University of Jaffna

Sir Pon Ramanathan
Memorial Lecture - 2017

Can "Adams's Peak" be a symbol of Peace and Reconciliation in Post War Sri Lanka? An ethno - historical Inquiry

by

Professor Premakumar de Silva, Ph.D
Professor in Sociology and Anthropology
Department of Sociology,
University of Colombo.

on

Thursday 12th January 2017
at 4.00 p.m

at

Kailasapathy Auditorium
University of Jaffna

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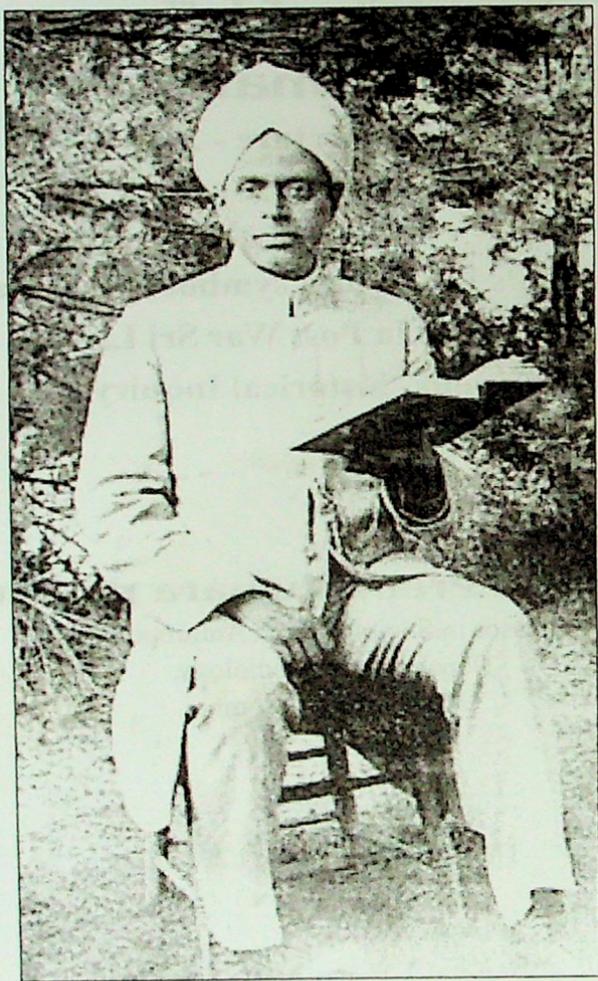# Sir Pon Ramanathan
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Sir Pon Ramanathan

Message from the Vice - Chancellor

Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan Memorial Lecture along with the Lady Ramanathan Memorial lecture has become an annual event in our University. It has become a tradition to hold these memorial lectures immediately following the General Convocation. The Ramanathan Memorial lecture is funded by an Endowment instituted by the Board of Directors of Parameswara College in 1980. The theme of the lecture usually centres on topics related to tradition, religion, society, technology and human values.

We are indeed thankful to those who instituted this endowment for giving the opportunity to cherish Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan's memory upon his services and establishing educational centers in this region.

This year Sir. Ponnampalam Ramanathan Memorial Lecture is being delivered by Prof. Premakumara De Silva, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo on the topic *"Can 'Adam's Peak' be a symbol of Peace and Reconciliation in Post War Sri Lanka? : An ethno-historical Inquiry"*

On behalf of the University I thank Prof. Premakumara De Silva for delivering this lecture.

Prof.(Ms.)V.Arasaratnam
Vice Chancellor

Sir Ponnambalm Ramanathan Memorial Lecture – 2017, 12th January at the University of Jaffna

The Chancellor, and Vice Chancellor of the University of Jaffna, Members of the Council, the Deans and all Professors and lecturers of the University, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends. I consider this a great privilege endowed upon me by the organizers of this prestige lecture. As I remember, I heard of Sir Ramanathan when I was a school boy reading a Social Studies text book which contained a picture of Sir Ramanathan under the list of 'National Heroes'. At that time, I never thought I would get an opportunity to deliver a lecture on a great national hero like Sir Ramanathan who was one of the true scholars that Sri Lanka produced. I really have no idea what my adequacy is to deliver the Sir Ponnambamalm Ramanathan Memorial Lecture in this esteemed institution – the University of Jaffna. However, I am deeply honored by the invitation of the Jaffna University to deliver the Sir Ramanathan Memorial Lecture this evening.

