CHAPTER – II

New Buddhisms—Buddhadasa Dhammakaya and Santi-Ashoke

In recent times, there has been a discourse in Buddhism about how Buddhist teachings have brought about negative influence in Thai society more or so in the case of Dhammakya sect. It is in the light of the emerging new Buddhisms that the second chapter will examine as to how the emergence of the new sects have reinforced temple economies and its operation. Yet, it is equally significant that one has to explore the role of other sects such as Santi A shoke Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in the operation of temples and its influence on Thai society by being adherent to the teachings of Buddhism. In this context, the present chapter will discuss the role of both the sects and their influence on Thai society. It will therefore be more illuminating to study these movements in a broader perspective by placing them within the context of Sangha hierarchy and contextualizing it in the rapidly changing Thai society.

Historical Perspective of Buddhism in Thailand

Before we go on further to discuss Wat Dhammakaya movement, Soun Moukh and Santi Ashoke, it is good to understand the original teachings of Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism) in Thailand. Buddhism was introduced in Thailand some twenty-three centuries ago when the region was inhabited by Mons and Lawas. Nakhon Pathom was then the administrative center and after the advent of the religion, became an active seat of Buddhist propagation. Later, the region was occupied by the Thais, also followers of Buddhism. Khun Luang Mao, who ruled over the Ailao Kingdom about two thousand years ago, was the first Thai Buddhist king and the professed upholder of the religion (Hazra1982:68-69, Plaintr1994:23; Bodhinantha 2005:12-13). A large number of sects, schools or philosophical systems have evolved and all of them, quite rightly, came under Buddhism; for example, Falun Gong - Falun Da, Suma Ching Hai International Association, True Buddha Order (Zhen Fo Zhong), Sheng-yen Lu, Soka Gakkai, etc, spread across the world. They believe on wide ranges of ideas, which are also fall in Buddhism.
Then, come to another definition of Buddhism with rituals grown around the doctrine of Buddha and the way of life preached by him, and thus becoming a religion. The following chart assists in understanding the various major schools of thought within Buddhism.

![Buddhism Chart]

**Source:** Schumann, Wolfgang (1973), Bhikshu Sangharakshita (1966:296)

Mahayana Buddhism spread to Thailand in the 9th century during the reign of the Srivijaya kings, who ruled from Sumatra and whose territories extended over some southern provinces of Thailand. Meanwhile, the Khmer authority and influence also spread over the whole of central and northeastern Thailand. The
Khmer kings were adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, which had by then absorbed much of the Brahmanistic elements into its system. It was around this time that Mahayana Buddhism and Brahmanism began to exert deep influence on Thai culture. Although neither of them came to replace Theravada Buddhism, their cultural influences were considerable, and can be readily observed even today (Gellner 2001:45-46). Buddhists in Thailand believe in the Buddhism of the Theravada school which came from Pugam (Burmar) and later from Sri Lankan Buddhism. Prior to this there existed both the schools: Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. The difference between the two is in the methods of practicing the code of discipline and in the concept of *Arahantship.* Theravada Buddhism, known as the “Doctrine of the Elders” strictly observes the teaching of Buddha. It was called by the opposite school as the “Small Vehicle.” The Mahayana Buddhism or the Bodhisattava doctrine, teaches the existence of a Human Buddha or Buddha-to-be, (Bodhisattava). Mahayana is sometimes called the “Greater Vehicle” (Sangharakshita 1966:220-221).

**Theoretical perspectives**

The thrust of the Buddha Dhamma is not directed to the creation of new political institutions and establishing political arrangements. Rather, it seeks to approach the problems of society by reforming the individuals constituting that society and by suggesting some general principles through which the society can be guided towards greater humanism, improved welfare of its members, and more equitable sharing of resources (Ven:K.Sri Dhammananda1996:494). The relation between Buddhism and politics is not quite simple as it is between Buddhism and culture. For, being concerned with the individual rather than with the group, culture is related to Buddhism as personal religion, but not to Buddhism as institutional religion. Moreover, from an institutional point of view, Buddhism comprises two groups, the first being the community of common believers of both male and female and the second being the noble Order of monks. These two groups need not have the same kind of relation to politics. In order to understand clearly the relation between Buddhism, both personal and institutional, on the one hand, and politics in the

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1 *Arahanta* has several meanings. It may be interpreted as “Worthy one” ‘passionless one’. Or one who commits no evil even secretly. He has got rid of both death and birth. After death, in conventional terms, he attains parinibbana. Until has death he serves other seekers of truth by example and by precept.
various senses of the term, on the other, it would be necessary to investigate the relations between (a) the Buddhist doctrine and political theories, (b) Buddhism and the State, (c) the laity and the government, (d) the Sangha and the government, (e) the individual monk and the government, (f) the layman and practical politics, and (g) the monk and practical politics (Sangharashita Bhikkhu et al: 2006).

Buddhism originated at the time when the model of the ruler in the world was mostly based on the idea that the state is an organism with the head and other supporting parts. In ancient India, four sections/strata of people are mentioned in the Hindu social hierarchy: the Brahmin (religious teachers), the Kshatriya (the king and his army), the Vaishya (traders), and the Sudra (the slaves). According to this model, the King plays the role as the head of the state. The King has a group of higher religious teachers as consulting committee whose primary duties are to give moral advice concerning administration of the state to the King. Sometimes the Buddha is asked to give the advice to the kings (Morgan 1986:44-51; Thapar 1982:32-39).

As a result, the Buddha usually gives a sermon on the virtues to be practiced by the kings. There are a number of the virtues given to the kings recorded in the Tipitaka (Pali Canon). As cited above, in Ayutthaya Era, due to the Indianization, the Khmer concept of Kingship had changed, and the Thai system of paternal king into of divine sanctity devaraja or god king had originated. The Indian theory of the king as the receptacle for the divine essence of Siva and Vishnu had been changed from the idea of Bodhisathava (Jayasuriya 2008:46-47). Thus the two concepts are comparable as mentioned in Chapter I.


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2 The Aggañña Sutta illustrates the sequence of social evolution according to cause and effect thus: People become lazy and begin to hoard rice (previously rice was plentiful and there was no need to hoard it) and this becomes the preferred practice people begin to hoard private supplies unscrupulous people steal other's shares to enlarge their own censure, lying, punishment, and contention result responsible people, seeing the need for authority, appoint a king some of the people, being disillusioned with society, decide to do away with evil actions and cultivate meditation practice. Some of these live close to the city and study and write scriptures; they become the Brahmins. Those who remain with their families continue to earn their living by various professions; they becoming the artisans. The remaining people, being vulgar and inept, become the plebeians. From among these four groups a smaller group breaks off, renouncing tradition and household life and taking to the 'homeless life.' These become the Sramanas. Aggañña Sutta (A Buddhist Genesis) on the science part, Buddha implied the theory of the Evolution of Universe, where it is said to shrink and then expand in repeated cycles.
However, the Buddhist approach to political power is the moralization and the responsible use of public power. The Buddha preached non-violence and peace as a universal message. He did not approve of violence or the destruction of life, and declared that there is no such thing as a 'just' war. He taught: 'the victor breeds hatred, the defeated lives in misery. He who renounces both victory and defeat is happy and peaceful.' Not only did the Buddha teach non-violence and peace, He was perhaps the first and only religious teacher who went to the battlefield personally to prevent the outbreak of a war. He diffused tension between the Sakyas and the Koliyas who were about to wage war over the waters of Rohini. He also dissuaded King Ajatasattu from attacking the Kingdom of the Vajjis (Rahula: 1998:84).

