

# **A Study on the Influence of Buddhist Literature on the Independent Development of the Contemporary Artist's Medium of Painting**

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Buddhist literature and murals can be identified as major art forms of the Sri Lankan culture. Visual cues such as symbols, shapes, elements, objects, tools, animal and human figures provide different meanings to murals. For instance, in the murals that signify the 'Themiya Jathaka' story; the costumes of Prince Themiya, the gardener and the hoe, the horse cart and the trees as well as the costumes in Thivanka's statue that depict the 'Chullapaduma Jathaka' story are visual cues that symbolise ideologies of both the artist and his/her contemporary period. Accordingly, this research study seeks to investigate the meanings, ideas and ideologies that are conveyed by the visual styles of Sri Lankan murals. This research is conducted via the application of the philosopher Johan Galtung's 'ABC Triangle' theoretical framework. This study examines that, despite the inspiration of Buddhist literature, when analysing the visual symbols and signs, the invisible concepts that intensify those visual factors such as the Sri Lankan identity, culture, and the way in which the artist has developed mural painting as an independent means of expression can be observed. Furthermore, this study reveals that the visual elements in murals provide a political reading and a reflection of the Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura periods, as well as the concept of eco-friendly green cities, the nature of the oppressed class system such as the capitalist ruling class and the disenfranchised classes that sheds light on the social inequality prevalent in those periods. This political analysis also becomes a representation of the cultural identity acquired by the ancient Sri Lankan society. Therefore, this study concludes that the visual imagery in the mural depicts the artist's invisible attitudes and ideologies via the painting and also the manner in which it becomes the cultural identity of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, it portrays the way in which the contemporary artist has developed an intensified form of independent painting tradition inspired by Buddhist literature.

**Keywords:** Murals, Buddhist literature, Visual signs, Independent medium, Ideology