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Chapter 1

Introduction:

Buddhism assumed significant role in the politics of Thailand or former Siam\(^1\) since ancient time.\(^2\) In spite of many challenges from within and also from the west, all the Kings under different dynasties remained capable of sustaining the strong hold of Buddhism as it was inseparable part of Thai culture. The reigns of King Rama II and Rama IV dealt with the west\(^3\) carefully to protect Thailand from the western religious invasion. In nineteenth century, the west had undergone a momentous change during the industrial revolution and western technology had begun to outstrip those of Asia in nineteenth century. When British had gained their victory in Europe, quest on her part for additional commerce and territory in Asia became imperative. Rama III denied Britishers to increase the share in trade, but tactically made an agreement with them and generously allowed the christian missionaries to work in the kingdom. The prince Monkut was intellectually stimulated by west.\(^4\)

Surprisingly, instead of opposing the west, King Monkut was the first Chakri King to embark seriously on reforms based on western model.\(^5\) Religion apart the king started road construction, canal digging, ship-building and reorganization of Thai administration with the help of the western experts and advisors. Similarly, the King Chulalongkorn, a son of Monkut followed the footsteps of his father in adopting and learning western ideas. At the same time he proved to be shrewd in resisting western rule by creating Siam’s strong international position.\(^6\) Influenced by Buddhist morality and western ideas, the King abolished corvee system and the institution of slavery. During this reign, communication system was revolutionized by introducing the network of post and telegraph and railway. Most importantly distant parts of the kingdom were brought under central authority. The ministries were reorganized on western model.\(^7\) Its
contribution to education became more secular in the history of Thailand. Additionally, this reign is considered to be important for the fact that in spite of the international crisis relating to extraterritorial claims of Britain and France, Thailand remained independent sovereign state and also strove to uphold Thai religious values and culture.

Having been educated at Harrow school and Oxford University, Vajiravudh Rama VI took over the political power from his father King Chulalongkorn and began immediately to take steps to modernize Thailand on the basis of western model.

The King was also keenly interested in military affairs and formed his own paramilitary organization, the *Wild Tiger Corps*, to inculcate nationalism and promote national unity. When the First World War broke out, he dared to join the Allies in their struggle against Germany due to which Thailand gained a lot of praise and recognition from the international community.

The major achievements of King Vajiravudh, however, lay in the area of education and related legislation. In 1921, the King issued a law on compulsory primary education, which was the first step in Siam 5 path towards universal primary education. Thailand’s most prestigious education establishments were founded by King Vajiravudh, Chulalongkorn University, Siam’s first western-style University, named in honor of King Chulalongkorn, and Vajiravudh College, a boarding school for boys modeled upon the English public school.

After the death of King Vajiravudh in 1925, the Prince Prajadhipok, his younger brother, succeeded the throne since King Vajiravudh had no male heir. The new king began his region at an unenviable juncture of both Thai and world history. The global economic depression of the late 1920’s and early 1930’s forced the Thai government to make economic measures that led to some discontentment. As for Siam’s internal development, the government was in a dilemma whether to launch institute wide-ranging political reforms or not.
King Prajadhipok was a liberal and was eager of establishing Siam’s identity in the international political community, as a country having a “modern” and “liberal” constitutional system of government. The King, however, had to convince more of his relatives in the Supreme State Council about the need to promulgate a constitution. In between, the when matter was taken out of his hands by the bloodless “revolution”, or coup d’état, of 24 June 1932.  

The 1932 coup d’état put an end to absolute monarchy of Siam. Prior to this event, there has been an increased political awareness among the middle-ranking military officers and civilian officials who were to become the major figures in the coup group, which called itself the People’s Party. Many of these men had been educated abroad, principally in France and Britain. There had also been a degree of discontent within the military and civilian bureaucracy resulting from the royal government’s retrenchment program, which in turn had been dictated by the worldwide economic depression. Government expenditures had been cut by one-third in early 1932, salaries were also cut, and many government officials lost their jobs. All these factors were instrumental in motivating the coup group of 1932 to initiate a new system of government. A formal constitution was promulgated and also a National Assembly was set up. Siam thus became a constitutional monarchy without any bloodshed or wholesale changes in its society and economy.  