The Buddhist ideal that receives the most attention in regard to a Buddhist politics is that of the Universal Monarch, the "Wheel-turner" or Cakkavattin. We will deal with it only so far as this ideal reinforces the case for Buddhism not justifying the use of violence in securing social order. The Cakkavatti Sutta begins with an exhortation of the monks to be their own support, which as in Plato's Republic begets an initial ambiguity over whether the work is to be taken as a serious political proposal or an analogy for self-understanding and discipline (Stroble 1991:4-5).

In any case, the distinguishing characteristic of the Cakkavattin is that he rules "the Earth to the extent of its ocean boundaries, having conquered territories not by force of arms but by righteousness." The noble duties of the Cakkavattin are to provide protection, shelter, and security for all, including the birds and beasts, taking the Dhamma as his sole guide and support, enquiring of the proper teachers as to the proper course of action. No specific policies are here mentioned, but from the fact that the conquest by righteousness is contrasted with one by force, we can surmise the same held for domestic policy.

Here we note that, early Buddhism, then, did not approve of the use of violence by kings, anymore than by anyone else, but merely accepted it as the fact, and did what was proper to the circumstances. As Chakravarti points out even though the Buddha did not propound the theory of the cakkavattin to any actual kings, "the Buddhists developed the idea of the Cakkavatti Dhammiko Dhammaraja who, by a just exercise of power would play a pivotal role in transforming society," as a counter to the excesses of actual kings (Chakravati 1987:196:198).

Thus Buddhism would have to deny the instrumental use of violence to defend even itself, and would have to pursue another method for the overcoming of
violence. This, as we find in the Dhammapada is the understanding of the causes of violence and the non-violent solution to it. At some level the intricate mechanism of the state for maintaining social order becomes unnecessary or even counter-productive. But faced with the actual existence of kings and armies, the Buddhists put forward a model of kingship that rules without punishment, legislates without enforcement. The problem is that with the preeminence of the king preserved, it is all too easy for the old methods to be put in service of the new goal without the separation of powers between the political and religious communities (Evans 1996: 89-113). Thus the king not only defends the Dharma from external threats, but also from internal dissension within the Sangha itself, so we have an absolute monarch whose use of force is justified only by himself. Thus we find the reversal of priorities which gives us the idea of violence, and indeed war, that is sanctioned by Buddhism, but in fact ignores the teaching of Buddhism concerning violence and suffering.

The Buddha discussed the importance and the prerequisites of a good government. He showed how the country could become corrupt, degenerate and unhappy when the head of the government becomes corrupt and unjust. He spoke against corruption and how a government should act based on humanitarian principles. The Buddha once said, 'When the ruler of a country is just and good, the ministers become just and good; when the ministers are just and good, the higher officials become just and good; when the higher officials are just and good, the rank and file become just and good; when the rank and file become just and good, the people become just and good' (Pali Text Society (1995) of Anguttara Nikaya, Vol, I, pp., 91-98). In the Cakkavatti Sihananda Sutta, the Buddha said that immorality and crime, such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty, could arise from poverty. Kings and governments may try to suppress crime through punishment, but it is futile to eradicate crimes through force (Pali Text Society1995, of the Digha Nikaya Vol, III, No.58. pp., 53-59). In the Kutadanta Sutta, the Buddha suggested economic development instead of force to reduce crime. The government should use the

3 The last of the Five Collections Nikayas of the Second or Sutta-Pitaka in the Pali Canon is called Khuddhaka-Nikaya, and of its contents, which are mainly anthologies, the first two are Khuddaka-Patha and Dhammapada (Pali Text Society,1995:Vol I : V) The Dhammapada consists of 423 melodious Pali verses, uttered by the Buddha on about 300 occasions, to suit the temperaments of the listeners in the course of His preaching tours during His ministry of forty-five years. We will give on example thus: Na hi verena verani - sammantidha kudacancam - Averenaca sammanti- esa dhammo sanantano. (Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love (Avera, literally, means non-anger) alone they cease. This is an eternal law. The Buddha advises Metta or loving-kindness is the only answer to modern.
country's resources to improve the economic conditions of the country. It could embark on agricultural and rural development, provide financial support to entrepreneurs and business, provide adequate wages for workers to maintain a decent life with human dignity (Pali Text Society1995 ‘of the Digha Nikaya’ Vol. II. Part. I, pp., 160-172).

In the Jataka, Buddha had given rules for good governance, known as ‘Dasa Raja Dharma’. These ten rules can be applied even today by any government which wishes to rule the country peacefully. As guiding principles of a ruler, he states that rulers should be liberal and avoid selfishness. They should maintain a high moral character, be prepared to sacrifice their own pleasure for the well-being of the subjects, be honest and maintain absolute integrity, be kind and gentle, lead a simple life for the subjects to emulate, be free from hatred of any kind, exercise non-violence, be practice-patient, and respect public opinion to promote peace and harmony.

Regarding this behavior of rulers, he further advised that a good ruler should act impartially and should not be biased and discriminates to a particular group or subject against another. A good ruler should not harbor any form of hatred against any of his subjects. A good ruler should show no fear whatsoever in the enforcement of the law, if it is justifiable. A good ruler must possess a clear understanding of the law to be enforced. It should not be enforced just because the ruler has the authority to enforce the law. It must be done in a reasonable manner and with common sense (Cowell, E.B1995:131-138). In the Milinda\(^4\) Panha, it is stated: “If a man, who is unfit, incompetent, immoral, improper, unable and unworthy of kingship has enthroned himself a king or a ruler with great authority, he is subject to be tortured, to be subject to a variety of punishment by the people, because, being unfit and unworthy, he has placed himself unrighteous in the seat of sovereignty. The ruler, like others who violate and transgress moral codes and basic rules of all social laws of mankind, is equally subject to punishment; and moreover, to be censured is the ruler who conducts himself as a robber of the public.' In a Jataka story, it is mentioned that a ruler who punishes innocent people and does not punish the culprit is not suitable to rule a country (Cowell 1995:34-35).

\(^4\) Milinda (lived 2nd century bc), Indian name for Menander, Greek ruler of Bactria, an ancient country in present-day east Afghanistan. Milinda’s discourses with the Buddhist monk Nagasena are recorded in the Milindapanha (2nd century ad, translated as Questions of King Milinda), an important text in Theravada Buddhism, in which certain key Buddhist teachings are explored.
The king always improves himself and carefully examines his own conduct in deeds, words and thoughts, trying to discover and listen to public opinion as to whether or not he had been guilty of any faults and mistakes in ruling the kingdom. If it is found that he rules unrighteous, the public will complain that they are ruined by the wicked ruler with unjust treatment, punishment, taxation, or other oppressions including corruption of any kind, and they will react against him in one way or another. On the contrary, if he rules righteously they will bless him (Pali Text Society1997: of Majjhima Nikaya, Vol, II: No.85, pp., 292-297).

