CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSION

The above research findings reveal how Buddhism is a Factor in Thai Politics from 1963–1992. The present discourses of Buddhism, Monarchy and Democracy are integral part of Thai society, which cannot be understood separately. Thailand’s transition of different phases of politics in the recent past has brought about changes in the structures of the prominent institutions and their role. However, there still remain certain structures which have withstood these transitions. As mentioned in chapter I, the fatherly monarch has long been associated with Thai people since the Sukhothai kingdom. Even though the monarchical institutions were formally changed to the absolute monarchy during the Ayutthaya Empire, it still maintains the so-called “Ten Royal Righteousness.” Hence, the kings during Ayutthaya Empire as well as the Ratanakosin Era were usually called as Dhamma Rajas and gradually developed their roles more and more closely to the word “fatherly king.” Even after Thailand’s transition to democracy, the institutions of monarchy and religion still remain pertinent in the country.

Besides various experiments of secular and democratic governments in Thailand, the Monarch still remains as the symbol of political conservatism, and Buddhism as a symbol of cultural conservatism and unity. More importantly, the king and the Buddhism are vital for the nation as a whole in uniting all sections of society. Buddhism and monarchy are treated as essential elements of the political system in Thailand from Sukhothai period to the Bangkok era. Different institutions are changing to be able to fit into the changing contours in Thailand. Thai Buddhism served as a socializing and acculturating force. It gave coherence to the society, and presented a teleology from which individual existence acquired a meaning that was entirely consistent with the structure of society.

The research further reveals of how the monarchy as an institution under several kings has been constantly trying to adapt itself to the changing needs of the society. For example, monarchy under King Bhumibol Adulayadej in Thailand is constantly adapting itself to ensure that it fits in with the modern world and is able to respond to the needs of the people and society. The Thai monarchy has a unique quality, and that is its adaptability to change, which has enabled it to flourish to this
day. It has always shown exceptional compassion, relevance and vitality, particularly in the contemporary world.

However, these relatively stable positions of the institutions underwent change with the emergence of the new brands of Buddhism. The two important movements of the Dhammakaya and the Santi Asoke brought about some structural changes. For example, the Dhammakaya movement is a religious and organizational expression, relevant to the religiosity and social expressions of an increasingly broad-based urban middle class. It uses symbols of change, progress, purity and spiritual prowess that resonate strongly for many of its middle-class adherents. Movement organizers grasp major annual religious observations as opportunities to display those symbols so that on such occasions, participants may express their identity as Thai Buddhists while simultaneously participating in a symbolic metaphor of what the future of Thai Buddhism could and should be, with explicit explanation and moral conducts, like vegetarianism, adoption of spiritualism instead of materialism.

With the followers divided between these two sects of Buddhism, it paved a route where the political leaders could exploit this difference to their political ends. Thus, religion became inevitably involved in the politics of the country. For example, Santi Asoke is not shy about flexing its political muscle, in the streets as well as at the ballot box. Emphasizing the need to go back to historical Buddhism, the movement, in effect, actually bypass some regulations set up by the Thai Council of Elders. For example, Phodhirak’s asking to nullify his membership in the Council of Elders while maintaining his status as a monk, means that he is still a monk although not under the jurisdiction of the legal Thai Sangha establishment. He also acts as an Upacha-chaya – Ordination to ordain new monks on his own. He also actively participated in the movement against Thaksin’s regime and also floated his own political party known as Phalongdham Party. Although his support comes from a miniscule section of the population, Phodhirak and his party has become an important part in the Thailand politics.

As mentioned above, the group was also in the vanguard of the 1992 demonstrations, and participated in the protest against the government policies. For example, they turned out in force to demonstrate against a beer company’s plans to list on the Thai stock exchange; alcohol being anathema to a virtuous Buddhist.
Thus, as Thailand marched towards the path of a modern nation state, the role and position of stabilizing institutions like Buddhism underwent changes. The new variants of Buddhism or the new movements of Buddhism like Buddhadasa, Dhammakaya, Santi-Asoke movements all carry enormous potential for change. The struggle of Buddhism will depend very much on the cooperation or antagonism between the Sangha establishment and other forces on the one hand, and on the relationship between the whole Sangha and the changing secular authority on the other. If history can serve as a guide, it seems that the Thai Sangha will change in secular world. The difference is that in the future the myth of the unity of Thai Buddhism may not be capable of revival. Yet, each sect holds significance in the domain of not only Thai political affairs but also in socio-economic and cultural lives of people. However, the bigger question in front is whether these new movements would create the likelihood of Thai Buddhism mounting a serious challenge to the existing political order. Or, would it be the other way round in which the State challenges the existing equation among the three important institutions.

