

Colonial Construction: Panadura Vaadaya in the Anthropological Literature

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The "Pananura debate" Panadura Vaadaya in the nineteenth century between the Christians and Buddhists was central to the anti-colonial struggle in the cultural sphere. It was the culmination of protests against the crude methods of suppression against the local culture employed by respectively the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British over nearly 400 years. This cultural liberationist movement has been deliberately distorted by a recent set of writers. These writers include Obeyesekere, Gombrich, Kapferer, Roberts, Tambiah, H.L. Seneviratne, C. R. de Silva and Kumari Jayawardene. Some of them have associated the debates with the contemporary Western discourse on fundamentalism -triggered by the Western fear of the Muslims. This paper summarizes the social background to the Panadura Vaadaya, its global context (within a time non Western classical literature and learning was coming into Western discourse) and global role (as part of the sensitizing process in the West to the existence of sophisticated discourses outside Christianity). The paper puts into contemporary global context and global role the interpretations of these latter writers. The writers engaging in distorting the anti colonial content help processes of recolonisation operating in the country.

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