

## **Religion, history and Colonial powers: Colonial knowledge production on a popular sacred site in Sri Lanka**

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The search of this paper is directed to discuss the “effective” aspect of colonial knowledges in the discursive constructions of one of the popular pilgrimage sites, Sri Pada in Sri Lanka. What I explore here is how different authoritative discourses emerge about Sri Pada from the different colonial powers, Portuguese (1505-1687), Dutch (1687-1896) and British (1896-1948). As we now know, authoritative discourse on the ‘colonized’ was largely produced through the agents of the colonial governments, military personnel, Christian missionaries, philologists and administrators. In this regard, Sri Pada was not exceptional. I am aware that these forms of knowledge production change with changes in the practices of colonialism. In this respect, I investigate what gets identified and counted by colonial authorized knowledges as ‘Adam’s Peak’ Such an investigation is now not new to anthropology and the human sciences at large. In the last two decades there a large body of knowledge has been produced to unpack “a particular construction of colonial knowledge”, under the sub-discipline the ‘anthropology of colonialism’ (Pels 1997). But there is a limitation in such analysis, in my view, because most of the “decolonising projects” in South Asia (India and Sri Lanka) have located their fields of work and expertise in the 19th and 20th centuries to unpack ‘British colonial knowledge production’ and they have paid scanty attention to ‘pre-British knowledge production’ for example as far as India and Sri Lanka are concerned, the Portuguese and the Dutch ‘colonial knowledge productions’. In my view, a reasonably comprehensive understanding of culture, religion and history of the various sub-continental regions in the early 18th century and before, is a prerequisite for our understanding of the transformations which the British instituted.

**Key words:** Religion, Colonialism, Knowledge production, Sri Lanka

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