The question becomes more pertinent considering the State’s demand over the control of the Buddhist Sanghas in Thailand. The modern state demanded control over all institutions of potential power, not only because of the fear of their dissent, but also because of their capacities to aid and sanctify a lot of state actions and policies. Three Sangha Acts enacted by the Thai government in 1920, 1941 and 1962 brought the Sangha formally under the government’s control. Each of these Acts created a state-imposed organizational structure for the Sangha that paralleled the current forms of government. In 1902, Siam (Thailand) was still a monarchy, and a Supreme Patriarch headed the hierarchical, centralized Sangha. In 1941, a decentralized structure was established that paralleled the democratic, constitutional monarchy and in 1962, a top-down structure was reintroduced to match the autocratic government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Thus, we see a complex equation in which the two institutions get intertwined.

Interestingly, the very concept of nation building in Thailand reflects the very nature and the relationship between these two structures. Taking into account the Sarit regime, he turned to the traditional ideology of monarchical institution and the practice of national development instead of the abstract concept of national ideology (ratta-niyom) and the practice of nation building (sang chart). It can
conclude that instead of placing primary emphasis on loyalty to abstract state or constitution, Sarit focused primary attention upon the monarch as both the focus of loyalty for the citizen and the source of legitimacy for the government. Government, in turn, became the secular arm of the semi-secular kingship and was worthy of respect and obedience by virtue of that connection.

It can be said that the sacredness of the monarch and the honor of the royal families had been recovered and revitalized in Sarit’s regime. Wyatt well describes the relationship between Sarit and King Rama IX that, “Sarit restored the monarchy to an active role in Thai society, reviving public ceremonies that had been neglected since 1932, encouraging the king to appear in public, and making the public show of allegiance to King Bhumiphol Adulyadej. Thus the government gained authority by this association. Also, he turned to the Buddhist conception of political sovereignty, which historically had been regarded as the essence of Thainess. By employing the monarchy, Buddhism and the national bureaucracy as the instruments for national development, the government in effect forced a particular form of Thai-ism into the Malay-Muslim communities.

It may be observed that throughout the history of Thailand from Sukhothai till date, the identification of the State and Buddhism cannot be separated. The Sangha sought to secure the adherence of the political rulers to Buddhist values, for this would guarantee the religious domain the political patronage and protection. However, there was an imbalance in this reciprocal relationship in Thailand. During the drafting of a new constitution in May 2007, Sanghas and Buddhist laities have asked Buddhism as State Religion. In this regards, as mentioned in previous chapters, the Thai state is ostensibly secular and the constitution-makers have rightly resisted demands to make Buddhism the state religion, but being itself an element, historical, of Theravada Buddhist culture, the state cannot entirely escape that culture, to which it owes existence and which has impelled it over the last 200 years to seek dominance over other elements.

Insofar as the question of being Thai with being Buddhist is made the cornerstone of Thai official thinking, non-Buddhists could be denied access to participation in the national community. As mentioned before, Keyes argues that it could be predicted that such a policy would lead to increasing alienation on the part of such minorities as the Thai Islam who show no signs of becoming Buddhist. The National Legislative Assembly (NLA) political reform committee voiced
disagreement with the proposed establishment of a National Crisis Council and Buddhism being declared as the national religion. The committee, assigned by the NLA to study the first draft charter, failed to see any benefit in enshrining Buddhism as the official state religion.

Yet, the southern provinces of Thailand have a tradition of “banditry”, quite distinct from communist or Malay Muslim insurgency. A social world in which assumptions about the basis of the social order and ways in which conflicts within that order can best be mediated are not shared by at least some of its groups. Despite attempts to deal with these issues by use of the school system and the Sanghas to legitimate state rule, “banditry” does persist in some forms. This is also evident in places where there are non-ethnic Thai such as hill tribes and Malay Muslims in the southern provinces. Southern Thailand has witnessed a series of violence and conflict between Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims. Recent violent incidents have several aspects such as political, historical, and socio-economic causes.