We have observed that almost all the kings from ancient past to the present had tried utmost to nourish, preserve Buddhism and also attempted to introduce modernization without disturbing the very basic frame of Buddhism. It is due to this fact that, Buddhism in Thailand not only occupies the private realm but also has strong footholds in the public realm. In the absence of Buddhism, politics and society remain as only a myth or dream. However, after 1932 the politics in Thailand took different turns- the military coups and counter- military coups, and the process of modernization continued.

In the 50’s the wave of modernization swept all over the world including Thailand. All people began to change their attitude towards the public institutions
the religious and political institutions. They also started expecting more than what they had expected earlier from these institutions. It is from this point of view that the implication of modernization in recent years on Buddhism and politics has attracted the attention. The meaning of Buddhism and politics in the process of modernization becoming the matter of interpretations and practices. However first of all let us understand the very concept of political modernization since this study concentrates on the interaction of Buddhism and politics. The mobilization of religion for attaining political legitimacy became necessary in the changing socio-political scenario.

Concepts of Modernization:

The western political scientists continued to look at the political development with political modernization. Modernization is conceived as means to westernization. According to a noted scholar Hevy, a modern society is regarded as “more or less modernized to the extent that its members use inanimate sources of power and / or use of tools to multiply the effects of their efforts”\textsuperscript{15} Another eminent scholar called Ward characterizes a modern society as “by its far-reaching ability to control or influence the physical and social circumstances of its environment and by a value system which is fundamental by optimistic about the desirability and the consequences of this ability.”\textsuperscript{16}

The concept of modernization has slightly different connotation than the modernity. Historically speaking, modernization, was explained by Eisenstadt as; “the process of change towards those type of social, economic in western Europe and north America and then have spread to other European countries and in nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the south American, Asian and African countries”.\textsuperscript{17}

The scholar in this field have looked at the concept of political modernization in many ways. Some of them view it as the capability of the political system, while others consider it as basic ingredient of political
development and few others view as political institutionalism. The political institutionalization has three aspects: political mobilization, political integration and political representation. An eminent scholar Deutsch asserts, "the dynamic process of social mobilization and cultural assimilation"\(^{18}\) as the general condition of political mobilization resulted from the exposure in the process of social mobilization to political structures, values and issues. Lucian Pye, acknowledged scholar, essentially characterized political modernization as political phenomenon, involving the mass participation in the process. Yet another distinguished scholar, Huntington, emphasizes on the socio-political institutions as such taking the shape of a complex of structures and norms regulating the polity and the whole of society. Political development for Huntington is institutionalization of political organization and procedures\(^{19}\). However his approach on political modernization recently has changed and he pointed out that western democracy has not been emerging in accordance with earlier expectations. According to him modernization has created political unrest and led to the rise of totalitarian forms of government.\(^{20}\) E.A. Shills view appropriately stands in understanding the political development and modernization. Political development, according to him, is equated with change in certain prescribed directions and has concerned with general improvement in human conditions towards prescribed standards. Additionally, this concept is correlated with economic and social development which is reflected in productivity, level of investment, literacy, birth and infant mortality rates. The notion of political improvement facilitates the multi-dimensional social development.\(^{21}\)

David A. Apter defines modernization in non-industrial society as the spread and transposition of certain roles-professional, technical, administrative and the transposition of (certain) institutions supporting this roles.\(^{22}\) Modernization, according to Fred W. Riggs, also refers broadly to all the processes of change which results in political development and also equated with political modernization.\(^{23}\)
Considering different perspectives to understand the meaning of political modernization, it is quite difficult to find out the means of describing the countries collectively, but in the absence of such alternative, we have chosen the term ‘developing’. Even we identify diversities in location, population, history, culture, religion and resources widely differ in countries as India, Ghana, Mexico, Iran or Thailand. Generally speaking non-Marxist perspective led to undertake the major themes in developing countries. Political and other forms of development in these countries needs modernization. The developing countries did not require to reinvent the wheel, but would in most cases take short cut by copying pioneered by the developed countries. Political modernization for those researcher who note this view was result of social, economic and cultural modernization. The political system is to develop as well as to resemble western democracies of the developed world. The developing countries were expected to deal with many aspects of modernization including the building of nation state, economic growth, welfare and extended representation. In fact, non-Marxist of the developing country did not only deal the modernization perspective but also focuses on post-war theories of the west and try to prevent re-emergence of Nazism / Fascism and resist communism.

