CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction:

Thailand, since the change from absolute monarchy to democracy on June 24, 1932, has continuously been facing problem of political instability. How and why the country has not yet been able to achieve a fully developed form of democracy as aspired for? The answer has been found in the course of this study which has revealed one of the most important factors by which the political system has not yet been fully democratized is political apathy among members of the Thai society. The political apathy still remains, because "the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and that provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system", has not yet been fully developed. Why has not this quality not yet been fully developed? The answer rests on two important points namely, the original political culture related to absolute monarchy and the elite appropriation of democracy. The Thais had long been associated with their authoritarian political culture from Sukhothai, Aydhaya and early
Ratanakosindra periods that had lasted for more than 700 years and that is why it was not easy for them to be accustomed to the democratic political culture. Because of such traditional political culture, even in the history of more than 61 years now (October 30, 1993) since the change, democracy in Thailand is still stumbling.

Furthermore, Thai political elites which mainly consist of the bureaucratic elite and military elite, had also dominated the political system and manipulated political affairs for a long period of four decades after the change in 1932. For their own lucrative interests "the Thai political elite had appropriated the forms and symbols of constitutional democracy and has sought at times to implement them, the elite has acted in accordance with traditional authoritarian structures and values for much of the time". Without democratic political culture, which is a prerequisite for a stable democratic system, obviously, it is rather difficult for democracy to be developed to the full-fledged status, which is the case in Thailand. The stable democratic political system, which Thailand has long been attempting to achieve needed systematic efforts to inculcate democratic values, attitudes, norms and orientation. However, this could not take place in early years as the members
of the Thai elite abused democratic system for selfish gain and exploited the large section of Thai people who were politically apathetic and therefore far away from any active participation in political affairs.

Another problem in the Thai political affairs is corruption that is practised by some groups of elite, politicians, civilian bureaucrats and military officers, while in power, in collaboration with businessmen of some interest groups. This is a very difficult problem as the businessmen belong to the rich class and hence are financially influential in the society and this is a serious drawback to democracy. When the elite members from the interest groups join hands with powerful military high-ranking officers and abused political structure, then the problem is more difficult to solve. When politicians in power had been found corrupt as those in the Chatichai Government, military coup d'état was the solution as has been witnessed already for more than 30 times since the change in 1932. This is a vicious circle which is: corrupt politicians in the government, coup d'état, interim government, general election, malpractice, coalition government, corrupt politicians and coup d'état again. With this political condition, the coalition is unstable as it can be easily overthrown by the military forces with the pretext that the government was not
suitable to rule as there had been corrupt politicians in the cabinet. That is the political phenomenon repeatedly occurred and poses itself as a crucial hindrance to the Thai polity.

Findings:

This study was set out to test if or not the political theory, the role of three agents viz. - educational institutions, political parties and mass media in developing democratic political culture by means of political socialisation of Thai people. The data was collected by using historical, observational and comparative methods, through the primary and secondary sources including interviews and questionnaire, to arrive at certain conclusions in this regard. The main findings of the present study can be sum up as follows:

1) Compatibility of democracy:

The overview of the historical development taken in the first chapter brings out vividly the fact that democracy is compatible with Thai mentality. It also reveals that democratic way of governance was partly promoted as far back as in the reign of King Ramkamhaeng the Great of Sukhotai period. However, during the 17 years period of Ayudhaya democracy was not evident as it was a period of absolute monarchy. It is only since middle of 19th century that the efforts to introduce democracy began.

The study reveals that three factors proved to be
important in introduction of democratic form of government in Thailand. They were: (i) increasing contacts with the west (ii) Western education to a group of selective elites and (iii) Royal initiative.

The present study reaffirms that democracy is compatible with the Thai mentality and their attitudes for one more reason. The Thais believe that democracy will not destroy any of the three most important Institutions of the Thai society, i.e.: Nation, Religion and King. That was also the reason why democracy was adopted in 1932, 81 years after the process of modernization started in the fourth reign of the Chakri Dynasty. Democracy is suitable to the Thais as the word 'Thai' means 'Free', so other forms of governments will not be acceptable to the Thais who live in the land with appropriate topography wherein natural resources abound. Economically speaking, the majority of the people live their life with sufficient income and as far as the economic and social structure is concerned, the people are divided into three groups; the rich, the middle and the poor classes and of whom the middle-income earners are the largest group. Thailand is an agricultural country and is now turning very fast towards industrialisation, and is categorized as NIC -
New Industrialized Country for which the political system must be stable so that foreign investment can be guaranteed. Apparently, democracy is the best form of government to cope up with the ensuring socio-economic development of the country.

2) Political Instability:

However, instability of the government has been the characteristic feature of Thai polity over a period of last half century i.e. since democracy was introduced in the country in 1932. The negative impact resulted from instability of the government has posed itself as a crucial problem and a hindrance to the national development plan. What has been held as the cause of the government's instability? The answer is that the political apathy of the majority of the population and domination of political power by the elites. These are inter-related matters. Political apathy has caused less political participation by the people in the country's political affairs and this situation has given a good chance to the various groups of elites to seek political power for their own interests.