It can also be looked at the southern Thai conflict as shifting from a chiefly ethnic Thai-Malay discord to largely Buddhist-Muslim strife. Especially in the post-September 11 environment, this shift has deep implications. It has led to two common misperceptions. First, a religious conflict alludes to the picture that mujahideen from all around the world will come to the assistance of their Muslim brethren in southern Thailand. Second, it suggests that solutions for resolving the southern Thailand conflict can be found in Islam and Buddhism. Both these assessments unfortunately make the assumption that conflict identities are fixed. A recent wave of violence in southern Thailand began on 4 January 2004 and is showing no signs of declining. The frequent attacks have become a thorn in the side of the Thaksin administration. Recent literature on the conflict as well as media reports tend to represent the insurgency in Thailand’s restive south as Islamic in nature and portray attacks as revenge against the Buddhists.

In this conflictual situation, the local Buddhist community has also been subject to attack. Buddhist monks and novices, and the temples they reside in have been particular targets, and many temples now lie empty. This tactic has been interpreted as essentially a political gesture, as a campaign against the symbols of the Thai state, from which Buddhism is virtually inseparable. The attacks on Buddhists seem also to have been, in large part, aimed at driving the local Thai Buddhist community from the region, which perhaps partly explains the use of such
extreme forms of violence. Indeed, many Buddhists in the Patani region are reported to have left their homes as a result of the insurgent attacks.

The Thai administration that has promised economic growth and the removal of social undesirables seem to be bigger than expectations of freedom of the press and social equity in Thailand. This is partly because the menace of terrorism was exaggerated and then the strategy of watching and combating terrorism is overly needed, and partly because the new middle class, prosperous in neo liberalist capitalist era, are not concerned about the fate of others. While politicians also utilize the religious ideology of public religion to legitimatize their policy, an unintentional result not needed by the public was sometimes generated as a side effect.

Prudence is necessary for the evaluation of public religion, especially for human and social development by monks in Thailand. As a solution, it requires a degree of give and take on both sides, with the Muslims renouncing all separatist aspirations and accepting their statues as Thai nationals, and the Buddhists recognizing once and for all that Thailand is no longer an exclusively Buddhist state and that being a Thai is no longer synonymous with being a Buddhist. As for the southern separatists, it seems probable that if the Thai authorities continue to pursue a policy of cultural coexistence combined with gradual political assimilation, Thai Malay separatism will continue to decline. Any return to the assimilationist policies of Sarit, however, would inevitably lead to a resurgence of Malay separatism in south Thailand, with potentially disastrous consequences for the area as a whole. Keyes remarks while the Dhammatuta (Ambassador of Dhamma) programme do represent moves in the direction of making Buddhism an instrument of national policy, that has not yet been irrevocably cast. These programmes are too recent to be able to assess fully their future course. The question of the role which Buddhism is to play in Thailand's search for modernity is still undecided.

Another domain in which we find the involvement of Buddhism in the State activities is the Sangha’s involvement in the political modernization of Thailand. Although the Sangha has been involved in the modernization of Thailand for a long time, the institutionalization of its role in politics is a recent phenomenon. The governments since 1958 have tried to mobilize various important institutions of which two in particular are the monarchy and the Buddhist Sangha. The decision to use the Sangha to carry out government policies might have come from the fact that
government could not effectively integrate certain groups, which are ethnically or culturally different from the majority, such as the case in the northeast of Thailand.

In the past, rural monks, in addition to their function as the embodiment of Buddhist morality, were deemed to possess the specialized knowledge necessary to help assure the social and economic development of their communities. For example, they were responsible for literacy, knowledge of historical and literary texts, expertise in making bricks in construction, in architecture, in herbal medicine etc. In fact, monks and priests in Thailand had since long been associated with the political modernization of Thailand. Even today, monks play a significant role by engaging themselves with the developmental works and spreading social awareness to the masses.

However, by the early 1960's it was becoming increasingly evident that with the expansion of government services and advances in technology, the monk's position as a repository of knowledge has been seriously challenged. This was evidenced by the frequent clashes between the monks and the government officials on many issues. One such clash happened when the monks resisted to the government's plan to grab a forestland. The fact however is, the objective of Thailand's modernization remains the same for both the government and the Sanghas, though they differ in their approach to it. Despite this, the monks have the backing from the government in their developmental works. The Sanghas adopted a bottom-top approach to political development and modernization as is evidenced by the fact that the monks provide the local leadership to the villagers. In fact, the two Buddhist Universities, Mahachulalongkorn and Mahamakut, representing the Mahanikaya and Dhammayut sects, respectively, have initiated to refine and expand the rural monks' traditional leadership role in community service. First, the curriculum of the two universities was expanded to include appropriate secular subjects that had been deemed relevant to nation building, including geography and the social sciences. Secondly, monks upon graduation were committed to serve two years in up-country provinces while supervising social service training programmes.