As Buddhist theory of state is based on the assumption that one of the duties of the State is being the moral teacher. However, we can distinguish between the virtues of the State and of the people. Normally, the father must have virtue higher than his children, otherwise he cannot teach them to be a good person. In the same way, the State (the Prime Minister, the Ministers, the President, the King, and so on) must have virtue higher than people, otherwise a role as moral exemplar will be meaningless (Promta 2006:1-22). Confucius says that the ruler is compared to the North Star which means the symbol of the state. If the ruler is bad, it hardly has good citizens. On the contrary, if the ruler is good, his goodness will make it possible to have good citizens. Buddhism totally agrees with Confucius.5

Belief system and Practices

Before one begins to examine the discourse on the movement of various Buddhist Sanghas in Thai society, it is important to briefly study the nature of belief system among the Thais, particularly the conventional believers who constitute the vast majority of the population. Buddhism, to them, is a way of life. Thais learn from an early age at home, school, and the temple about how to be a “good person” according to Buddhist standards, to follow “the Noble Eightfold Path” so that they may ultimately achieve enlightenment and escape the suffering of rebirth. Though few individuals make a lifetime commitment to religious pursuits (necessary to

5 Confucianism, major system of thought in China, developed from the teachings of Confucius and his disciples, and concerned with the principles of good conduct, practical wisdom, and proper social relationships. Similarly, the five precepts of Buddhism and the five practical morals of Confucianism were shown to be identical. Other areas looking for similarity were: Politically, Confucius advocated a government in which the ruler is benevolent and the subjects obedient. He believed that the monarch should cultivate moral standards in order to set a good example to the people. Confucius was well known for his ideas on education, which he believed to be valuable for all people, regardless of class.
reach nirvana, according to the Theravada School), (see appendix for more details in Theravada School) there exists a cultural expectation that men enter the monk head for a short period as a rite of passage or an act of filial piety. The world of a Thai villager (and that of many city folk as well) is inhabited by a host of spirits of greater or lesser relevance to an individual's well being. Although many of these are not sanctioned by Buddhist scripture or even by Buddhist tradition, many monks, themselves of rural origin and essentially tied to the village, are as likely as the peasant to accept the beliefs and rituals associated with spirits (Piker 1979: 115; Priyanut 1997:153-156).

A number of authors have also seen Thai religion as influencing the preoccupation with surface effects. Mulder describes Thai religion as a carefully constructed presentation of Buddhist ritual married with a hybridized belief complex built from selected teachings of Theravada Buddhism that are compatible with pre-Buddhist animistic beliefs in supernatural (saksit) power. In this light, the surface form of power in modern Thailand can be seen as deriving some of its epistemological characteristics from the distinctive metaphysics that underpins the society's hybridized Buddhist-Brahmanical-animist religious complex (Mulder 2000:19).

In addition to the rites dedicated to an assortment of spirits either regularly or as the occasion demands, other rites intended to maximize merit for the participants are practiced. Buddha prescribes no ceremonies for birth, death, and marriage, but the Hindu rites adopted by the Thai people entail the participation of Buddhist monks. The monks limit their participation to chanting the appropriate Buddhist scriptural texts or to providing holy water (Kirsch 1973:188). In fact, the spirit cults associated with Thai practices are frowned upon by many reform-minded Buddhists such as the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the most prolific Buddhist philosopher in Thailand (Buddhadasa 2006:14). Buddhadasa further criticized the worship of Buddha images now sullied by popular ideas about their supernatural powers (an extension of the spirit cult). However, Ven:Sri Dhammananda argues that Buddhists respect the Buddha statue as a monument of the greatest, wisest, most perfect and compassionate religious teacher who ever lived in this world. The image is necessary to recall Buddha and his great qualities which inspired millions of people from generation to generation throughout the civilized world (Ven: Sri Dhammananda 1996:360). Buddhadasa suggests that Buddhism depends on reason
and insight. He did not oppose the move to produce Buddha images to raise funds for construction of a hospital building at a military camp. The disciples, however, disagreed with the use of the temple as the ceremonial venue. Performing the rite went against the teachings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who opined that Buddhism cannot be practiced through good luck or charms (Ibid, p., 15).

According to social critics like Prawese, Thai Buddhism has experienced chaos and crisis since the 1980s. Buddhism in contemporary Thailand has become an “alienated and unwanted surplus” in Thai life and society (Prawese 2005). Its institutional and moral foundations have been considerably weakened by penetrations of modern consumerism and materialism. Thai Buddhism has been facing difficulties and challenges from both inside and outside Buddhist institutions. Thai Buddhism has by and large lost its moral authority, spiritual leadership and cultural significance in contemporary Thailand, because its leaders and institutions lost their battlegrounds to the aggressive and complex forces of modernization and globalization from outside. Moreover, the Thai Buddhist Sangha has often been criticized for its corruption-stricken administration and visionless ill adaptation (Phra Paisal Visalo 1999: 236). Kitiarsa criticizes some monks who use traditional skills that are based on traditional knowledge to bind themselves to their clients. Some offer therapy through magical spells, through self-made or mail-order herbal pills, through massage-cum-prayer sessions, medical bathing, through distributing amulets, or through predicting lottery numbers or through tilting the luck of politicians during elections (Kitiarsa 2008:138). He thought it as superstition.

Thus, the Thai people, like all cultures in adopting a religion, have added their own seasonal holidays, folk beliefs, and customs, some of which have nothing to do with Buddha or his message, and others in which the original meaning has been forgotten. In the first case, Suan Mokkh refuses to participate. No crude superstitions are tolerated, although they are always trying to sneak in. In the latter case, the ceremonial aspects are simplified and the spiritual meaning and value stressed (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu1999:1). Thai customs are of course followed, but in simple ways that can support Dhamma understanding rather than mere emotional gratification. Not only is this approach courageous and daring (in any time or culture), it takes much hard work. It is not easy to explain the deeper significance of holidays and traditions to “believers” more intent on warm feelings and fun. These explanations must be repeated year after year, not only for the local villagers, but
also for school teachers, soldiers, governors, academics, monks and foreign scholars. These are merely some superficial examples of Suan Mokkh’s attempt to recover “Pristine Buddhism.” The most important aspect of the attempt involves taking a “new look” at the basic and essential teachings; especially those overlooked by traditionalists and have stirred up controversies (Ibid.p.2).

Changes in Thai Society and its Religion

In Chapter one, we have already discussed how King Rama VI wanted to make Buddhism as civil religion in the country. During his reign, King Rama VI himself instituted an experiment in democratic polity (Reynolds 1977:275). After King Prachathipok (Rama VII) took over the throne, Rama VII actually began to make preparation for a voluntary transition to a more democratic political system. The king, however, was not inclined to let the matter rest. As the reign was on, his thinking on the subject of political change became steadily less cautious. A second stage in this process occurred in 1927, when the king appointed a committee to devise a broader advisory council (Landon 1944:15-16). As part of their deliberations, King Rama VII wrote a memorandum on ‘Democracy in Siam’ in which he argued that “if it is admitted that some day we may be forced to have some form of democracy in Siam, we must prepare ourselves for it gradually. We must learn and we must educate ourselves. We must learn and experiment so as to have an idea as to how a parliamentary government would work in Siam. We must try to educate the people to be politically conscious, to realize (their) real interests so that they will not be misled by agitators or mere dreamers of Utopia. If we are to have a parliament, we must teach the people how to vote and how to elect representatives who will really have their interest at heart” (Batson 1977:13-22 cited in Wyatt, David K. 1999: 236-237). But before these plans could come to fruition, a group of military and civilian officials took matters into their own hands, engineered a successful and largely bloodless coup and established a constitutional regime according to their own design. The first group of Siam’s government had never listened to the voice of Thai people especially Buddhist majorities in the country. Phra Promhkunaporn puts it, “when they think of democracy, most people think of its forms and its physical structure, such as the senate, the House of Representatives, the courts, and the powers of legislation, administration, and arbitration, but little thought is given to the truly indispensable part of democracy, which is its heart. The
heart of democracy, its real substance, is an abstract condition. Without this substance, the structure is meaningless. To obtain democracy, we must look deeply into its substance or heart, not simply its structures.” (Phra Dhammapitaka 1994:4). He further suggests that the substance and the structure must exist together; either one without the other will not be truly effective. However, what we really want is the substance, not the structure. The structure's only meaning is in its capacity to contain or support the substance (Ibid., p., 5). Therefore, it is important to ensure that those structures really support democracy's heart, and not become empty, polluted or false. True democracy cannot be obtained by copying a set of structures. That is how Thai government copied British's structure of democracy which does not suit to Thai culture. Even the present King Bhumibol advised the CDC (Constitution Drafting Committee) and NLA (National Legislative Assembly) while drafting the Constitution to make it simple and suitable to the people of Thailand.