Ponnambamalm Ramanathan was born on April 16, 1851. He had his early education at the Colombo Academy (now Royal College) and proceeded to Presidency College, Madras, for higher studies. On his return, he chose the legal profession and became an Advocate of the Colombo Bar in 1874. In 1879, at the age of 28, he was chosen to be the Nominated Unofficial Member in the Legislative Council for 1922-1924. Ramanathan was a lawyer, legislator, scholar, statesman and silver-tongued orator. He was knighted in 1921, when he was seventy years old. When territorial representation was introduced, he contested and won the Valikamam North Seat, in the Jaffna peninsula, which he

occupied from 1924, until his death on November 26, 1930, when he was nearly eighty years.

He fought against the tyranny of the British Government, taking up the cause of the Sinhalese when arbitrary and oppressive measures were taken against them by the Government of Ceylon during the widespread Sinhalese-Muslim Riots of 1915. Also, he struggled against the imperialist rulers to ensure the right to follow any faith and to name all important religious days of every faith as public holidays. He argued at the Legislative Council to have Vesak Poya Day declared a public holiday.

His immense contribution to education was the establishment of two schools, the Ramanathan College for Girls, established at Chunnakam in 1913, and the Parameshwara College for boys, eight years later. The latter has since become the Jaffna University. He also rebuilt the Hindu Sivan Temple, the Ponnambalavaneswara Temple at Kochchikade commenced by his father in Colombo, in granite stone sculpture. Those public activities revealed his great philanthropy.
Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's ideology and his views for a true Sri Lankan society are worth emulation by today's ethnic centred leaders in order to create an equal society for all.

I do not intend to speak more about Sir Ramanathan to a gathering of scholars and intellectuals in Jaffna, for that would be a rather meaning less attempt. I shall proceed to my lecture now and the topic of my presentation today is:

Can 'Adam's Peak[1] be a symbol of Peace and Reconciliation in Post War Sri Lanka? : An ethno-historical Inquiry

The Anthropologist, Robert M. Hayden, in his "Antagonistic Tolerance" argues that

> Sacred sites that have long been shared by members of different religious communities and may even exhibit syncretic mixtures of the practices of both may come to be seized or destroyed by members of one of them in order to manifest dominance over the other (Hayden 2002: 205).

Sri Lanka not only has a highly complex and highly developed structure of religious sites historically and in the present day, but also has a rich academic tradition of studying religious sites. Throughout the country there are hundreds of religious sites in a multiple array of forms (and with an equally complex set of vocabularies), and worship (pilgrimage) which have been widely accepted factors in the expansion and development of specific religious traditions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and also the new religious cults, all of which have constructed sacred geographies as a way of expanding their clienteles and public images.

The academic tradition of studying this complex phenomenon has taken on several guises in Sri Lanka and crosses a number of disciplinary areas. These range from the sociological and

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[1] Siri- Pade is a popular usage among Sinhala Buddhist pilgrims; Sripadasthana (the temple of the sacred footprint) is the modern official usage; Sumana-kuta (the peak of the god Sumana), Samanta-kuta (the peak of the god Saman) Samonola and Samanala (the Mountain of the Butterflies) are found in the Pali and the Sinhala scholarly writings and popular literature. Tamil Hindus say it is the footprint of Lord Siva (Sivan-oli-padam). Muslims maintain that it belongs to Adam (Baba- Adamalei) and Adam's Peak is widely used in European languages (see de Silva 2014).

anthropological to religious and Buddhist studies and historical studies. By drawing my own work on Sri Pada and other ethnographical work on major multi-religious sites in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere 1978, 1981; Seneviratne 1978; Stirrat 1982, 1992; Nissan 1985, 1988; and Bastin 2002), this paper will explain the nature of plural worship at those religious sites, and how those sites have become space for contestations and co-existence during the colonial and postcolonial polity of the country. This paper then explores social and ideological bases of how such plurality of worship is sustained and contested.

As Rajasingham (2009) explains, the invention of modern national identities is usually accomplished by the selective 'forgetting' of culturally mixed and hybrid pasts; constructing authentic, pure and stable present ethno-religious histories; and projecting far back in time modern identity categories and classifications that are essentially modern socio- political formations. Sri Lanka has been no exception to this process of modern ethno- national and ethno-religious national identity construction, and Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism has become a potent public political discourse.