Thus, a two-pronged programme was set in motion in the north, northeast, and the deep south of Thailand. The reason for the government to focus on development monks is to emphasize the monk's logic of practice and its efficacy in the specific context of a local community. By doing so, it is possible to consider the substantial function of religion in social development as a social science.
Acknowledging that there are several variations in which development monks were engaged in rural development, we cannot limit the role of monks to just only as the development facilitator. The recent role monks have played in environmental protection may be seen as a logical extension of these earlier community development efforts. The government, however, is ambivalent of its reaction to the active and expanding role of the Sangha. For example, the Sanghas' involvement in environmental protection campaigns, including protests against the degradation of the environment by both the state and private business interests, has been a major irritant to the establishment.

As is seen from above, there has always been a connection between the government and the Sanghas. This relation between the two institutions sometimes stretches to an extent where one tries to superimpose its authority over the other. And the evidences of such cases are very common in Thailand. For example, the political interference in the Buddhist affairs and corrupt political governments has dragged the Sanghas well into open politics. In fact, the Sangha became increasingly compromised and inevitably manipulated for political purposes. As a result of this, priests who constitute the Sangha have also become under the strict control of the state. The practical and religious education of the people was in the hands of the priests in the past which is now controlled by the Education Department.

The nature of the relation between Buddhism and the State vary in accordance with two factors, one being, of course, the nature of the State itself, the other, the relative strength of the Buddhist institutions. When there is a strong state in the sense that it has overwhelming monopoly over other institutions in the country, the Sanghas have an insignificant role to play. On the other hand, when there is a weak state mechanism, there is every possibility of getting the state succumbed to the other forces like the religious institutions etc. It is where the state is forced to toe the lines of the religious groups and declare a particular religion as state religion, for instance. In such cases, in countries like Thailand which is a predominantly Buddhist State, Buddhism would expect to enjoy the state support in declaring Buddhism as state religion. However, the state has been able to withstand the pressure from the majority religious groups, indicating that the state has not completely lost its power to these forces. If we are to understand the recent 1992 Sangha Act, it even challenges the prevailing power structure by ensuring that the state has control over the people through the monks and temples. Under section 106
of the Constitution, the monks do not have the right to vote. A recent law also forbids the Monks to make political statements. Hence, it might be difficult for Buddhist authorities to take a political position, which contradicts the policy followed by the government.

The other institution of monarcy also remains indispensable in Thailand. In Thailand, the monarchy is a moral force that binds all elements in Thai nation. The institution of monarchy has been in Thai society for more than 800 years without any interruption. The king has been much respected, loved, and revered. In the time of crisis, he is the one who would come down to solve the problem. The king is indeed the symbol of Thai identity. Since 1932, the supreme patriarch is the chief of Buddhist monks and is appointed by the King. He holds the absolute power to govern the whole monastic community and to direct all ecclesiastical affairs. The State, through the King, has the sole power to bestow the ecclesiastical titles to monks. The present monarch, King Bhumibol is the third king in the democratic regime. As a constitutional head of state, he reigns over the country like a paternal king. Besides many formal functions specified in the Constitution, the king has practiced outstanding roles both in political and social development.

In order to preserve the monarchical institution, the democratic government should sincerely try to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, including gap between the government officials and the common people. The government should also make the people aware of possible effects upon the monarchical power. Last but not the least, those loyal to the throne should try to educate the Thai citizens about the politics and history of Thailand.

Regarding the movements for democracy during the period of study, they have largely failed to deliver to the people, but there were also many landmarks in the history for retaining democracy. Although, the overall picture for the struggle of democracy in Thailand was kept aside due to intense Cold War politics in Southeast Asian countries. The period covered from 1957 to 1973, where the rise of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and ended with the demise of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn in the student-led popular uprising of 14 October 1973. In the movement for democracy, this uprising is a landmark and perhaps as significant as the Coup of 1932 against the monarchy in Thailand’s political history.

Conceptualizing the previous chapters, the period from 1970’s to the 1990’s saw the existence of democratic setup being rooted in Thai political life. It marked a
break-up of a strong alliance between the military and the capitalists which, in turn, allowed the intellectuals and the middle class to emerge as strong political actors in the polity. However, it is crucial to understand the notion of democracy as perceived by various political forces during this period.

