those who wish to cultivate the devotion for Babaji or to meditate in the sacred environment in which Babaji's Kriya Yoga was born will be inspired to go on a pilgrimage to Katirgama. To do so, what do you need to know?

Sri Lanka is a large island off the south east coast of India, with a warm tropical climate. Its name derives from the Sanskrit *sri* (venerable) and *lanka* (island),<sup>1</sup> the name of the island in the ancient Indian epics *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. It covers 65,000 square kilometers (25,000 square miles) and has a population of 20.6 million. Sri Lanka is next only to Maldives in the South Asian region in terms of per capita income. It recorded a GDP growth of 8.2% in 2010 and it is estimated that GDP will grow by 9.5% in 2011 becoming one of the fastest growing economies of the world. Its population includes about 14.5 million ethnic Sinhala, who are mostly Buddhist, 2.5 million ethnic Tamils, and 1.5 million Moors, who are Muslims.

## **Katirgama Ashram and Babaji Koil temple**

The holiest shrine to both Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka is the Muruga temple complex at Katirgama, 40 km north of the southernmost town in Sri Lanka, Hambatota, deep in the forest, next to the Manickaganga River. Every year thousands of pilgrims come to Katirgama to seek the blessings of Lord Muruga at this powerful shrine and to enjoy the pristine natural environment. Babaji Nagaraj came here in search of his Guru, and found the Siddhar Boganathar. Under his guidance, for four years he learned dhyana and jnana and attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi, with the blessings of Muruga. He also realized that he is an avatar of Muruga.

A small shrine has been erected on the very spot where Babaji sat, under a banyan tree, with the Siddhar Boganathar to attain enlightenment. It is located just inside the gate to the Theivani Amman Kovil. Pujas are conducted there daily by the priests. Devotees are encouraged to meditate and practice Yoga in front of the small shrine, which contains granite murthis of Babaji and Siddhar Boganathar and a Muruga vel.

Devotees are welcome to visit the Babaji Ashram, which is a 10 minutes walk away from the temple, behind the CTB Government Transport Depot, and the new bridge. It is located adjacent to the east side of the Manickaganga River, in the forest. It is an ideal place for meditation. Contact in advance: E-mail: [srilanka@babajiskriyayoga.net](mailto:srilanka@babajiskriyayoga.net)

Visitors may enjoy staying at the nearby Sunflower Hotel. [www.hotelsunflowerlk.net](http://www.hotelsunflowerlk.net)  
Tel. 94.47.22.35.611

**How to get there?** One may travel to Katirgama by public bus or train or rental car from Colombo along the scenic coastal highway, stopping at the beach resort towns of Matara, Galle and Hambatota, and then transfer to a bus going 40 km north and inland to Katirgama. This will require about 8 hours. Or if one is short on time and money, take the “Lakehouse Newspaper” bus which leaves at 10 pm, from Lake House, in downtown Colombo. It arrives in the early morning hours at Katirgama via an route through the interior mountains of Sri Lanka. Early booking can be done at the Lake House to avoid disappointment

The Katirgama temple complex includes three small temples, side by side, where Ganesha, Muruga and Thevani are worshipped. The entrance gate is framed by a row of carved elephant heads on either side. To the right of the Thevani temple is a small Hindu monastery, founded by the ascetic Palkudi Baba in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Babaji Koil or temple, is just behind the above mentioned wall by another gate leading to the Thevani temple and monastery. Behind these three temples lies a huge white Buddhist stupa, over 80 feet high. A mosque is 100 yards away to the right of the park in front of the gate. On the left flows the Manickaganga River. The entire area is actually a forested park, with ancient trees, devoid of other structures, with no commercial clutter. A powerful spiritual atmosphere pervades the entire area. It is the one place where everyone in Sri Lanka comes together in religious harmony.

Buddhist and Hindu priests share responsibility for the conduct of services in the main temple, which is dedicated to Muruga. Unlike other temples, there is no idol, no image any kind. In fact, the offerings made by devotees are offered by the priests behind a curtain, to a sacred yantra, which is concealed from the public. This geometric image, carved into stone, is said to concentrate the power of Lord Muruga, the legendary on of Shiva, whose mission is to destroy the darkness of ignorance with the light of consciousness. As the holiest shrine in Sri Lanka, people from all walks of faith come here regularly praying to Lord Muruga for assistance for all purposes. During the middle of July each year, there are elaborate ceremonies over a two period, with fire walking and other ascetic practices by devotees. . It is the only time during the year when the sacred yantra is taken out of the temple – and on the back of an elephant brought down to the Manickaganga River for ritual washing.