Though Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu linguistic communities have historically co- existed and shared a gamut of cultural and religious practices, they have emerged in the postcolonial period as opposed national communities. Nevertheless, Hinduism enjoys a certain de facto uniformity of status with Buddhism, arguable due to their intertwined historical roots and ability to accommodate other deities. While Buddhism in theory is atheistic and Hinduism polytheistic, both religions are in practice polytheistic, entertain a multiplicity of gods and do not have injunctions against "other" deities

that the religions of the book (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) entail. The famous multi-religious sacred sites of Kataragama in the south, Sri Pada in central hills, Chilaw and Mannar in the west of the island are testimony to the co- existence of these two religions in Sri Lanka, in addition to the accommodation of Islamic and Christian religious traditions. I argue that such shared or plural religious places are not merely promoting religious diversity and co-existence but also seized or faded such diverse religious practices under the hegemonic majoritarian religion and politics in (post) colonial Sri Lanka.

Referring to the hybrid role the religious agents play, a recent study stated ". . . sometimes they may act as 'potentates' working to reinforce the political boundaries, and sometimes as 'travellers' able to transgress the same boundaries" (Spencer et al. 2015: 6). How is it possible for the same religions to become a foundation for social solidarity within and in between religious groups at one time and a major instigator of violent conflicts at other times? Are religions intrinsically conflict prone because people are ready to fight for what they firmly and fervently believe in? Are religions intrinsically peaceful because they are spiritually oriented and the religious worldviews and precepts include ideas such as inner peace, non-violence and calming meditation? Any effort to essentialize religion in general or specific religions as conflict-prone or peaceful is bound to be invalid empirically. What is perhaps more useful is to examine under what circumstances religions or some religious actors turn to violence and what makes religious players advocates for peace and mutual co-existence (Silva et al. 2016: 1-2).

Like most countries in the South Asian region, Sri Lanka was faced with balancing the expectations of majority and minority

communities vis-à-vis access to power and resources in the post-colonial period. The island experienced several tensions and riots between the majority and minority ethno-religious communities in the post-colonial period.

The militarisation of radical Tamil minority youth groups was to result in South Asia's bloodiest post-colonial armed conflict waged over a quarter century, from 1983-2009, by the LTTE for a separate state in the Tamil-speaking north-eastern regions. The confrontation between the state and the LTTE resulted in the further ethnicisation of public religion and culture.

For in the post- colonial period, communal, or what are now termed ethno-racial or national identities were mapped on to conceptions of race, thereby changing existing identity configurations. What is clear is that linguistic and religious categories have been consolidated along an ethno-racial fault line in post-colonial Sri Lanka. Thus, despite the fact that Hindus and Buddhists share many common religious practices, they are viewed as belonging to different "religions" (Rajasingham 2009). The paper aims to show how plural worship helps reconciliation in the post-war Sri Lanka, and to stress the importance of "re-gaining multi-cultural past" of the country.[2] Let me explain this by paying attention to a body of literature produced on major religious sites in Sri Lanka by both local and foreign anthropologists.

Religious Sites in the Anthropology of Sri Lanka

There are a number of anthropological and sociological works on major religious or pilgrimage centres in Sri Lanka. With regard to Buddhist

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[2] See Sivatamby as well (1995).

sites[3], notable works include H.L. Seneviratne at the Temple of Tooth relic of the Buddha in the capital city of the former Kandyan kingdom (1978), Gananath Obeyesekere at the deity shrine of Kataragama in the Southern province (1977, 1978, 1981), Elizabeth Nissan at Anuradhapura, the first capital of pre-colonial Sri Lanka (1985), Jonathan Walters' work on Kelaniya near the capital city of Colombo (1996) and Mihintale near Anuradhapura (1998:133-162), Steven Kemper (1991: 148-160) at Seruvila in the Eastern Province, and my own recent study on Sri Pāda (de Silva 2007, 2008,2013).

The work of Pfaffenberger (1979), Whitaker (1999), Pathmanathan (1999), and Bastin (2002) on Hindu pilgrimage sites is also notable here, as is Jock Stirrat on Catholic pilgrimage sites (1982, 1991, 1992), and Dennis McGillivray on Sufism and Muslim saints' shrines in Sri Lanka (2004). Yet, there are more important pilgrimage centres and shrines, both Buddhist and Hindu, even Catholics and Islamic, to be studied in the country.