The period also marked the period wherein Thailand underwent the grand project of nation building through the developmental era in Thailand, which was lunched through the Department of Public Welfare. The purpose of the programme was to strengthen sentimental ties with the tribal people and to create loyalties (of the tribal people) to the nation through development of strong beliefs in Buddhism. This policy aims at the bringing of marginal people into the national fold of Thailand through conversion to Buddhism, it seems to have origins in policies concerning the relationship between Buddhism and national integration that were first formulated in the reign of King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) at the end of the last century. Thus, Buddhism becomes a source of socio-cultural orientation for those who study and practice it to construct and engage the society in daily life.

The period about the last half of 1980’s to the first half of 1990’s marked various socio-economic changes, where there was economic boom and the raise of middle class on the one hand, and the process of democratization on the other. After this, Thailand began to witness the decline of its economy from 1995 onwards and ultimately collapsed in 1997 which is known as the “financial crisis” of 1997. The crisis drastically affected in both short and long-term human resources, mainly in the education, health, and other family and community sectors. This also created many social problems as mentioned in chapter 4. At this time, the response of Buddhist monks in different humanitarian missions was remarkable. Monks like Phra Phra Dhamma Visuthimongkol known as Loung Ta Mahabua, initiated the project for helping the nation at his temple in Udon Dhani province in the rural Northeast as a broker for the donations. The campaign is called *dho pa pha Dollars chuoy chat* (Literary meaning to donate money to help the nation at the time of crisis). Phra DhammaVisuthimongkol collected more than $US4.3 million and 1,457 kilograms of gold through donations that were all given to the Ministry of Finance. Phra Loung Ta Mahabua had advised not to waste the money, (*Phra Klung*) and to manage it for better use of the nation in that critical time. They also actively participated in combating issues like HIV/AIDS.
Concluding Observation

Tracing the relationship between these three above-mentioned institutions of State, Buddhism and monarchy, mention can be made that the ideal of Nation, Buddhism and King developed from the time of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). He stressed the centuries-old relationship between the monarch and Buddhism in a modern form by linking the king, as nation, to religion. King Rama VI described religion as an essential and necessary form of discipline and went so far as to suggest that those members of Thai societies who abandoned the Buddhist faith were not Thai.

To understand the relationship between the institutions—monarchy, the religion and the State, it will be beneficial to look at the present scenario of Thai politics today to see if the present political scenario in Thailand corresponds with the whole dynamics of the three institutions and their relations. During 1973 there was an uprising of prominent Buddhist Sangha, like Phra Kittivudho Bhikkhu, who preached that it was meritorious to kill communists. Although not supported by the religious and political establishments, he provided right-wing militants with a Buddhist ideological justification for their extremist activities. Buddhist monks took strong public stands on political issues, voicing not only intolerance for the left but even commitment to its physical extirpation, the polarization was complete, and gone was the old image of the Thai nation as a single, in its allegiance to nation, Buddhism, and monarchy.

On the other hand, the emergence of diverse Buddhist movements has accorded legitimacy and security in the face of social crises primarily concerned with the growing middle class. However, in all these processes, the unity of the Sangha is foregone, and therefore, Buddhism has become more vulnerable to government's political manipulations, and cause tussle between them. Thus, the challenge for this approach whether based on Buddhism or secular conceptions of human rights, is to encompass, or at least deal with, the possibility that others may disagree. Living with contradiction is something with which the West, not just Southeast Asia which has much experience in this regard, needs to get used to in the postmodern, multi-culturalist world of international human rights.

From the above discussion, it is clear that my hypotheses have been validated, where the government has been misusing the religion to justify their oppressive and corrupt regimes in the period of study. This nexus between the
government and religion leads to an uneasy relationship between them. And, since
the socio-economic changes of the 1980’s and 1990’s, there has also been both
tussles and cooperation between Buddhist Sangha and government, which results
into a confusing affair of the society.

It is also understood that for a long time the three institutions e.g. the
monarchy, the religion and the State have been in constant negotiation among
themselves. If we trace their roles from as early as the Sukhothai Period (1238-
1350), we can understand the relationship between these institutions, though
symbiotic at some point of time when one tried to abuse another institution to its
own advantage. Therefore, there is always a tension between these institutions. For
example, Buddhism as motivation and the Sangha as an organization capable of
mobilizing political dissent always remained a threat to the government. The Sangha
criticized the government for losing an enlightened rule while the government, or:
the other hand, in order to control an organized dissent preferred fragmented
Buddhism. The rise of Buddhist movements during our survey period are examples
of how not only the government acted in political earnest with them but also how
many of them clamored for political strength through their influence on laity and
new members. In fact, the state intervention into the matters of Sanghas and their
religious functioning, coupled with the mismanagement and mal-administration of
the government in these affairs have disturbed the relation between these
institutions.