### **Yogi S.A.A. Ramaiah and the revelations of Babaji about Katirgama**

From 1956 to 1968, my teacher, Yogi.S.A.A. Ramaiah made many visits to Sri Lanka to teach Babaji’s Kriya Yoga. He and his wife Solachi used to stay at the Bamballapittya Hindu temple in southern Colombo, on Galle Road, where he would give lectures on Yoga Siddhantham and yoga asana classes, and initiation seminars in Babaji’s Kriya Yoga. He also visited Jaffna, in the extreme north, where he stayed at the home of a disciple, at 51 Arasady Road. In 1958, he also organized the fifth annual Parliament of World Religions and Yoga, with leading representatives from the various faith

communities as honored speakers, including Swami Satchidananda, disciple of the renowned Swami Sivananda. This occurred during a period when communal violence had broken out between the Tamil and Sinhala communities. The government had recently passed a law making Sinhala the only official language, and limiting the access to university and civil posts to ethnic Tamils. The Parliament attracted hundreds of persons from all of the communities. Its message of “unity in diversity” echoed by all the speakers, struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of listeners. The Prime Minister came to the Parliament and thanked the organizers for helping to defuse the ethnic tension.

During a visit to Katirgama, Babaji directed Yogi Ramaiah to a huge, ancient banyan tree which was growing in front of the Thevani temple. He told him that it was under this same tree that Boganathar has guided him in the practice of dhyana over a period of nearly 4 years, from the age of 11 to 15. In this place, he attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi. After doing so, Boganathar instructed him to go to Courtrallam, in Tamil Nadu, to find his guru, the Siddhar Agastyar. In 1970, Yogi Ramaiah lamented to me that this same banyan tree had been cut down by a woodcutter a few years earlier. But with deep remorse for what he had done, the woodcutter ended his life by hanging shortly thereafter.

However, the roots of the banyan were coming up through the nearby well. Yogi Ramaiah began to make plans to build a small shrine to commemorate this sacred spot. In 1973 he began sending his Western disciples one by one to live for up to 6 months at a time Colombo, Sri Lanka, conducting free public yoga asana classes in schools and colleges, and visiting this sacred spot to perform intensive sadhana at this spot. He also founded a non profit charity known as Lanka Babaji Yoga Sangam. These disciples included Edmund Ayyappa, Linga Devar, and Meenakshisunderan. In 1980, he obtained permission from the abbot of the monastery which owned the land, to build a temple, the Babaji Koil. A local disciple, Murugesu Candaswamy and Meenakshisunderan, from Baltimore, USA, my longtime Kriyaban built the first “Babaji Koil,” was a small seven foot square concrete structure, housing murthis of Babaji and Boganathar, accessible through a small door. Since that time, the priests from the Thevani temple have performed pujas to these murthis every day, and visitors to the temple complex come to worship.

### **I make my first visit to Sri Lanka**

From 1980 to 1981 I spent nearly one year in Sri Lanka. I lived most of the time in a one room rudimentary hut, a stone’s throw from the beach and its juncture with the Welawatte canal separating Colombo from Dehiwala. I made a vow to perform yogic tapas (continuous yogic practice), which included silence, with only a half hour of reading per day, no forms of distraction, and a weekly asana class for young persons in a local high school in Wellawatte, Colombo, and Ratmalana Hindu College. The first three months were very difficult, as the mind sought its usual sources of distraction. But then day and night flowed into one another and a deep state of Ananda, or bliss established itself with an expanded consciousness.

Upon the instructions of Yogi Ramaiah, upon arrival, I brought a beautiful fifty pound, two foot high granite murthi of Vishnu, from Mahabalipuram, India to Katirgama, to replace the one which had been stolen from the side of the Thevani temple. This gift was much appreciated by the temple priests. Yogi Ramaiah subsequently informed myself and Meenakshisunderan, that the abbot of the monastery had also requested him to recommend one of his disciples, like the author to replace him as abbot as he felt that he was nearing the end of the life. Yogi Ramaiah indicated that if we wanted to stay in Katirgama for this purpose, it would meet with his approval, but that it was for us to decide. The offer was tempting.

In late 1980 under the direction of Yogi Ramaiah, and with the support of one of the supreme court justices of Sri Lanka, the late H.W. Tambiah, who was the chairman of Lanka Babaji Yoga Sangam, a half acre parcel of land was purchased across from the beach, at 59 Peters Lane, Dehiwala, a half mile from the southern boundary of the capital city of Colombo. Murugesu Candaswamy, who supervised the construction of two small houses and the foundation for a meeting hall in 1980 and 1981 at this beautiful seaside site.

In 1983, communal riots broke out in Colombo, and many of my friends were murdered by roving gangs of criminals. My successor, Eyton Shalom, from New York and Murugesu Candaswamy were forced to quit Sri Lanka.

In 1986, I returned to Sri Lanka with Yogi Ramaiah with two other disciples, Sita Jean Norton, and Chockalingam. An initiation seminar was conducted and we visited Katirgama.