Buddhism and Its Impact on Thai Politics

Buddhism has deep impact on Thai politics which the government seldom realized about it. After 1932 military coup and the establishment of constitutional monarchy, the role of Buddhism and kingship became problematic. Their place in the new order was considered at least partially in instrumental terms. As it turned out, the leaders of the new regime became convinced that the maintenance of a civic religious life in which Buddhism and kingship played a major role was necessary in order to assure in realization of their national goals. However, there can be little doubt that the ultimate focus of Thai civic religion had become the nation itself. What is more, in the period since 1932, this emphasis on the primacy of the nation has been continually reaffirmed by the leadership and it has with the passage of time, become increasingly recognized by the population at large (Reynold F. 1977:276).

During the coup and its immediate effect, the monks generally maintained their traditional distance from partisan political involvement. And then Sangharaja acted as a mediating figure whose influence helped to ease the country through the difficult period of transition. In the years following the coup, Buddhist interpreters gained a hearing with the various factions of the political and social elite by presenting Buddhist teaching so as to support both "traditional values and democratic change." In addition, the Sangha was able to retain a powerful hold on
the loyalty of the village folk, nor only through its specifically religious appeal, but also by providing a channel through which the more capable and ambitious villagers. They could rise to prominence in a context where they did not have to compete with their more sophisticated urban compatriots (Keyes 1989: 135-136).

Thus, in spite of occasional expressions of philosophical skepticism and anti-clerical hostility, Buddhism was able to retain the basic respect of the various often conflicting segments of society; and by doing so; it was able to maintain its influence as a major pillar of Thai civil religion. At the same time, that the political authorities gave their support to various Buddhist activities and causes, they also exerted a strong influence in national ecclesiastical affairs. Although the impact of the monarchy of the events of the early 1930s was obviously much more immediate and extensive than the impact experienced by Buddhism, it too was able to weather the crisis. The king quickly indicated his willingness to cooperate with the new government, a serious confrontation was avoided; and since the majority of the new leaders recognized the important function the king could perform in maintaining the identity and unity of the nation and in giving legitimacy to the new regime, the monarchy was given a definite though carefully limited place within the new constitutional order (Reynold F. 1977: 277). It always stressed that:

The King shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the King to any sort of accusation or action. The King is a Buddhist and Upholder of religions Council (Constitution of Kingdom of Thailand: Government of Thailand 2008 Section: 9).

Buddhism and Impact in Thai Modern society

Thai religion as being an integral part of the total social system also undergoes changes as the socio-economic political system undergoes changes. In Thailand, new Buddhist movements begin to redefine the role of religious community within society. This trend has promoted further laxity in religious matters and erosion of centralized monastic authority (the new Buddhist movement challenges the Sangha hierarchy of the old order in Thailand. In other word, it is called the Council of Elder in Thai Mahathera Samakhom). The trend underscores the need for a socially relevant, contemporary belief system and structure beyond traditional patterns and ritual patronage of the Sangha (O'Connor:1993:330-339). The new religious movements as products of the Buddhist engagement with
modernity and as reactions to the totalizing constructs of traditional galactic polities are located in highly differentiated, multifaceted contexts. As their "globalizing constructs" are embedded in increasingly encompassing social, economic, and intellectual expert systems, they continue to take shape and be shaped by emerging political and social contexts (Schober 1995:309). Jim argues that new religions in Thailand, as in other cultural contexts, are not so much a return to (an-other) interpretation of perceived tradition, as recognition of new possibilities that are latent in the sentiments and experiences of modern (material) everyday life, which is contradicts to spiritualism of the Thai Buddhism.

So, it is individual's worldly life that are reshaping by the social processes of modernity. Religion is an integral part of these interactive, complex and articulated social processes where we see a complex move towards hybridity and the challenges of conventional boundaries and spaces of sanctity. The global experience of Buddhism in the west is another hybridizing domain that has been well researched in recent years (Taylor 2004:2). Thus, Taylor thought that the discourse of present Buddhism cannot be understood by its only theoretical aspects, it has been changing with the time, associating with modernity to adjust with the ever changing society.

The movements identify features of the religious ideologies and ethics, on the one hand, explain their reasons among the disenchanted modern urban middle class and, on the other, define lay communities in a manner that is antithetical to the conventional relationship between Theravada Buddhist society, state and religion: O'Connor argues that forms of authority and legitimation no longer seek to reproduce or adapt the totalizing constructs of the galactic polity, Thai society modified articulations of the modern nation-state, or other prevailing processes of legitimating status and power. Instead, new movements aim to replace them with alternative modes of constructing relations between Buddhism, society, and political power that contradict conventional sources of religious and political authority (O'Connor 1993:333).

Knox comments that increasingly, Bangkok society is being influenced by the West. While Thailand's leaders seem eager to embrace industrial, educational and economic models of Western countries, they seem to have blinded themselves to the fact that cultural and social spheres of life are inextricably bound with industry, education and the economy (Knox, Bangkok Post 22, February 1998). He further comments Bangkokians are turning to predominately secular lifestyles as found in...
many Western societies, because the traditional reciprocity between Buddhism and social and family life is quickly fading. Often, all that remains is the shell of religious practice, an empty ritual of money changing hands.

Kittiasa points out that, as Bangkok changes culturally and socially, it drags the rest of the country with it by the chains of the economy and the mass media. Buddhism has been one of the strengths of Thai culture and Thai people through centuries of change. Perhaps now more than ever, Thais need relevant religious guidance, not barren rituals or secularism. Buddhist practice must come to terms with changes in social practice if the religion is to remain relevant (Kittiasa2005:461-466).

Thai Buddhism has also changed. Buddhaization has made it purer but as Kirch argues the lost element served functions that Buddhism is moving from a temple localized to a Sangha-centred religion (Kirsch1977:265). O'Connor comments that lay religiosity (lay Buddhist practices) are moving the same way. For example, they look at amulets and meditation (O'Connor 1993:336). Neither is new but their popularity is growing. The temple has changed. As Sangha reform pulled one way, society went another. Now as temple and society stand further apart, the temple becomes peripheral. We could call this gap secularization or Buddhaization (Ibid.,).

The transformations from traditional galactic polities to modern nation-states initiated profound re-conceptualizations of the relation between Buddhism and Thai modern middle class society. The religious reforms of the nineteenth century ushered in unprecedented centralization of the Sangha, enhanced the religious authority of the laity and rationalized cosmology in the Southeast Asian Theravada tradition. In Thailand the advent of an independent kingdom brought further sweeping changes in political, religion, economic innovations, and access to increasingly modern life styles, all of which have radically altered the social, cultural, and Buddhist landscapes of these countries (Swearer 1995:114-115).

As a result of the advancement in the field of science and social sciences, new knowledge and information about man and his society has shaken and unsettled many traditional beliefs and the great historic faiths like Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism as well as the institutional system based on them. These beliefs have become alien, obsolete or old-fashioned for members in modern societies which are
characterized by industrialization. This has created an acute theological crisis to all

Religious leaders have tried to translate important traditional religious
elements into modern terms to make religion more relevant to modern societies. As
the traditional sources of religious authorities have come more and more into
question, religion has become more privatized and individualized. As a result,
religious influence has decreased, at the same time, religious conflicts and
differential religious sects have sprung up. Existing religious institutions and
teachings are indeed facing challenges from social changes, and the resulting
religious development (Phra Sithawatchamethi 2006:2-3).