The perspective of political modernization provides deep insight in the study of the developing country. We have a case here of Thailand. Thailand certainly shares the characteristics explained by a number of scholars on political modernization. Thailand has been in the process of modernization since the nineteenth century. Thai leaders, whether they be kings or political elites, have been and still are the actors of modernizing roles and have launched a chain of transformation designed to reduce the cultural, religious, military, technological and administrative gap between Thai society and other advanced societies.

The direct impact of modernization on traditional and transitional societies like Thailand is evident in the formation of new roles, and the modification and adjustment of the traditional roles of various institutions associated with the
modernizing process. By and large, the traditional institutions and their values may be naturally appropriated to develop a new system of political legitimacy and to aid in mobilizing the masses' in support for political ends.

As far as political legitimacy and political mobilization are concerned, national integration remained in Thailand as one important part of the process of political modernization. This study conceives Thai society as, to some extent, consisting of cultural, ethnic and regional minority groups. Political modernization in Thailand aimed at to integrate these different groups into the national social structure. To have national integration as a part of the process, this study refers to how the efforts have been taken to bring the different parts of the society into a more integrated whole, to the minimum value consensus necessary to maintain a social order.

Among traditional institutions and values, Buddhism and Sangha are ranked high in Thai society. It is interesting to know that how the traditional and modern values have come into confrontation in the unprecedented transformation of Thai society. Secondly, how did Thailand most important institutions monarchy, Buddhism and Sangha react to the political modernization.26

Formulation of the Problem:

Though Buddhism is a central point of the politics of Thailand, the modernization tried to blast the stronghold of Buddhism. From the ancient past to the early twentieth century, the Kings have had nourished Buddhism and also developed the other institution, the ministries, Sangha and monasteries on the Buddhist principles. However, the rule of Buddhism came into crisis, when the process of modernization of the west reached to Thailand with baby steps. Over the year, this process became popular in the society particularly the intellectual class, rich class, and young generation of Thai society who have been considerably influenced by the artifacts of modernity: the technology, industrial development, mass communication, computer system etc. Moreover, in the recent year, like any
other country, Thailand was also caught up totally in the process of global economy. The affluent classes and young generation are after using all the means of modernization: the credit cards, fast-food restaurants and soon. Ever expanding multi-national companies, the American and Japanese found to be setting the social culture of Thailand.

Taking into consideration the recent changed situation, the question can be asked how the Thai Buddhism and its long cherished institutions Sangha and monasteries and cultural practices can be protected from the influence or onslaught of modernization and westernization? Can the inbuilt capacity of Buddhism is being appropriated and exhausted in accommodating the positive changes occurred out of modernity for the well-being of Thai society? How does the kings in the past and the successive governments after 1932 have brought out changes in Sangha and monasteries in the light of modern scenario? How does the monks and other people involved in politics? What changes are there in the interplay between the king, Sangha and the people.

Though a process of political modernization gained ground in Thailand through after the event of bloodless revolution, Thailand switched back and forth between democratic regimes and authoritarian regimes headed by military rule remained in power for such a long time essentially for the reason that there is no awareness. Among Thai common masses were ignorant about political mobilization around their own rights, self-dignity, sense of equality. However, students community and intellectual class of Thai society kept democratic impulse alive by making protest against military government from time to time.

Historically speaking, Buddhism in Thailand reached the modern period under the warm support of the king and the people, without any interruption of colonial persecution or suppression. Under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V; 1868-1910 or B.E. 2411-2453), the structure of the secular government was modeled on modern western system. With the assistance of King’s half brother, the monk-primer Vajirananaavarosa, who later became a supreme patriarch, an important
role of assigning the public education to the monks was performed. For this a
new form of ecclesiastical government was established, as such a foundation was
laid for the modernization of ecclesiastical education. Thailand has credited with
the publication of the first complete set of the Pali canon, known as the Royal
Siamese Tripitaka. For preserving Buddhism sacred books and race scriptures,
Royal, Library was established. Two royal Buddhist academic institute; 
Mahamakuta and Mahachulalongkorn, were also founded with a plan to function
in due course as Sangha colleges or universities providing for monks and novices
advanced Buddhist studies along with modern higher education.