And also, the various government policies and agencies for reaching faster
economic growth have brought new social occupations and changes in society which
was not in accordance with traditional Buddhism. It has not only caused tussle
between Buddhist Sangha and the Government but has also caused serious social
crises for rising middle classes.

Another dimension of politics in Thailand is manifested in the recent swing
of the pendulum between military and civilian government. Recently too, there was
a military coup in Thailand which brought the military back into power. The military
attempted to popularize the action by citing the rampant corruption under the
civilian administration. The military attempt to rationalize the coup is especially
significant since the military listed the threat to the monarchy. However, the real
reason for a coup in Thailand is the declining military influence and the concomitant
decline in opportunities for the military to participate in corruption.
abound in every step. Political parties are only instrument for politicians to make money.

Moreover, anyone can float a political party and dissolve it whenever they wish. But, what is worse is the changing alliance of the politicians. The number of politicians shifting party alliance cannot be counted. They have no moral responsibilities; they do what they want, without thinking of the common Thai citizens. The ultimate aim of every faction is to join a ruling coalition and then use its votes according to principles of political arithmetic to bargain for cabinet seats for its leaders. Political parties are highly unstable and mostly short-lived, often set up and dissolved at will, while factions in general are far more cohesive and tended to stick together despite their frequent moves from one party to another. Factions were therefore everything in Thai electoral politics while parties and policies are almost nothing. Another problem inflicting Thai politics today is the mixing of politics and business among the groups of politicians whatever big or small.

The striking contrast between the values of Buddhism and politics helps explain why studying their interaction is a sensitive issue discouraged by both Sangha and government officials. The present study finds that, the relationship of the Sangha with politics has changed in a situation and time of sociopolitical change. Contrary to conventional wisdom, political power has pervaded the Sangha structure, enabled the political authorities to secure the loyalty of the Sangha and to subjugate Sangha officials to the policies of the state. The study tries to explain why the members of the Sanghas are willing to co-operate with the political and economic establishment in resisting changes in the existing socio-economic structures. Even the Sangha’s involvement in the modernization has taken place in the broad terms such as political and economics development plan.

Hence, the Sangha was only a small part of a larger ideological belief system based on nation, religion, and monarchy. The purpose of the Sangha is to provide the state with moral legitimation while government protection guarantees the monks monopoly as spiritual leaders of the state. Despite their different value orientations, there is a convergence in the common interests of both in the prosperity of Buddhism. Such a convergence could end up alienating the people from the co-opted monks.

As discussed above, monarchy and the Buddhism have been used by the government for their own purposes and to legitimize their political control. The
advantages in terms of creating national support are obvious. However, in using Buddhism as a political tool the ruling power should realize that the tool can turn against them as well. The political leaders should also recognize that if they are to mobilize religion for their legitimacy, they must not re-mould religion, which through such a transformation would lose its identity and sacred nature. Buddhism and politics have coexisted in Thailand from Sukhothai until Rattanakosin era.

If democracy has to be made meaningful, it should be accommodative of differences. The diverse ethnic minorities have to be taken into account and should not be alienated from any policies of the government. This, however, should be in perfect harmony with the majority of the population. For example, the sense of insecurity of the different religious minorities in Thailand, in making Buddhism as the State’s religion, needs to give proper security and protection. In the failure of the state to provide security, there is every possibility of a widespread unrest among the minorities which might lead to social anxiety and political turmoil in Thailand. This can be prevented only with effective government mechanism and proper response through non-violence means. And the government may also create a special department or a ministry to maintain social harmony.

In order to rescue the country from the present political chaos, the political leadership today should welcome the constructive involvement of the Sangha both in word and action. Their role should not be deemed divisive and political, but rather be viewed positively as fulfilling a unique and valued resource for sustainable development. At a time when civil society’s check and balance mechanisms, including the independent monitoring organizations mandated by the 2007 Constitution, are being co-opted, compromised and marginalized, the Sangha may find itself increasingly pressed to be a moral watchdog. In its commitment to a just, equitable and compassionate society ruled by the Dharma, the Sangha may inevitably ruffle some political feathers through its counsel, critiques, cautions and programmes. However, one hopes that reason will prevail and that rational debate would result constructive activities in the society.