According to Satha-Anand in the past few decades, Thai Buddhism has
gone through many precarious and oftentimes frustrating adventures. Public
criticisms of the inertia of the mainstream Sangha establishment, several sex
scandals involving much-admired leading monks, proliferation of independent lay
movements, reformist movements with the Sangha, aggressive proselytizing efforts
from imported neo-Christian and Japanese healing cults, Buddhist feminist voices,
and so on, have created a raft of challenges for the Thai Sangha (Satha-Anand
1990:395). In this process, there have been signs of intolerance within the Sangha as
can be seen in the purging of the Santi Ashoke movement in the late 1980s, and that
of the Dhammakaya movement in the 1990s. Satha-Anand emphasizes that in the
past few years, a new wave of intolerance spreading against other religions in Thai
society has taken shape. The major reason of this recent ultra-conservative
development might have been the proposal to set up a National Committee on
Religion in the newly reformed Ministry of Culture and Religion, which will be
charged with the authority to deal with all religious matters in the kingdom
(Ibid.,). One of the major criticisms of this idea is that the proposed plan is to include
representatives from all religions in the national committee (Satha-anand 2004:207;
Swidler 2007:15-16). By the fact mentioned above O'Connor points that there are
three factors responsible for the religious changes in Thai society. First, narrowing
acceptable Buddhism widened Thai religion. Practices and people driven out of the

6 Partly due to protests from some Thai Buddhists, including many monks, the plan was dropped. At
the moment, instead of the planned National Committee on Religion, a separate National Office of
Buddhist Affairs was established outside both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of
Culture, and is under direct supervision by the Prime Minister, in the Prime Minister's Office,
While religious matters regarding other minority religions are under the supervision of the Ministry
of Education, as it used to be.
well-controlled temple now flourish on an uncontrolled religious market. Second, religion has a new clientele: a middle class whose tastes and money already back reform Buddhism and some new movements. Where old money approached temple (wat) as patrons wanting honour, this new wealth comes to religion as consumers expecting results. Third, Bangkok overwhelmed localism to make a nation whose variety now threatens to remake religion (O’Connor 1993:336). Thai government has brought the countryside under capitalism. This is one of the reasons of local religious practices evolved over centuries, are now free from palace and at present anyone can follow any religion as it was never before. He further asks “Are people shopping for new religious forms because the old ones failed? Surely we need to know this before we impute angst or infer Buddhism cannot meet modern religious need (Ibid. p., 337).

Within dominant discourses of Thai identity Thailand is represented as being a Buddhist society. Indeed, Buddhist ritual, teachings and the institution of the Sangha have played vital symbolic roles throughout recorded Thai history. However, observers of actual religious practice and belief have often commented upon the complex and syncretic character of Thai religiosity, which combines animist, Brahmanical and Buddhist elements.

New Religious Movements – An analysis of Buddhadasa Dhammakaya and Santi Ashoke

In this section, an attempt will be made to critically analyze the three New Religious Movements. The three major contemporary Buddhist religious movements, the Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Suan Moke Movement), Ven: Chaiboon Dhammachayo (Dhammakaya Movement) and Samana Bodhirak (Santi-Ashoke Group) responded to the changing socio-economic conditions of the Buddhist community and also to the inertia of Buddhist establishment (Satha-Ananō 1990:395). Phongphit points out that these three movements have made serious attempts to communicate and provide answers in terms of spiritual needs of the Thai people, basically the urban middle class in the modern context (Phongphit 1999:70). These religious movements have been allied the Sila group (Santi Ashoke), the Samadhi group (Dhammakaya) and the Panna (Wisdom) group (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu).
In Thailand, this was immediate, with the ease with which movements assumed such agenda having been influenced by the ideological foundation of the social movements that fought for the opening of democratic space. The counter-ideology that was carried by oppositional movements directly negated the State’s appropriation of the Thai identity, and had therefore used the very same logic to invert the dominant State project. Reformist Buddhism was used to launch a deconstruction of the “nation, religion, King” dogma, and the village became a metaphor that was offered to be an antithesis to the corrupt and elitist State (Contreras 2003:10)

Thus, even as the initial agenda of the democratization movement in Thailand was to open spaces for participation, the struggle did not end there, but had to be carried through into the domain of the political construction of social capital. The State was challenged not only as a structure of power that favored elite modes of constitution but also as a sphere of legitimation that alienated Thais from their true Thainess.

The Buddhadasa Bhikkhu Movement (Suan Mokha: The Garden of Liberation)

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, all people in the world, including the Thai people, are now in the same situation as were the Kalama people of Kesaputtanigama, India, during the time of the Buddha. Each of these teachers taught that his personal doctrine was the only truth and that all others before and after him were wrong. The Kalamas could not decide which doctrine they should accept and follow. The Buddha once came to their village and the Kalamas brought up this problem with him that they did not know which teacher to believe. So the Buddha taught them what is now known as the Kalama Sutta, which will be examined here. Buddhadasa further points out that “...worldly people can study many different approaches to economic, social, and technological development. Then, regarding spiritual matters, here in Thailand we have so many teachers, so many interpretations of the Buddha’s teachings, and so many meditation centers that nobody knows which teaching to accept or which practice to follow.” Thus it can be said that we have fallen into the same position as the Kalamas were in (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu1999:1: cited in Anguttara- Nikaya1995: No.65, pp., 170-178).
Buddhadasa was born into a local Chinese family in 1906 in the small town of Chaiya in Surat Dhanee province. According to the Thai culture, boys have to be ordained at the age of twenty. The primary path to esteem and prestige for Thai men is the service in the monastic order. Traditional values for becoming a monk are to gain great merit for himself and his parents for going to Heaven, and to become a mature adult. Most Thai young men leave monkhood after spending three months in the temple rather than a life-long pursuit. Buddhadasa was ordained by the age of 20. After Buddhadasa became a Buddhist monk, as he wrote in his autobiography, “he had never given up yellow rope as he enjoyed his mindful and studied Pali literature in the educational system established for the Sangha by Prince Wachirayan. Unfortunately he failed the 3rd grade of Pali examination, which was a turning point in his life and since then he started staying in the forest which he found more conducive to practice Buddhism and study directly from nature. That is how the ‘Garden of Liberation’ came up. As argued by thinkers, Buddhadasa was the first and foremost Buddhist reformist in Thailand to seriously think about Buddhism (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1990 Buddhadasa’s archives: 1937:6, Phongpaichit1998:166-167). After devoting most of his life to reforming Buddhism in Thailand, Buddhadasa found it necessary to address socio-political issues from a Buddhist perspective. In the 1960s, he articulated his socio-political position in terms of “Dhammocracy” (Dhamma-thipatai): the social and political order should follow the law of Dhamma—the teachings of the Buddha (Kuwinpant 2002:1-18, and Phra Dhammakosajarn 2006). Later, in the atmosphere of the student led revolution in Thailand from 1973 to 1976; Buddhadasa presented his unique theory of “Dhammic Socialism” (Dhammika Sangkhom-niyom). Buddhadasa’s theory of Dhammic socialism is based on nature (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2005:130).

