

The Sacred Footprint (*Buddhapāda*) in Sri Lankan Buddhist Art

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The present study aims at examining the significance of the Sacred Footprint (*Buddhapāda*) in Sri Lankan Buddhist Art in relation to the context of contemporary Asian art. The notable character of Asian Buddhist art is the aniconic representations of the Buddha through a variety of symbols that include the Bodhi Tree, the Wheel of Dharma, the Sacred Footprint, the Sacred Throne, the Trident etc., This character is obviously highlighted when examining the Indian Buddhist art where such aniconic representations occur in many instances as possible. The scholars who studied the origin and the evolution of Sri Lankan art, thus view the Indianized aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhist art, and attempt to pursue any resemblance to the aniconic characteristics that the Indian artist utilized to represent the Buddha in those of Sri Lankan Buddhist art, too. However, a detailed examination of the Sacred Footprint (*Buddhapāda*) recovered from different sites in the country proves that Sri Lankan innovation is not parallel to those of India or elsewhere, and it is the symbol of Footprint (*Buddhapāda*) representing the Buddha, and appears to be an object of veneration or a decorative element where no evidence to prove the aniconic presence of the Buddha. Instead, the evidence so far found portray unique iconographic characteristics ie. the Wheel of Dharma (*dharmacakra*), the Trident (*trīśula*), the lotus bud (*Padma*), the Parasol (*catra*) etc., each representing in an individual context where there is no resemblance to the aniconic symbols in Indian Buddhist art. Therefore, the present study provides a needy background to examine the unique iconographic characteristics of the Sacred Footprint (*Buddhapāda*) in Sri Lankan Buddhist art, and its independent appearance of Indian prototype.

Key words: Sacred Footprint, aniconic symbols, Buddhist Art, Sri Lanka