Instead of politics of competitive nature at the level of masses Thai politics turned into a competition among elites in the society, and when they happened to be
group of military elites, then coup d'état is unavoidable consequences which gives serious setback to the growth of democracy. This is the chronic disease that has not yet been cured. At the moment it seems that this chronic disease is a bit under control especially after the May Massacre, but who knows when this disease will turn active again, as it has not yet been entirely eradicated. The course of development of Thai democracy reveals that the military elites were ready to stage a coup on number of pretext but their main argument was that by and large the ruling power did not come from free and fair elections and the ruling power based on corrupt votes was not healthy. That was reason why the government could be easily toppled by the military coup d'état. Thus, for over 61 years the military and bureaucratic elites had no desire to propagate democracy among the people for they did not want to let the ruling power out of their hands so that they could continue to perpetuate their interests on the ground of political apathy from the majority of the people. Thus anti-democratic orientation of military elites and chronic apathy of majority of masses won the result of traditional influences perpetuated over a period of time. This was the major socialising influence on Thai masses which had negative impact on the course of democratic development of Thai democracy. However, the situation began to change after seventies.
Major Agents of Socialisation:

(1) The present study has proved the relevance and utility of three major socialising agents at the later stage of political socialisation especially concerning the youth. On the basis of the data collected in the context the emergence, development and impact of these major agents of political socialization and presented in Chapter IV it can be said that these secondary agents are relevant more in the process of solving the political problems, Thailand has been facing since the change over to democratic form of government in 1932. Regarding each agent following observations are made.

(1) Educational Institutions:— In case of educational institutions it has been observed that higher level educational institutions i.e. colleges and universities have been playing a significant part in the propagation of democracy to the citizens of the country.

Apart from imparting knowledge about democratic principles to their students, the teachers at schools and lecturers and professors at the college and university level have played a significant role in mobilising the students and through them, the masses, to participate in important political events concerning their democratic
interests. Their participation in three major political events by joining others to oppose military elites and the latters manipulation of electoral process was the expression of their active participation in politics without any reservations. Their signed statement expressing their opposition to General Suchinda's appointment as the Prime Minister in 1991 and thereafter demanding his resignation and condemning military action against unarmed civilians gathered to protest against undemocratic practices, is the expression of increasing fearlessness and boldness - against repressive authority in the guise of democracy - which is characteristic and of exemplary nature. This active involvement of the academic community has certainly elevated the level of the struggle and encouraged more and more youth to emulate their elders to stand by democratic values.

(ii) **Political Parties**: Thailand has a multi-party system. With the advent of democracy political parties emerged. The data about them reveals that all political parties - past and present - have contributed to socialise Thai people politically in number of ways. It provided a chance for like-minded people to come together on one platform to perform political activities. It
provided opportunity for Thai people to participate in political activities, which was unthinkable for them even in early days of democracy.

In a way it is a political outfit in the form of People's Party which was instrumental in bringing change in Thai political system from absolute monarchy to democracy in 1932. Thus right from the emergence of democracy political parties have been performing functions of mobilising people, guiding them during the period of political crisis of major nature viz 1972, 1976, 1991 etc., and educating them during the elections.

However, one thing will have to be admitted and that is, though in existence as organizations of political nature and in large number, political parties in Thailand — as instruments of interest articulation of the masses — have failed in making their impact on Thai people regarding their ideological positions. Many political parties have come and gone. Many of them stayed for a short while because they were founded by men in power or by top ranking leaders. Naturally they lack strong base, as a result when the leader of the party were out of power the parties were finished. However, the role of political party as an essential instrument of democracy has been established beyond doubts in last
two decades. In the political events of 1992 leaders and members of four major parties - viz, Prajadhipalya, the New Aspiration, the Palang Dharma and the Ekabtiab Party-participated in demonstrations, side by side with the students and teachers, co-ordinated the political activities to change undemocratic constitution, to democratic one and proved their utility and importance while thinking about the process of political socialization of the people during this period. The role of political parties has to be acknowledged.

(3) The Mass Media:

The present study further finds out how important the role of the mass media has been in the political socialisation in Thailand. As one of the major socializing agents, the media instruments have been vigorously contributing to the growth of democracy in the Thai polity. It has been a constant effort put forward by the press, the radio and television to constitute democratic political culture in Thailand. Their consistent contribution to the development of democracy was an outstanding action in all the major political events occurred in the country. In October 1973, it was the vigorous effort of the mass media to transmit the news of what had happened to the people. As a result, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Bangkok to join and back up the demonstrators who had
protested against the undemocratic government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikhachorn that was finally ousted. Again in October 1976, the mass media played their role to keep the people informed of what was going on. The electronic media, especially the 7 radio stations along with many others, did their best for political awareness of the masses. They kept the people informed that the demonstrators, the youths, had gone deviated from democracy to communism and as a result the demonstrators were defeated because of lack of popular support.