Dhammic Socialism Theory (In Thai คุณูปทศมิเรศคณิยม)

The term 'Dhammic Socialism' was coined by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in the late 1960’s in response to the growing political polarization in Southeast Asia. Through the sixties, Thailand had been pulled into the geo-political mess of which the Vietnam War was the major conflagration. As the sixties developed, growing violence between the communist insurgency and the right wing military backed by the U.S. resulted in the murders of tens of thousands. During this time, Buddhist monks were routinely threatened into refraining from political comment, a silencing

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compounded by decades of cultural belief persuading most monks that politics and other ‘worldly affairs’ were none of their concern. This was the climate in which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu began talking about Dhammic Socialism. Since the forties, when he came to national prominence, he was one monk who had not feared to discuss politics (Santikaro 2003:1). Previously, he did so primarily in terms of democracy, which was not the Thai system of government. During the sixties, he began to assert, openly and forthrightly, that Buddhism is basically socialist in nature. He was the first major figure in Thailand to do so (some Burmese leaders had used the term “Buddhist Socialism” McCarhy2007:26-27 ) and the first to approach the topic with the particular meaning he gave it — something he continued to do for the rest of his life (Ibid., p., 2-4).

The “socialism” (sangkhom-niyom) in the Thai language is interesting in itself as it reflects a Buddhist perspective on socialism. The term Sangkhom comes from the Sanskrit root sangha (community), and Niyom from the Sanskrit root Niyama (restraint). So Sangkhom-Niyom literally means the restraint of each member of the society for the benefit of the community. The restraint of oneself is one of the most basic teachings of the Buddha: sila (normality, “precepts”). As Buddhadasa understands it, the Buddhist Sangha (community of monks) is a living example of the socialist way of life and the socialist community in Buddhism. For him, “dhammic socialism” is socialism of the Dhamma. Buddhadasa bases his idea of dhammic socialism on his insights into nature, the teachings of the Buddha, and the practice of the Buddhist Sangha (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1986:15).

Changkhwanyen observes that Buddhadasa’s analysis of socialism, which he referred to as “Dhammic socialism,” must also be looked at in this light in order to determine whether it is in fact socialism or not; if so, what kind of socialism it is and what special features it has. We will decide these issues partly on the basis of his writings and partly on the basis of support and rejection from others (Changkhwanyen 2003:117). Within Buddhadasa work, we will be first analyzing the two word socialism and Dhamma which go up to make Dhammic socialism, before going on to a practical evaluation (Buddhadasa Op.,cit p.,16). Buddhadasa uses the term socialism in a slightly different way from how it is used in the West. His analysis of socialist thought is clearly based on the teachings of the Aagganna Sutta, although he does not actually cite it. This, he proceeds to analyze with a
modern socialist outlook, an outlook on surplus and class exploitation, and then combines socialist thought with absolute monarchy and the righteous king (Dhamaraja).

We will attempt to determine just how viable his system of thought is, and in order to clearly understand it. We will cite his words: “Socialism is a natural state. Here he uses the word nature in a sense that includes its Pali meaning and conforms to the concept held in Buddhism and other religions such as Taoism (Taoist).”\(^7\) Taoism uses the word “Tao” in many senses. It can mean “nature,” “the source of all things,” “a path or way,” “living according to that way,” and “the destination of the way.” These meanings have a similarity to the idea of God in Christian and Hindu teachings. Buddhadasa says of the word Dhamma:

> “Dhamma, God, Dao, or whatever, can refer to ‘a way,’ to ‘traveling along the way,’ or to ‘arriving at the destination of the way.’ They are all the same and cannot be separated, and doing so would serve no purpose” (Dhammika Songkom niyom).

The reason he explains socialism as a natural state is that he sees all things as socialist by nature; i.e., they all exist together within the one system. He uses the phrase “one system” in a very broad sense, including the physical world, such as the stars:

> “We study in science about the world and its mechanics, about all of the galaxies within the universe, and they are all a socialist system. The countless stars up in the sky exist in a socialist system, they are all right and well according to the socialist system, and that is how the universe can survive. This tiny solar system of ours, with the sun surrounded by the various planets, including our own earth, exist together in a socialist system. But they are not so crazy as to crash into each other. These days human beings are so crazy they bite each other and clash with each other because they adhere to an unrighteous (non-Dhammic) socialism, one that is not right according to the standards of nature, and do not know the truths of nature.” (Changkhwanyuen 2003:118-119 Cited in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2005 pp.,8-15).

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\(^7\) The essential Taoist philosophical and mystical beliefs can be found in the Dao dejing (Tao-te Ching, Classic of the Way and Its Power) attributed to the historical figure Laozi (Lao-tzu, 570?-490? BC) and possibly compiled by followers as late as the 3rd century BC. Whereas Confucianism urged the individual to conform to the standards of an ideal social system, Taoism maintained that the individual should ignore the dictates of society and seek only to conform with the underlying pattern of the universe, the Dao (or Tao, meaning “way”), which can neither be described in words nor conceived in thought. To be in accord with Taoi, one has to “do nothing” (wuwei)—that is, nothing strained, artificial, or unnatural.
Next Buddhadasa described this natural state is composed of two important factors. Firstly, things existing together; secondly, their existing together are interdependent; there is no conflict or aberration within the system. That means there is balance and there is unity. To him, nature represents the state of balance for the survival and well being of human beings, animals, plants, and the ecology of the world. In the state of nature, every being produces according to its capacity and consumes according to its needs; no being, whatever form it has, hoards “surplus” for its own sake (Buddhadsa 2006:127 in Thai). Buddhadasa calls this balanced state of nature socialistic. Problems arise, however, when human beings begin to hoard a “surplus” for the sake of their own profit; this leaves others facing scarcity and poverty.

According to Buddhadasa, human beings can and should produce “surplus,” but the “surplus” should be distributed for the well being of everyone, and Buddhism provides the ethical tools for this fair distribution. Buddhadasa’s individualistic approach to social and economic problems, solved by the personal practice of self-restraint (sila “precepts” and vinaya “discipline”) and giving (dana), is, in many respects, reflective of his Theravada Buddhist world view (Chayabongse 2006).

Jackson suggests that within the modern economic situation, however, he (Buddhadasa) fails to address the issue of scarcity and poverty at the structural level caused by the global market economy (Jackson 1988:305). Therefore, proposes to analyze critically about Buddhadasa's theory of Dhammic socialism from a more structural and comparative perspective. Other critics like Tavivat argues that Buddhadasa's Dhammic socialism, which uses the older form of traditional Buddhist society as a model for a contemporary society, does not take sufficient stock of the intractable nature of structural problems. If the life of the Thai people in the past was "better" than today, it was mainly because of the self-sufficiency of their local economy and the decentralization of political power, ensuring the integrity of local culture and social values. To advocate a change of form without changing the underlying structure is to miss the point...political structure into one of more local decentralization, with moral and cultural values adapted to a contemporary context. Only then can Buddhist social ethics take root in society as it did in the past (Putarigvivat 2003:189).
Tavivat further analyzes the Buddhist spirit of loving-kindness, compassion, sharing, and cooperation expressed in Buddhadasa's Dhammic socialism will then prevail, at both personal and structural level (Ibid). For Chokechai Buddhadasa's ideas are used, on the one hand, to support cultural identity and nationalism and, on the other hand, to support the country's integration into the global economic and cultural order. Significantly, in this account Thailand's globalization is not only considered possible without the loss of cultural identity, but is also represented as a return to the supposed rational roots of Buddhist culture (Chokechai 1993:89).

However, Chokchai's views on the impact of globalization are not shared by all of Buddhadasa's followers, such as Santikaro Bhikkhu who believes that Chokechai has wandered quite far from Acharn Buddhadsa's message. He never argued for the integration of Thailand into the global economy. Rather, his criticisms of materialism, consumerism and capitalism should lead thoughtful readers to think of getting disentangled from the global economy. He (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) was highly critical of the capitalist project and the unbridled individualism and selfishness it has fostered (Santikaro Bhikkhu 1997:89).