Each of these pilgrimage centres has a major annual festival. Similarly, each centre has developed its own pattern of religiosity. For example, Kataragama shows more expressive forms (externalised) of worship, practising *bhakti* devotionalism. The Kataragama pilgrimage is notable for the fact that expressive form of worship at the site was originally an almost exclusive concern of Tamil Hindus and Veddas. The recent involvement of Sinhala pilgrims in more expressive form of *bhakti* devotionalism at Kataragama is one of the key themes which Obeyesekere has explored in his study. But the majority of pilgrims

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[3] For a general discussion on Buddhist pilgrimage, see Gombrich (1971), Kekulawala (1979), and Holt (1982).

going to Kataragama do not engage in any externalised devotional religious activities. Their primary activity is making and fulfilling vows by making various kinds of offerings to the god. Kataragama can be identified as a place of plural worship where Buddhist, Hindus, Islam and Catholic devotees are visibly engaged in their religious activities.

In contrast to the religiosity of Kataragama pilgrims, Nissan's study in the sacred city of Anuradhapura has shown a different type of religiosity (1988). Pilgrims go to the sacred city mainly for worshiping and to obtain merit, and emphasize restraint and calm in physical and emotional manner (externalised devotionalism is absent). An attitude of internalised devotion is appropriate for such merit making. Anuradhapura is predominantly a Buddhist site and people belong to other religions do not play a part in the religious activities at the centre. The pilgrims to the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy are different from Anuradhapura and Kataragama. According to Seneviratne, pilgrims come to see the great annual pageant of the former Kandyan kingdom while many pilgrims make offerings in the Temple of the Tooth as well (1979). People belong to other religions also visit to the Temple just as visitors of historically and culturally important places in the country, but not as devotees.

Unlike Anuradhapura and Kandy, devotees come to Munnesvaram, according to Bastin, to engage in non-merit-making activities such as the practise of sorcery and counter sorcery rites and seek alleviation from misfortune and other forms of suffering which are hard to find at other religious' sites in the country. This Tamil Saivite temple is open to all Sinhala Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, Roman Catholics and Islamic people. Munnesvaram is also a remarkable place

of a Tamil Saivite temple with predominantly Sinhala-Buddhist patronage which prevails even during a period of ethnic violence between Tamils and Sinhalese (2002). Bastian's study has revealed that the Hindu temple is reproduced as a centre of worship amidst conflict and competition and a degree of religious tolerance that see both communities worshiping together.

Stirrat (1992) interprets the shift of devotional interest of Sinhala-Catholic pilgrims from the older, place-specific shrines to the new person-centred cults. In general Stirrat explores how attendance of special Catholics shrines enables the reintegration of fragmented individual experiences and divers groups.[4] Of the many Catholic shrines in Sri Lanka two stand out from all the others as being particularly popular among not only among Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics but also among Buddhist and Hindus as well (see Bastian 1997, 2012). These shrines are; St. Anne at Talawila and of Our Lady of Madhu in Mannar which are claimed by some to be on sites previously sacred to Hindu or Buddhist deities (1983: 391). According to Stirrat many Catholics accept the existence of Hindu and Buddhist gods and their healing rituals are clearly modelled on those of Sinhalese Buddhists in both form and content, Catholic saints being substituted for Buddhist gods. Therefore, 'the religiosity of such Catholics owes more to Sinhalese Buddhism than to the Church of Rome'.

All these pilgrimage centres are of national significance and draw large crowds, Kandy and Anuradhapura being almost exclusively

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[4] The British colonial administrator, John Still, recorded in his book, *Jungle Tide*, which was published over a hundred years ago in 1911 that he witnessed a Muslim father bring his son who was ill to the shrine at Madhu church which was known to be a powerful and healing sacred place.

Buddhist, whilst Kataragama, Munnesvaram and Sri Pāda draw pilgrims from all of Sri Lanka's religious groups predominantly Buddhists and Hindus, but also Muslims and Catholics. These centres have not all been equally important in the past. However, due to the Low-Country Buddhist revivalist activities in the latter part of the nineteenth century, most of these pilgrimage centres have become of national significance. For example, pilgrimage centres like Anuradhapura raised its prominence during the colonial era and has been recreated as a national heartland since independence of Sri Lanka (see Nissan 1985).

