

Sauwastika

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The term **sauwastika** (or *sauvastika*^{[1][2]}) is sometimes used to distinguish the **left-facing** from the **right-facing swastika** symbol, a meaning which developed in 19th century scholarship.^[3]

The *left-facing* variant is favoured in **Bön** and **Gurung Dharma**; it is called *zungdrung* in Bon and *Gurung Yantra* in Gurung Dharma. Both the right-facing and left-facing variants are employed in **Hinduism** and **Buddhism**; however, the *left-facing* is more commonly used in Buddhism than Hinduism and the *right-facing* is more commonly used in Hinduism than Buddhism.^[4]

In Buddhism the **left-facing** sauwastika imprinted on the chest, feet, palms of Buddha and also the first of the 65 auspicious symbols on the footprint of the Buddha.^{[5][6]} In Hinduism the **left-facing** sauwastika is associated with esoteric tantric practices and often stands for Goddess **Kali**.^{[7][8]}



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Etymology

Sanskrit *sauvastika* is the *vrddhi* of *svastika*, attested as an adjective meaning "benedictive, salutatory".^[9] The connection to a "reversed" *svastika* is probably first made by **Eugène Burnouf** in 1852, and taken up by **Schliemann** in *Ilios* (1880), based on a letter from **Max Müller**, who is in turn quoting Burnouf. The term *sauwastika* is used in the sense of "backwards swastika" by D'Alviella (1894):

"In India it [the gammadion] bears the name of swastika, when its arms are bent towards the right, and sauwastika when they are turned in the other direction."^[10]

The term has been misspelled as *suavastika*, a term attributed to Max Müller by Wilson (1896). Wilson finds that "The 'suavastika' which Max Müller names and believes was applied to the swastika sign, with the ends bent to the left [...] seems not to be reported with that meaning by any other author except Burnouf."^[11]

Claims of a distinction in Indian religions

Eugene Burnouf, the first Western expert on Buddhism, stated in his book *Lotus de la bonne loi* (1852) that the *sauvastika* was a Buddhist variant of the *svastika*.

When **Heinrich Schliemann** discovered swastika motifs in **Troy**, he wrote to the Indologist **Max Müller**, who, quoting Burnouf, confirmed this distinction, adding that "the *svastika* was originally a symbol of the sun, perhaps of the vernal sun as opposed to the autumnal sun, the *sauvastika*, and, therefore, a natural symbol of light, life, health, peace and wealth." The letter was published in Schliemann's book *Ilios* (1880):

"In the footprints of Buddha the Buddhists recognize no less than sixty-five auspicious signs, the first of them being the Svastika [...]" (Eugene Burnouf, *Lotus de la bonne loi*, p. 625); *"the fourth is the sauvastika [sic], or that with the arms turned to the left."*

The term *sauvastika* thus cannot be confirmed as authentic and is probably due to Burnouf (1852). Notions that sauwastikas are considered "evil" or inauspicious versions of the auspicious swastika in **Indian religions** have even less substance, since even Burnouf counts the *svastika* and the *sauvastika* equally among the "sixty-five auspicious signs".

D'Alviella (1894) voices doubts about the distinction:

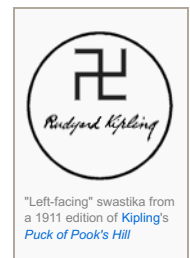
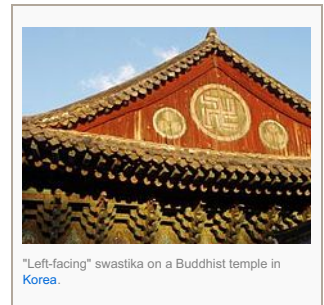
"Would it not be simpler to admit that the direction of the branches is of secondary importance in the symbolism of the gammadion? When it is desired to symbolize the progress of the sun, namely, its faculty of translation through space, rather than the direction in which it turns, little attention will have been paid to the direction given to the rays." (p. 68)

Although the more common form is the right-facing swastika, the symbol is used in both orientations for the sake of balance in **Hinduism**. Buddhists almost always use the left-facing swastika.

Use


Sauwastika was a favorite symbol of the last Russian Empress **Alexandra Feodorovna**. She put this sign everywhere for good luck. In particular, she drew it with a pencil on the wall, at the window opening, and on the wallpaper above the bed of her son **Tsarevich Alexei Nikolaevich** in **Ipatiev House**, where the arrested Emperor's family spent the last days of their lives.

See also



- [Bön](#)
- [Lauburu](#)
- [Sun cross](#)
- [Triskelion](#)
- [Western use of the Swastika in the early 20th century](#)
- [Valknut](#)
- [Gurung Dharma](#)

Bibliography

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- [^] In use from the 1850s, certainly so used by D'Alviella (1894) "[sauvastika](#)" is used to classify the geometrical form of symbols in Liungman, Carl G., *Symbols: Encyclopedia of Western Signs and Ideograms*, HME Publishing (2004) ISBN 91-972705-0-4 11.
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External links

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