**Buddhadasa's vision of the Present Buddhist Monks**

Buddhadasa has been influential in providing cognitive and evaluative elements that have been incorporated into Thai culture and its social structure. Buddhism is deemed as the instrument of the Thai people's identity and cultural continuity. Buddhism is consistently woven into all thoughts and actions of the Thais whose cultural life has been their great attachment to the doctrines and rites of the Buddhist order. However, in the present times one notices how Buddhist monks and the Thais in general Buddhadasa seem to have lost confidence in their own cultural values by undermining their own cultural traditions in the context of western materialistic culture as argued in his book *Dhamma and Politics* (Buddhadasa 1976:257).

In one way, such changes among the Thais negates the preaching of Buddhism. They are so much influenced by the media of the multinationals and western-style clothes. The high-ranking Buddhist monks are also forgetting the basic teachings of the Buddha to live a simple life in quest of higher wisdom. These modern monks are competing with each other for their materialistic advancement. Today even the lay Buddhists actually worship money and success. Some monks
frequently attract followers and make money by telling fortunes and suggesting lucky lottery numbers. "To put it in a nutshell, traditional Buddhism does not cater to modern Thai people, but only for those who go to temples for superstitions or astrologers or fortune telling," said Sulak, a Buddhist scholar and social critic. "Otherwise people only care about the temples for funeral services and car parking." Many temples make extra money by letting out their grounds for parking (Sivaraksa2003:5-6). According to Satha-anand these conflicting pictures of contemporary religious movements reflect a turning point in the history of Thai Buddhism (Satha-anand 2004:193).

In the process, Buddhadasa, as argued by Santakaro⁸ lays a theoretical framework for an alternative social and political order. From a doctrinal perspective, his emphasis on the study of the Pali Suttas and on "right understanding" (Sammaditthi) has identified him as a representative of the Buddhist emphasis on the centrality of wisdom (Panna) in Buddhist praxis. Swearer notes that, throughout his long career, Buddhadasa adopted a critical stance towards religion, social and political structures. In doing so he applied the normative teachings of Theravada Buddhism-non-attachment, non-self (Anatta), emptiness (Sunnata), dependent co-arising (Paticcasamupada) and nibbana (Pali) – to show people how to live in the world by adhering to Buddhist teachings. In addition to this, Buddhadasa contends that Nibbana in the above sense is not solely a monastic pursuit but a goal for everyone (Swearer 2005:16-17).

**Buddhadasa’s Movement and His Followers**

Buddhadasa’s teachings had far and wide ranging influence on the lives of many people. His impact has remained strong especially among university students, professional elites and social activist monks and laity. With regard to membership of the Suan Mokh nobody knows, as Buddhadasa has told that, he also insisted that Suan Mokh has no branch, no disciple or member. Thos who lead their lives with “correct understanding” (samma-ditthi) are disciples whether they know Suan Mokkh or not, and those who do not lead such kind of life are not disciples even if they may claim to be. On this matter, Buddhadasa commented that: "To make

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⁸ Santikaro Bhikkhu is Abbot of Suan Atammayatarama (USA) and on the Executive Committee of Phra Sekhiyadhamma, a nationwide network of socially concerned monks. For a number of years, he served as the English translator for Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.
people understand the teachings more is organization itself. Right understanding is power. The need to do similar things enables people to get together themselves without conditions. And when they are not together, they have no conflicts, so this is a natural organization,” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1992:34-39).

His movement has proved to be a relatively loosely knit association, so informal in its organization that many of its followers were led to believe that it has no “organization” and that it did not exist as a “separate” group. This was felt to be true because there is no committee, no bureaucratic officials, no legislature; no regular pledges of financial support were organized; and no efforts were made to formulate an explicit creed of beliefs and practices. To support this argument, Swearer comments that monasteries found throughout the country, such as Umong Temple in Chiang Mai province, promote his teachings, and noted Buddhist lay men and women such as Prawasei and Buddhist feminist and university professor Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, publicly acknowledge their independence to Buddhadasa’s teachings and examples. Sulak Sivaraksa is another follower who has been involved in the founding and sponsorship of numerous non-governmental organizations in Thailand and the international network of Buddhists activist monks who are engaged in development work. All these individuals and organizations are directly influenced by the teachings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

Finally, these people and organizations in turn play a crucial role as a bridge to take Buddhadasa’s teachings to the rural areas, where villagers are the vast majority of the population of Thailand. This dimension of rural expansion of the movement is often overlooked. At the same time, the lay followers, who live in urban areas, promote Buddhadas’s teachings among people around them. They have organized one group NGO, it is known as Sehkiyadhamma.

According to Jackson, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was in fact a product of his age. He referred his time as the decline of Buddhism. His search for spiritual meaning and his reinterpretation of Buddhism could not have occurred isolated from socio-cultural environment of his time. However, his religious thought could have

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9 At present Donald K. Swearer is the lecturer at Centre for Buddhist Studies Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University
10 Prawasei, Wasi is a medical doctor who devotes himself to the health development programs in rural areas in the Northeast of Thailand. He was a recipient of Magsaysay award in 1980s. He is now the Dean of the Public Health Faculty, Bangkok Mahidol University
11 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh wants to bring a Bhikkuni Order back to Thailand again, but she is objected by all the Sangha hierarchy in Thailand.
developed beyond the fabric of traditional Thai Buddhist teachings and practices. The motivation for his interpretation of Theravada doctrine seems to go far beyond the simple problem of communication. It is rather a problem of making Buddhism not only meaningful but also relevant to the modern world. At the same time Buddhadasa also sees his work as an attempt to return to pristine Buddhist teaching (Jackson 1988:242). Buddhadasa’s teaching has spread for over 50 years and has become one of the most prominent religious movements in contemporary Thailand. As Suwanna notes for the masses, his ideas seem to be too liberal and radical. It is not surprising to find that most of his followers are limited to intellectuals and the most educated among the middle class (Satha-Anand 1990:398). To a considerable degree, Buddhadasa’s movement does not only manifest change in Thai culture and society but also suggests a stage of religious development facilitating change.

**Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s Political Theory**

Buddhadasa’s political thought is conservative, and it is here that many of his most fervent supporters’ part company. For Buddhadasa, moral responsibility must take precedence over freedom. Individual political rights should be forsaken to guarantee social order and stability. Dictatorial means, albeit inspired by moral rectitude and spiritual values, become a tool to promote the Dhamma and assure peace and social order. In terms of political thought he suggests that, “We need to see politics as a form of practical morality... when politics is seen as a form of morality, it can help the world” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2005:88-89). It is argued that, “politics is a moral matter. For a political system to be moral it must be consistent with the truth or the essence of nature (the sacca of dhammajati). A moral political system embodies Dhamma, whereas a political system not based in morality is dishonest, destructive and inconsistent with the essence or fundamental truth of Nature. As Buddhadasa defines it,“True politics is a struggle against misunderstanding, wrong view, craving after defilements and the like” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2005:134-135).

As the result of his long observation of nature, Buddhadasa affirms that a will of nature exists. This will of nature has a collective or socialist property. Clouds produce rain; the rain falls to the earth and forms a river; the river’s moisture rises to clouds again. Natural phenomena coexist and support each other. This is a natural
process in which everything is codependent. If we accept this, Buddhadasa argues, we must also accept the truth that no one can live without the support of others. The result is that all of us have the moral obligation to do good deeds for others. This is Dhammic socialism in Buddhadasa’s view, a political and social pattern he believes to be in accordance with the true spirit of Buddhism.