Sri Pāda : A religious site of contestation and co-existence

Let me briefly talk about my work on Sri Pāda is a major pilgrimage site in the country and it is also known to the English-speaking world by its Anglicized name "Adam's Peak". This tropical forest mountain territory (*samanala adaviya*) is said to be protected by the god Saman, considered the guardian of Sri Pāda (see de Silva 2008). Historically speaking, Sri Pāda is a remarkable place of worship for people belonging to all four major religions in Sri Lanka where they share one particular object of worship, the sacred footprint, but with specific interpretations from their own religious traditions.[5]

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[5] The sacredness of Sri Pāda is not only claimed by Buddhists but also by other religious groups such as Hindus, Muslims and Catholics. Sri Pāda is regarded by Hindus as having been made a sacred ground by Lord Siva, one of the supreme gods of the Hindu pantheon. In the mid 1950's a Tamil Hindu ritual practice oriented to the God Siva to whom Tamil Hindus believe that the sacred footprint at the temple belongs, begun to fade from Sri Pāda. Surprisingly, the historical origin of this particular Hindu practice at Sri Pāda is very ambiguous in its orientation. However, the ritual engagement of Hindu mendicants at Sri Pāda can be traced back to the period of the Tamil king of Ariya Chakkrawarti in the fourteenth century or even before (see de Silva 2007). For surely, during the period of late sixteenth century to mid eighteenth century a group of Hindu Tamil mendicants, popularly known as āndiya controlled the Sri Pāda temple until it was taken over by king Kriti Sri Rajasinhge and handed it over to Kandyan Buddhist monks.

As Nissan and Stirrat point out, in pre-colonial states ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences were not used as the basis for inclusion or exclusion from the polity. At various times groups would speak alternative languages, adhere to alternative religions and claim alternative identities (1990: 26). As Tambiah, Anderson and Stein show, the pre-modern states of South and Southeast Asia, despite variations in detail, emerge as relatively loosely structured organizations built upon the bases of heterogeneity, relativity, and graduality, and on the ideal of the delegation of power from the centre (cf. ibid: 24). This S. J. Tambiah describes as a 'Galactic Polity' (1976, 1986) and Burton Stein formulates as a 'segmentary state' (1980). In my view, such differences were evidently tolerated at the pre-colonial Sri Pāda, which had been continuously patronized by the pre-colonial states. Though Buddhist monks had controlled the Sri Pāda temple and Buddhist kings lavishly patronised it, alternative religious belief and practices were never excluded from pre-colonial Sri Pāda. Instead, they were accommodated and recognised.

Like other major pilgrimage sites in Sri Lanka thousands of pilgrims annually make the journey to Sri Pāda to worship the sacred footprint. In the past, many people climbed there with the intention of acquiring religious merit and indeed today they visit for many reasons. **The main pilgrimage normally takes place during the months of December to May, however the busiest part of the year extends from February to April, with the peak of the pilgrimage season during at the festival of Mädin full moon day in March.** According to police estimation during the 2000 2001 number of pilgrims attended

at Sri Pāda was 2.2 million, a figure that, if true, would indicate that one eighth of the total population of Sri Lanka visited Sri Pāda[6].

The historical development[7] **of the site** showed how different Sri Pāda Temples have constructed, reconstructed or ordered, and reordered under different powers at different historical moments in temple history. **It is also evident that** Sri Pāda has been historically viewed as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious site and how that multiple discursive and non-discursive practices **have been** contested and marginalized with the insurgence of the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism,

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[6]It is hard to find early statistical figures on the pilgrims' attendance at Sri Pāda. However, some British 'official records' have arbitrarily reported figures in qualitative manner, for example "full swing crowds" "many thousand" "large number" and this may give us some indication about the scale of the pilgrimage in the nineteenth century (SLNA 45/37). In the early twentieth century administrative records provide some estimated figures on pilgrims attendance; in 1905 12380 pilgrims visited Sri Pāda, the figure rising to 40,000 in 1913 (AR 1912/13). By 1921 during February to April the number was 13,650 (AR 1921). In 1937 Government Agent of Sabaragamuva reported "The annual pilgrimage to Sri Pāda assumed large proportion in comparison with past three years" (AR 1931). By 1968, it was 600,000 to 700,000 (Ceylon Daily News, 22 Dec. 1969).