After the reign of King Chulalongkorn, things changed for the worse. The
process of modernization continued as a part of the secular, but on the
ecclesiastical side it was kept going for only a short period of time and then
weakened. The position of monks and Sangha was put at the losing side. The role
of monks in imparting public education began to come to an end, though most of
the public schools have been housed in monastery. Initially arrangements for
modern higher Buddhist education have been sidelined in the plans. This has led
to the suppression of Sangha and monkhood. Though the Monks deserve to take
many responsibilities, they remained utilized. Consequently, they have been
living in rich heritage of traditional popular support and gradually becoming idle
and indulging in unlawful activities, even in scams and scandals. 27

It is interesting to note that the encounter of Thai people with the West did
not mean a reaction against it, like those countries that were once under colonial
rule. In contrast, as we have pointed out earlier that the king and the people were
to learn and to imitate the west. Strong nationalism, perpetuated through
Buddhism being identified as a national cultural heritage, also has not been
perceived in the light of Western secularism. Thai People who have been
associated with modern technology of the West, belong to urban areas. Most of
them are intellectuals and they have a lot of fascination for western thought and
culture. As a result, they eventually alienated themselves from the traditional Thai
society, saying that ruralites are the backward uneducated or the old fashioned. A few who tried not to be isolated from traditional are treated as the people having split personalities: a traditional and a westernized modern Thai. According to this new class, Buddhist institutions are associated with the traditional Thai society and identified with Buddhist traditional cultural activities. Consequently, Buddhism became a religion of the less privileged and the backward population. Buddhism and modern Thai society gradually isolated themselves from each other. Thai Buddhism has put itself in a more and more narrowed confinement. The monkhood once upon a time had intellectual leadership but today there is no place in the intelligentsia except for these individual monks who have earned modern education. As a result, monks have lost intellectual leadership in the modernized sector of Thai society. Under the modern westernized system of education, Thai youth have began to turn away from Buddhism and also, to some extent, from traditional Thai culture. Thailand modern system of education is in reality blamed for westernization or turning out the young generation from Thai culture.28

Buddhism usually manifested the form of merit making acts through festivals and ceremonies. The intention behind such acts is to observe some basic rules of morality. The traditional Buddhists, essentially, insist on dissemination of knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings. However, the majority of them participate in celebrations and temple fairs and festivals. Other fact of superstition and astrology still play an important part in their lives. Monks, in fact concentrate on monastic affairs inside the Wat and place focus on the construction of monastic buildings. They are usually seen performing religious duties through chanting or ceremonial preaching and urging for donations for a monastic building.

The Sangha and monks, however, maintain social relationship. By and large, monasteries remain centers of social life of rural communities. Monks still play traditional roles for well-being of the people, both spiritual and temporal. It is beyond doubt that Sangha and monkhood in spite of many changes still considered
as a major source of social mobility and contributes for reducing the inequality of opportunity.

Meanwhile, strict traditionalism of the Sangha and Thai society as a whole has both directly and indirectly caused reactions, conflicts and new developments in private realms. A number of Elders, in their efforts have taken up the long-felt but ignored need to produce Buddhist monks updated with modern knowledge relevant to the contemporary world. A few monks, through their own efforts, gained insight into a new meaning of the Buddha-Dharma through their own interpretation. They give Buddhism a new appeal, a vitality that has made it accessible to the intellectuals and university students. They have helped to reduce the widening gap between the monkhood and the monk’s spiritual leadership.\textsuperscript{29}

After 60’s, the state of Thailand initiated its programmes for the socio-economic development of Thai society as a part of the process of the modernity project. The state came to realise that unless the Sangha’s efforts are appropriated, there is no possibility of reaching the desired goals of the programmes. It is from this point of view the politics of involving Sangha into the programme has actually been started by the government.\textsuperscript{30}

