

A little bit of our Heritage

Srī Pāda – Padalāñchana



Srī Pāda is the most popular of the names given to this mountain located in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. It is about 45 Km northeast of Ratnapura of the Sabaragamuwa Province and 32 Km southwest of Hatton in the Central Province. On a clear day the mountain is visible even from Colombo and that is one of its unique characteristics. All around is largely forested and has been declared a wildlife reserve. Besides, three major rivers start their onward journey to their final destinations after giving succour to thousands of people living in-between. It is an important watershed with the rivers *Kelani*, *Kalu* and *Walawe* flowing to the northwest, southwest and south of Sri Lanka.

The mountain is of great religious significance to the Buddhists of Sri Lanka. It is recorded in the *Mahāvamsa* that when the Buddha visited Sri Lanka for the third and last time, the impression of the Buddha's left foot was placed at the top of the mountain peak. This was at the request of God Sumana Saman. Buddhists venerate the sacred foot in their daily salutations with a special verse (*gāthā*) that goes as follows:

***Yannammadāya nadiyā pulineca tīre
Yaṃ saccabaddhagirike sumanācalagge
Yaṃ tattha yonaka pure muninoca pādaṃ
Taṃ pāda lāñcanamahaṃ sirasā namāmi***

I worship with reverence the sacred footprints of the Buddha placed on the banks of River Narmada, on the top of Mt. Saccabaddha (both in India), on the Samanta Kūṭa (in Sri Lanka), and the city of the Yonakas

According to this verse that appears in the 13th century book *Samantakūṭavaṇṇanā*, there are three other sacred footprints that are located outside Sri Lanka and are worshipped by Sri Lankan Buddhists. *Mt. Saccabaddha* has been identified as the present day Tirupati of South India. In India it is worshipped as ‘*Vishnupath*’ – ‘the Foot of Vishnu’. It may be noted that footprints of the Buddha (known as *Buddhapada*) are sacred symbols found across Asia. They mark places where the Buddha is believed to have physically visited or left his spiritual mark.

There is much evidence to show that symbolic worship was popular even from pre-Buddhist times. Among the Buddhist symbols worshipped, *inter alia*, are the Bodhi Tree symbolizing Enlightenment, the Dhamma wheel (*dharmacakra*) the Dhamma, and the footprint, the Buddha. It is said that Ven. Maha Kassapa touched and worshipped the Buddha’s feet at Kusinārā, before lighting the funeral pyre.

In modern times Sri Pada could be described as the symbol of unity. All four major religions consider Sri Pada as a sacred mountain but with different nomenclature. The Hindus, mostly Shaivites, worship the footprint as *Sivanolipaathamalai*, meaning 'Mountain of Shiva's Light', and the Islam and Christian religionists call it the Adam’s Peak. The latter name was popularized during the colonial period and still used as an alternative name.

Climbing Sri Pada is a pilgrimage. Due to weather conditions the pilgrim months start from the full moon day of Unduvap (December) and end in the month of Vesak (May). At the commencement of the Pilgrim season, the sacred Buddha relics, the statue of God Saman and other ceremonial regalia are taken in procession from the Sri Pada Raja Maha Viharaya in Pelmadulla. These are brought back at the end of the season.

There are six trails to the summit, the most favoured being the Ratnapura-Palabaddala and Hatton-Nallathanni routes because they are shorter and with better facilities. The other four trails are Kuruwita-Erathna, Murraywatte, Mookuwatte and Malimboda.

Climbing is done with great solemnity. Pre-climb rituals are observed for personal purification and get the blessings of God Sumana Saman for travel without mishaps. The first-timer is called a *kodukārayā* and is more protected. The words used are most important and throughout the journey uphill and down one has to observe restraint in speech. Pilgrims usually greet each other with the word *karunāvai* and going up or down is referred as *karuna karanava*.

The wish of everyone is to get to the summit before sunrise and to witness the sunrise. At the summit pilgrims pay obeisance to the sacred footprint by placing their foreheads after which they go to the large brass bell and ring it once for every time the journey has been done.

There are many historical figures that has climbed this sacred mount. The Ambagamuwa rock inscription of King Vijayabahu I (1058-1114 CE) records that the king himself climbed the mountain and worshipped the Buddha's footprint. Fa-Hien, the Chinese pilgrim who stayed in Sri Lanka in 411 CE has made reference to Sri Pada. Marco Polo, the Italian merchant, in his *Travels* of 1298 CE, too, mentions Sri Pada as an important place of pilgrimage, whilst the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta, climbed Sri

Pada. That was in 1344 CE. There are also records of Britishers who climbed the Peak in the 19th century, the most notable being John Davy. These references indicate the long-recorded history of Sri Pada from the Buddha's time to date.

Nāṇasiha

***Yo ca pubbe pamajjitvā
paccā so nappamajjati;
so imaṃ lokaṃ pabbāseti
abbhā mutto'va candimā.***

Whoever was heedless before - and afterwards is not so;
Such a one illumines the world - like the moon freed from
clouds

***Yassa pāpaṃ kataṃ kammaṃ
kusalena pīthīyati;
so imaṃ lokaṃ pabbāseti
abbhā mutto'va candimā.***

Whoever by good deed
covers the evil done;
Such a one illumines the world
like the moon freed from clouds

***Andhabhūto ayaṃ loko - Tanuk'ettha vipassati,
Sakunto jāla mutto'va - Appo saggāya gacchati.***

Blind is this world; -Few are here who clearly see.
As birds that escape from a net - A few go to a blissful state.

Dhammapada (Loka vagga), vv 172, 173 & 174