[7]The cult of worshipping the footprint in Buddhist and Hindu societies in South and South-east Asia is undoubtedly an ancient religious practice. However, there is no definite historical evidence about exactly when the cult was popularised in the Hindu-Buddhist cultural regions. In the case of Sri Lanka some argue that the worship of the footprint can be traced back to the 2nd century BCE, but the site of worship was historically not the exact place where present worship takes place (Sri Pāda) (Ranavalla 1965: 187-219). Ranavella argues that the present pilgrimage site (Sri Pāda) of footprint worshipping emerged around the 10th century CE. There is good reason to accept his argument because, after the 5th century Mahavamsa documentation, of the Buddha's mythical engagement with Sri Pāda, it is hard to find textual or archaeological information on any significant human engagement at Sri Pāda before the 10th century. As Paranavitana puts it 'It is in the reign of Vijayabahu I [1055-1110], we have the earliest historical evidence in the chronicles and in inscriptions for the cult of the Footprint on Adam's peak' (1958: 12). However, R.A.L.H. Gunawardena says that evidently this shrine (Sri Pāda) was known and revered even at the time when the Mahavamsa was written (1979: 233). This may be true, but as I argue elsewhere until early 12th century Sri Pāda was not a sacred site recognised by the state (see de Silva 2012).

particularly in postcolonial Sri Lanka. Though all sorts of 'bitter' disputes, contestations, antagonism and exclusion have been transpired in the 'official' domains at Sri Pāda Temple, the continued attraction of the large number of 'pilgrims' mainly from 'peasant and working class backgrounds' of all nominal religious affiliations is remarkably impressive. Obviously, **the majority crowd** is represented by the Sinhala Buddhists, the largest religious group in the island.

Unlike other Buddhist pilgrimage sites on the island such as Kandy, Anuradhapura, Muneswaram, and Kataragama, **Sri Pāda pilgrimage has never been abandoned**[8]despite the political difficulties that have arisen since it was firstly institutionalised as a popular pilgrimage site during the kingship of Vijayabahu I in early 12th century. **The factors that have affected the attendance numbers, and led to occasional breaks in Sri Pāda's popularity, have been insurgencies, outbreak of epidemics and unexpected weather conditions. Pilgrimage to Sri Pāda has otherwise remained a popular attraction to many people in Sri Lanka regardless of their religious faiths. The impact of such afore-mentioned factors on the popularity of other pilgrimage sites is no way comparable with that of Sri Pāda pilgrimage.**

The Sri Pāda that was created in the decades after Independence does not represent a return to any original condition that it inherits. Rather, it was a new creation – a predominantly Buddhist space – a very concrete

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[8]Kandy disappeared as a festival centre in the nineteenth century, to rise in importance again after the 1920's, and **the 1950's, particularly** (Seneviratne 1976) **whilst** Anuradhapura became increasingly important as a popular pilgrimage site in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth (Nissan 1985,1988). **Likewise,** Kataragama is said to have declined as a pilgrimage site from the early nineteenth century, but became of major site for Buddhists in more recent decades (Obeyesekere 1977, 1978, 1981)

manifestation of current ideas of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Like Kataragama, the strong Buddhist element at today's Sri Pāda continues to grow. The smaller number of pilgrims who are representing non-Buddhist religious communities are still present at the Sri Pada temple as subordinate groups to Buddhism (see de Silva 2016).

The paradox of politics and nationalism in modern Buddhist polities is particularly acute in Sri Lanka, a historically multicultural and multi-faith island where four great world religions – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, a range of indigenous spirit beliefs, and astrology, have coexisted for centuries. Though the island's Sinhalese majority, who are mostly Buddhist, have been in a bipolar ethno-linguistic conflict with the Tamils who are mainly Hindu in the post-colonial period (1983-2009), most Buddhists pay homage to Hindu deities and Buddhist temples have Hindu shrines. Indeed, religious co-existence and hybridity among Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus in everyday religious practice, has been as much a unifying and bridging factor between these communities, as a dividing one since the rise of post-colonial Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Though the post-colonial conflict on the island is primarily ethno-linguistic, public religion or Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has been used by a range of political actors to marginalise religious minorities. I have explained this point through the case of Sri Pada temple particularly how Sri Pada lost it historical base of plural worship at the advent of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in (post) colonial Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's cultural diversity and complex mix of identities is not unique. Most South Asian nations are plural, diverse and complex. However, in the post/colonial period diversity has been perceived as a threat rather than a gift. The result has been marginalization and

discrimination against smaller and less powerful groups for linguistic, ethnic, religious, caste and/or class basis, giving rise to various forms of violent political conflicts. Since independence, however, there has been a failure to define and realize an inclusive national vision from the perspective of this distinctive heritage. Instead, competitive ethnic and religious politics became institutionalized.