In the modern westernized Thai society the fact cannot be denied that monks have no important role to play and the society has reached the current stage of development without their claim to help or guidance. Due to the acquisition of artifacts and technology and certain amount of material achievement, so called affluent class of Thai society resisted participating in religious activities and thereby alienating from Buddhism. This urban trend has had implications on rural Thai. These peoples started copying the rich to some extent government has given serious thought to this event. It is for this reason some programmes have been launched which led to the resurgence of Sangha, in order to bring about re-activism in religious work. With a view to develop the emotional attachment of the people with Buddhism the programme called Phra Dhammatuta and Phra Dhammajarik was evolved by the government. The government was aware about
the criticism that modern Thailand received. It is due to the lack of the monk's share in the process of development which brought undesirable result. By contrast, monastic leadership has still strong hold in the rural part of Thailand. The people still recognize their responsibility to the Buddhist institutions. Modernizations, however, is to be brought to the rural area which remained challenge to the monks' leadership to change their own attitudes as well as the attitudes of the people towards the Buddhism. The rural monks are recruited from among the rural people, more specifically the villagers, with a very limited inadequate disadvantaged educational background and experiences.31

The monks, themselves lack modern knowledge thereby the development is misguided. However, in order to bring awakening in rural monastic leadership, the Buddhist Universities and other monastic institutions took over the social programmes for social welfare and rural uplift. Courses in the practical aspects of community development have been included along with training for the propagation of Buddhism. However, these programmes have been become the target of criticism for secularization and some people perceived this as an attempt of politicization. Apart from programs for rural monks, the two Buddhist universities annually arrange to send a number of graduates to take teaching positions and participate in local development programs and other social, educational and Buddhist activities. This has aimed at realizing the Buddhist ideal of “going for the welfare and happiness of the many” by extending help to the people through a process of right and real development.32

We are well aware of the fact that the position of Sangha and monasteries in Thai society has been rated quite high mainly for the reason that these institutions had carried Buddhism into the nerve system of Thai society and have remained the center of socio-cultural activities. In spite of this fact, unprecedented transformations in the recent years which have taken place due to the modernization. The image of Sangha has come into question to the large extent. On one hand the westernized class of society posed major threat to the Buddhism
and Sangha, on the other hand Sangha itself began to create some space in the modern society through the means of playing politics and also opening up and exposing to the new urban and industrial environment. At the same time, some individual monks have began to blast the very foundation of Sangha by launching new movements like Dhammakaya and Santi Ashoke movement. Similarly some monks independently began to mobilize the people around the environmental issues and the issue of making awareness about AIDS/HIV.

Hypothesis:

Against this background, efforts have been made to set out some propositions for undertaking this research endeavour.

Firstly, Thailand emerged as homogeneous country precisely because of its demographic profile in general and because of Buddhism and culture in particular. Besides this land, socio-economic conditions have also largely contributed in shaping and homogenization of Thailand. The chapter III of this study has attempted to analyze and verify this statement.

Secondly, it is the Buddhism that has been providing legitimacy to the authority of monarchy and the power structures through its doctrine and practices. The religion became mode of nationalization and domestication of Thai people to bring them to the respect and follow the King. The validity of this proposition has been tested in the chapter II.

Thirdly, one of the significant, premise of this research problem relates with the under laying political complexities. Actual political power lay in the hands of the elites - the military and bureaucrats, after the King became constitutional monarch. Regardless of political complexion of the persons in power, the significance of Buddhism to the nation was never attached. The King remained an important symbol and the public ideology insisted the religion, king and nation were inextricably intertwined. Detailed discussion in chapter IV attempts to substantiate the this point of argument.
Fourthly, the reform in Buddhism the evolution of sangha and monasteries continue to have significant implications on the monarchy and political processes in Thailand. The evolution of Sangha and monasteries come to occupy central position in the public sphere and also emerged as a force which has been considered as significant as political authority. This proposition has been verified in chapter V.

Fifthly, in recent years the Sangha has been politicised. The Sangha is being involved into development campaign through community development and missionary programmes. The services of the monks have been used in politically sensitive and economically poor provinces. The monks work for the welfare of minority residing in the hilly areas in order to convert them from animism to Buddhism. Lastly in the second half of the twentieth century, monks have come to forefront politically and ideologically and have also engaged themselves in political propaganda. Discussion on these aspects substantiates this fact in chapter VI and chapter VII.

Objectives of the study:

In the light of the above hypothesis, the following objectives have been set out for the present study:

1. To study the role of Buddhism in relation to the society. This is to understand why Buddhism became the prime force for the identify of Thai people.