On April 1, 1981, the electronic media in particular played a very significant part in saving the life and national property, the heavy weapons, during the war on the airwave was being fought between the Revolutionary Party, led by General Sant Chitpatima, and General Prem Tinsulanonda, the Prime Minister. With the facility through the electronic media, the people knew clearly that it was the war fought between military men in power and both the sides claimed that it was doing its best for the welfare of the people in conformity with the principles of democratic administration. In that case, popular support was not needed as both the parties were fighting for democracy and as such either party, after its victory,
would rule according to the democratic system and so the people did not have to join any of them. However, because of the electronic media, the people were soon aware that the government was going to win without armed forces of both the parties engaged in fighting the battle. Thus, it was a clear indication of the effective utility of the electronic mass media in particular.

In the political event of May Massacre, the outcome regarding the significant role of the mass media was quite different; at the beginning all the agents of mass media could normally function to keep the people informed of what had happened and how it was going on. But later on the blockage of news was imposed on by the government of General Suchinda Kraprayoon and that was the cause by which the people were out to the scene in order to see things with their own eyes and that was why the number of the participants in the demonstrations against the undemocratic constitution and undemocratic government was swelled to tens of thousands and finally led to a tragic end. The mass media of any form have become the essential principle of life that the people of the world today cannot live without and thus, the present study has proved that
the mass media, the press, the radio and television, as one of the major socializing agents in the process of political socialization, are relevant and very useful to the process of developing the Thai political system to be better democratic than what it has been.

The Youth Force:

Another important factor in the process of democratizing the Thai political culture is the youths' force that has been explored and the finding has revealed that the youths have/the vigorous actors in the Thai political scene for the past two decades. In the political uprising against the military government of Field Marshal Thanom that had ruled undemocratically for over a decade, the demonstration was initiated by the students at Thammasat University led by Thirayuth Bonmee, Saowanee Limanonda and Seksan Prasertkul etc., that finally resulted in the tragedy on the demonstrators and the undemocratic government toppled. The youths won, because they had fought for democracy and their fight was strongly supported by the people and that was the great success resulted from the role played by the youths. With the victory they had received from the political uprising in October 1973, the youths went on
playing their roles by staging number of demonstrations throughout the country against corrupt government officials, especially of the Ministry of the Interior as it was and is still the largest ministry that has the wide range of duties to do for the people from birth to death. Their demonstrations went on through in 1974 and 1975 that was the period on which they were closer to the people in upcountry and they also tried their best to enlighten the villagers, the labourers and the farmers with democracy. But later on they were split into two groups, the pro-democracy group and the pro-communist group. The latter grew more powerful and therefore, resorted to communism as the best way to solve the national problem. In October 1976, three years after their victory over the military government, the majority of the students fell under the control of the Secondary School Students Centre of Thailand with Thongchai Vinijakul as its Secretary-General who led the youths' movement into another tragedy in which they were completely suppressed. They were defeated because they had not fought democracy, but they had changed their stand-point to fight for communism which was not accepted by the majority of the people. Without popular support the youths lost their ground and suffered a heavy crackdown inflicted on them by the power from the right-wing and finally led them to the sad ending.
In the political event occurred during May 17-20, 1992, which was quite similar to that on October 14, 1973, the youths in the name of the Students Federation of Thailand (SFT) showed their determination to fight for democracy. They participated in political activities and boldly faced crackdown of Thai government; which resulted in tragedy; came to be known as 'May Massacre'. That signified the political role which the youths have been playing for more than two decades to develop and perpetuate democracy for which many of them have sacrificed their lives. Their active role in political participation continued even after May Massacre. The study has revealed that the role played by the youths in all the major political events is indicative of growing political consciousness on their parts; which is ultimately helpful in inculcating democratic attitudes and values in them. This will in future help Thai polity to overcome problems and difficulties in the process of democratization.

Finally, the critical study of the role and impact of major socializing agents on political behaviour in the Thai society as has been explored and worked out on the Thesis entitled Political Socialization in Thailand and
as presented in the FIVE CHAPTERS has proved that the three Major Socializing Agents, the Educational Institutes, especially colleges and universities, political parties and the Mass Media as well as the role played by the youths are effectively capable of growing more democratic mind in the Thai political culture so that the desire for a stable democratic form of government shall be achieved.

To sum up it can be stated that the present study was an attempt to understand and analyse the role of three major socialising agents in the process of political socialisation in Thailand. It reveals that all the three agents viz., Educational Institutions, Political Parties and Mass Media have become very important in recent times especially since last two decades. It is really difficult to quantify their impact in the form of statistical generalisation; nor their achievements can be compared in terms of their relative high or low impact. It is found that they are not operating independently in vacuum. They are very much interrelated. Mere educational development without any democratic orientation would have been fruitless. Likewise mere publicity and narration of political happenings through mass media, without active involvement of academic community i.e. teachers and students - and
lack of organizational role played by Political parties and its leadership would not have brought desired change. The winds of change could blow through Thai Political environment since last two decades, because these socializing agents played together, a positive role in the direction of establishing democracy in real sense of the term. They have certainly succeeded in their objective but they can't cease to function; as political socialization is a continuous process and Thai democracy is yet to go far a head in the direction of real democratic polity.