In this paper I have described Sri Lanka's multi-religious nature through its major religious sites, but made a case for the idea that some religions in the country have had, or currently have, an eminent position in respect to the other religions as they have enjoyed at different times a favoured relation with political power. This favoured relation has not always been a strict correspondence between state and religion, for as I showed during the pre-colonial even colonial periods with the Sri Pada example, the state was quite receptive to the existing social and religious diversity of the country but that receptiveness began to be challenged when national culture was increasingly dominated by a highly politicised and organised Sinhala-Buddhist polity.

That receptivity was, however first challenged by the Portuguese Catholics who transformed this situation by destroying temples and eventually evicting the Muslims from law country regions. But then they gave way to the Protestant Dutch, who themselves gave way to the increasingly secular bureaucratic British who created a colonial state, and a native bourgeoisie that inherited power and a plantation economy as well as a religiously revitalised diverse society that has increasingly demanded that the majority religion be granted the foremost place. This has not been achieved easily or without

bloodshed, because the foremost place for Buddhism in Sri Lanka entails the territorial capture of both space (and time-sound) within which the minority religions can exist and co-exist as long as they acknowledge and subordinate themselves to Buddhism. My speech also explains that many of the major religious sites have been shared among Sri Lanka's diverse religious communities as often as they have been contested. If these sites and the divinities associated with them are permanently Buddhicised, they will cease to be viable sources of divine justice for all groups concerned just as much as the state is no longer viewed as a neutral agency serving everyone on the basis of common citizenship, equal human rights and human dignity

With this conclusion I would like to thank you again for this opportunity to address you, and to do so when celebrating the life and work of Sir Ponnambalm Ramanathan, whom I regard as one of the National Heroes and a great human being of Sri Lanka.

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Premakumara De Silva received his B.A. (Hones.) and M.A. in Sociology from the University of Colombo and MSc and PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh, UK. He has won several prestige international fellowships including British Academy, American Academy of Religion, Sir Radcliffe-Brown and Sir Remond Firth Fellowship of Royal Anthropological Institute in UK, Award of Commonwealth Countries of University of Edinburgh (Sir Ernest Cassel Award), Overseas Research Student (ORS) award by Committee of UK Vice-chancellors and Wenner - Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in New York. He was the first Deputy Vice Chancellor, and former Head of Sociology Department and the Senior Student Counsellor of University of Colombo. Prof. de Silva was the president of Sociological Association of Sri Lanka (SASL) 2007-2009, and the Honorary Council member of Social Scientist Association of Sri Lank (SSA). His research interests include political use of religion and ritual nationalism, local democracy, youth culture, Indigenous study, violence and globalization. Prof. de Silva has won several international competitive research grants most recently Australian Research Council (ARC) grant for the collaborative research project title 'Religious Innovation and Social Reform in Sri Lanka' (2015-2017). He has published eight books, several book chapters and number of articles on his credit. Its include books on 'Globalization and the Transformation of Planetary Rituals in Southern Sri Lanka (2000) Colombo: ICES Publication, 'Second Tsunami': Lost of co-existence among Tsunami Affected Communities in Southern Sri Lanka. Colombo: SSA publication (2009), His most recent article are, (2015) 'Colonial Knowledge' Productions on Sri Pada as 'Adam's Peak' In *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences* (SAJSS) and (2016) "Anthropological Studies on South Asian Pilgrimage: Case of Buddhist Pilgrimage in Sri Lanka" In *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* Vol.4. No.1. He is currently working on a monograph, titled 'Beyond the Sacred Journey: Varieties of Pilgrimage at the Sri Pada Temple in Sri Lanka. Prof. de Silva has been serving as a member of editorial panels of number of international reputed journals and he is the founder of Sociology Department Journal 'Samaja Vigraha (Social Analysis). He also delivered number of invited guest lectures at reputed universities including Edinburgh, Durham, Sussex, Harvard, Cornell, Virginia and Missouri. This year an Honorary Professorship has been awarded to Prof. de Silva by Deakin University in Australia to recognize his contribution to field of Anthropology.