2. To study structural relationships and the interaction between Buddhism and political system in view of understanding the three main actors of Thailand the religion, nation and monarchy.

3. To study the evolution of Sangha and monasteries in pre-modern period. The aim of this study is to throw light on structural relationship of the Sangha and the state. It is because the Sangha has had greater amount of influence on Thai masses.

4. To study the Sangha and monasteries in modern period in order to understand as to how the role of sangha is changing over the year in Thailand.
5. To study that as to how Sangha has been politicised and has been used for the achievements of national goals designed by the government from time to time.

Methodology of the study:

This historical, analytical and descriptive study of political development in Thailand in the context of Buddhism has deep impact on the politics. It is an interesting phenomenon for study to all those who are working in social sciences. In the sixties particularly forceful attempt was made to apply this paradigm to the development of politics in the Third World. The studies and ideas of the west were turned into grand universal theories of political development. These theories has to be applied to the ‘non-western’ world. The focus upon universalistic grand theories, concepts and norms in the study of political modernization has continuously been under attack from scholars of ‘actual’ third world politics. Then basic argument is that we need to study the institutions, organization, policies and ideologies as such, take them at face value, contextualize them and look into their own histories. It is from this theoretical perspectives, an attempt has been made in this study to probe into the political scenario historically changing over the years in Thailand, a important nation in third world.

In carrying out the present study, analytical, historical and descriptive methods have been used. While applying the methodological tools and techniques, many students of political modernisation have a tendency to locate themselves within modernization theory to take for the granted that social and cultural modernization would be necessarily associated with political development. Even the researchers of political development have underestimated this issue. Hence this study covers misplaced analytical tool-kit applied to study the political modernization in the context of Thailand. This study also focuses much on the application of historical approach as to understand the transition from tradition to modernity in the light of legitimate political system prevailing in Thailand.

This study is based on primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected by undertaking a field survey. Though structured questionnaire was
not prepared, the researcher had informal discussion with politicians, monks, researcher scholars in Thailand on the research problem. This method of collection of data has immensely helped in this study. Additionally, original documents published by Thailand government and many other documents such as census, official records and University records that has also used as primary source for this study has been useful to the greater extent. The secondary sources such as books, research journal, news paper, internet, clippings have been used in carrying the present work.

Chapterization:

Chapter first is an 'Introduction' which gives outline of the research design and methodology. The chapter second is 'Foundation of Thai nation state' that discusses the historical background of the interrelationship between Buddhism, monasteries and the Sangha. The chapter third is titled as 'Social setting of Thailand', providing demographic profile. The chapter fourth is 'Politics and Government' which deals with understanding the interplay between the state and government and people. The chapter fifth is 'The Sangha and monasteries in pre-modern Thailand' that provides evolution of Sangha and Monastery. The chapter sixth is 'The Sangha and monasteries in modern Thailand' which discusses the reforms brought out in Sangha and monasteries. The chapter seventh is 'Politicisation of Sangha and Monks' which throws light on as to how there politicization of Sangha and monks toke place. The chapter eighth is 'Summary and conclusion'.
Notes and References

1. “Siam” is the name by which the country was known to the world until 1949, on 11 May 1949, an official proclamation changed the name of the country to “Prathet Thai” or “Thailand”. The word “Thai” means “Free” and therefore “Thailand” means “Land of the free”


4. *The priest-prince had an inquiring mind, a philosophical nature, and a voracious appetite for new knowledge. He learnt Latin from the French Catholic bishop Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix and English from the American Protestant missionary Jesse Caswell. Prince Monkut’s intellectual interest were wide ranging; not only did he study the Buddhist Pali scriptures but also Western astronomy, mathematics, science, geography, and culture. His wide knowledge of the West helped him to deal with Britain, France, and other powers when he reigned as King of Siam (1851-1868)*


8. *Ibid*, PP. 80-81


12. *Ibid*, P. 16


17. Rober E. ward, "Political modernization and political culture in Japan", world politics, XV, No.5 July 1963, P. 570.
20. Samuel P. Huntington, "Political development and political Decay" world politics, 17 P. 393
30. Somboon Suksamran, *op.cit.*, pp. 61-62
32. Somboon Suksamran, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-64.