During the civil war which began in 1983, a caretaker was appointed to watch over the ashram in Dehiwala. From 1990, he began claiming the property for himself. When Candaswamy returned to Sri Lanka, he had to wage a legal battle for six years before regaining control of the ashram property.

In 2002, Murugesu Candaswamy sold two thirds of the ashram property including the apartment where he lived, to a businessman, to raise funds to build a meeting hall on the remaining portion. Construction of this began. But in December 2004, after a tsunami heavily damaged the apartments and construction. Murugesu Candaswamy wrote to me and immediately began a fundraising drive to help finish the construction. More than \$6,000 was raised within a couple of months and sent to Sri Lanka for this purpose. In January 2007, I visited Sri Lanka with my wife Durga and the kirtan singer, Bhagavan Das, a disciple of Neem Karoli Baba, and three German sadhaks, Satya and Nandi and Ganesha. Murugesu Candaswamy brought us to Katirgama where he had purchased a two acre parcel and built a small ashram, adjacent to the Manickaganga river. Bhagavan Das had contributed to the purchase of this parcel as he wished to build a permanent residence there. We were thrilled to see that with funds from the sale of the ashram property, Candaswamy had replaced the original Babaji temple in Katirgama with a much larger shrine, with an esthetic classical design.

From 2006 to 2008, with more funds being sent from Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas in Canada, the meeting hall and new apartments were built at the seaside ashram by the newly formed Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas Trust, which after the mahasamadhi of Yogi Ramaiah in Malaysia, July 12, 2006, replaced the then defunct Lanka Babaji Yoga Sangam. In 2007, the Order gave scholarships to four students from Sri Lanka to attend the Kriya Hatha Yoga Teacher Training course in Bangalore given by Durga and myself. Since then, three of them, including K. Krishnaveni and T. Anatharavi have continued teaching several public Kriya Hatha Yoga classes every week in different locations in Colombo, and one of them, Jeyarajeen, teaches free public classes in two Hindu temples in Toronto, where he immigrated. In addition, since 2006, every year, I or Acharya Satyananda have made given initiation seminars in this ashram.

### **Recent and future development of Babaji's mission in Sri Lanka**

With the ending of the 25 year old civil war in 2008, conditions in Sri Lanka have greatly improved. In order to help bring the Sinhala and Tamil communities together on the basis of Yoga, our Trust has translated, published and distributed several of our publications in these two languages. Consequently, in October 2011, of the sixty persons who attended the Kriya Yoga initiation seminar, 40 of them were from the Sinhala Buddhist community. Among them was a revered Buddhist monk. A newly formed Working Committee of six members from both communities has recently assumed responsibility for managing the activities of the Trust. These include free public yoga classes, pujas, and satsang meetings of initiates, every week, the organization of pilgrimages to Katirgama, and the translation and publication of books on Kriya Yoga into the Sinhala language. For details contact K. Krishnaveni at (94)-(0)7.73.70.69.88

The Babaji shrine in Katirgama has recently been renovated with a new ceramic tile surface. A granite monument, with an inscriptions in Sinhala, Tamil and English now commemorates this sacred site. A *mandapam* portico will soon be constructed at its entrance to provide shade. Plans for a meditation hall to its rear have been prepared. Everyone is invited to visit Katirgama and to worship either externally with puja or internally by practicing Kriya Kundalini Pranayama and Dhyana.

While since ancient times, various communal groups have competed with one another militarily, politically, and culturally, Babaji's cherished teaching, "unity in diversity" through the practice of Yoga, is helping to heal the fear induced divisions created by political and religious leaders.

### **An appeal for support**

We are in urgent need of at least \$30,000 to buy back the land adjacent to the new meeting hall from the businessman who purchased it in 2003. Following the destruction caused by the tsunami, new government restrictions on the sale of property along the seaside, prevented the new owner from developing it. However, these restrictions are expected to end soon. More funds will be needed to develop the Katirgama meditation hall and ashram. We are therefore appealing to everyone to send donations which will be

used to buy back the ashram land at 59 Peters Land, Dehiwala. This will ensure that our ashram will continue to be a peaceful, ideal place for the instruction and practice of Babaji's Kriya Yoga. For this purpose, donations may be made to Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas in Canada, directly by cheque, credit card on our website Order/Contributions page, or by bank transfer. Donors living in North America will receive a receipt which can be used to deduct the amount of their donation from their taxable income. Donors from India may either donate for this purpose through our Bangalore Trust or directly to the Trust in Sri Lanka. For further details, write to me at [satchidananda@babajiskriyayoga.net](mailto:satchidananda@babajiskriyayoga.net) or [srilanka@babajiskriyayoga.net](mailto:srilanka@babajiskriyayoga.net) or [info@babajiskriyayoga.in](mailto:info@babajiskriyayoga.in) Or contact Murugesu Candaswamy at (94) 785.796.395