Buddhadasa’s political theory and his emphasis on morality have its followers in some of the scholars. Analyzing Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism, Swearer Donald maintains that dhammic socialism is premised on three basic principles of the good of the whole deals with political, economic, and social structures, of restraint and generosity governs individual behavior and finally, the principle of respect and loving-kindness prescribes the right attitude toward all forms of life. He argues that Buddhadasa’s vision serves as a critique of both capitalism and communism and provides the basic principles for a political philosophy with the potential to help guide Buddhist Thailand to a more just and equitable social, political and economic order (Swearer 2004:33-34). However, there were critics of Buddhadasa’s theory. For example, Puntarigvivat argues that Buddhadasa’s political theory in Buddhism is an old and controversial one (Puntarivivat 2002:10).

In conclusion, Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism represents a particular Buddhist response to rapid social change in a modern Asian state. For an ideal political system and society, Buddhadasa always refers to the “golden age” of the historical past whether it is a society during the time of the Buddha, King Ashoka of India, or the kings of the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Bangkok periods in Thailand. Buddhadasa portrays those ancient societies as full of the spirit of Dhammic Socialism with the leadership observing the ten royal virtues, people practicing Buddhist ethical principles such as self-restraint (Sīla and vinaya), loving-kindness (Metta-Karuna), and giving (Dana) (Bhuddhadasa 2006:114-115).

As in any traditional society, people in those periods might have had more intimate social relations and have followed religious disciplines more strictly. But Buddhadasa forgets the historical fact that those societies contained various forms of social oppression such as slavery, annual indenture ship. An inhumane and arbitrary legal system has many assassinations in the recurring power struggles for the throne. Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism reflects his view of a Buddhist Utopia.
As a political programme, it fails to address realistically contemporary political, economic, and social issues facing Thailand today (Puntarigvivat Op., cit., p., 9).

Jackson comments that the contradiction between Buddhadasa’s theoretical radicalism and his conservative practice manifests itself in many ways, all of which raise doubts about the ability of his system to successfully fulfil his stated intention of making Buddhism relevant to the lives of contemporary people. The contradictions between theory and practice tend to alienate the very people Buddhadasa has said he is most concerned to reach, the progressive, modernist and educated Thai people (Jackson 1988:305) Jackson further argues the structural contradictions in Buddhadasa’s work do not have only a sociological significance. Jackson is not of the belief that Buddhadsa’s personal inability to effect the sweeping reforms he foreshadowed early in his career should be taken as indicating that Theravada Buddhism is incapable of adjusting its role and outlook in order to become an effective moral and religious voice in modern Thai society (Ibid.,p., 306).

Despite the shortcomings in Buddhadasa’s political thought, his dhammic socialism still serves as an indigenous traditional critique of modern economic and political theories as well as the construction of moral guidelines to create a new political philosophy. Buddhadasa’s greatest contribution lies in his theory of the state of nature which provides a philosophical agenda for solving the environmental and ecological crises facing Thailand today. As a leading reformist Buddhist figure, Buddhadasa has laid a religious foundation for contemporary Thai thinkers to search for a more realistic political ideology which would link traditional Thai culture to the modern problems under the influence of the global market economy (Swearer 1995:133; Jackson 1988:278-279).

Next we will discuss the Dhammakaya Movement which has been known through its work of propagating Buddhism among Thai intellectuals, but behind the modern adaptations of the Dhammakaya School of practice lies an oral tradition motivated by the intricate teaching of founder Phramonkolthepmuni (1885-1959) a celebrated meditation master and the late abbot of Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen, Thonburi (Swearer 1999:215).
Wat Phra Dhammakaya movement

In extreme contrast, the philosophy of Wat Phra Dhammakaya movement at its expansion is basically through the use of electronic media and other forms of capital such as cash. In other words, it means that the abbot has made Buddha doctrine as a tool to make people believe that by charity a lot of money should be given to temple and practice meditation in their way, so that they can achieve nirvana easy. In Dhammakaya Monastery there is educated ‘middle class’\(^\text{12}\) gathering at this place, but they hardly know well the doctrine and teachings of Buddha. His teachings are usually in contradiction. For example, meditation according to Buddha teachings begins with mental disciplining exercises in the introductory stages of other meditation systems but his teachings focus on a Buddha image or clear crystal ball which was to be imagined at the centre of the mediator’s body. This imagined image would eventually be replaced by a vision of a similar object, also positioned at one’s centre of gravity, a point said to be two inches above the level of the navel. That was called by Phra Mongkol Thebmunee of Wat Paknam Pathom-mamak. This method is easy equation of Dhammakaya with the way to nirvana, it is difficult to accept for most Buddhist scholars, but people who practice meditation in Dhammakaya temple do not appear to be bothered by the doctrinal controversy (Zehner 1990:402-404, Sivaraks 1995:116, at the original website http://www.dhammakaya.or.th).

Dhammakaya movement does not have the mass appeal and is more influential in the lives of urban middle class of Bangkok. The Dammakaya temple was begun by Chaibul Suthipol, the present Ven: Dhammachayo. He was born in 1944 in Singhaburee Province in central Thailand. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk after graduation from Kasetsat University Bangkok and in 1969 he established the centre of Buddhachak for meditation practice that became the Dhammakaya Temple (Zehner.,p., 408). Wat Phra Dhammakaya is a Buddhist temple in Khlong Luang District, Pathum Thani Province north of Bangkok. It was established on Magha Puja Day 20 February 1970, on an eighty-acre (320,000 m\(^2\)) plot of land donated by Lady Prayat Phaetayapongsavisudhathibodi. The site, sixteen kilometres

\(^{12}\) In this context the term "middle class" is used in a broad sense, including officials who play important roles in many sections of Thai society. Many are Western educated and live in a Westernized style.
north of Bangkok, was originally called ‘Soon Buddacakk-patipat-Dham’. From acidic paddy fields, woodland was created: parkland for meditators. The foundation stone for the main chapel laid by H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on behalf of H.M. the King in December 1977 marked the official foundation of the centre as a temple. In 1978, the Royal Thai Government’s Department of Religious Affairs granted this centre official registration as Dhammakaya Temple, (Liebhood 1999).

The Dhammakaya movement is one of the indices of a quiet individualistic revolution that has been taking place in Thai society over the past several decades. The present discussion seeks to interpret the movement in terms of its social context, and understand the doctrine of Buddha teaching through their teacher, Dhammachayo. In Bangkok, the Dhammakaya is only one of several innovative monasteries, meditation and study centres that have grown up around dynamic religious leaders over the past 30 years. However, many Thais are impressed by Dhammakaya’s size, including some in other religious traditions, by looking its organizational methods for clues as to how to build their own movement (Bowers, J 1996:8-11).

**Dhammakaya Movement and Its Expansionist Policy**

Dhammachayo sees himself as a key leader in Buddhist reform movement in improving the lives of his followers and to strengthen Buddhism and bring prosperity to Thailand. But Dhammakaya’s detractors criticize the meditation method around which the movement has been built; deplore the movement’s expenditure rates and fund-raising techniques and criticise on the ground that it uses hypnotic mind-control methods over its followers (Taylor 1990:135-154). Some Thai people have observed all persuasions that Dhammakaya’s skilful use of positive national and religious symbols for their purposes, its abilities to organize students and young urban professionals to work at staging visually and emotionally appealing public displays.

The Dhammakaya movement had an advantage over other Buddhist groups in mobilizing and training university students. The present focus is to study its expansion through various activities such as Sunday activities at the new centre in Pathumtanee, but also through the activities of its associated Student Buddhist
Clubs. All these clubs have functioning university and student organizations for extra-curricular Buddhist activities. Dhammakaya participants became active in the clubs and in 1972 they began to take control of the clubs by electing their own slate of candidates in the annual elections, often in the face of stiff opposition (Taylor, p., 136). Once Dhammakaya candidates gained control of a club, the club essentially became an integral part of the Dhammakaya organization. When Dhammakaya controlled the club, they used the name (in Thai Language as *Chomlom Buddhhasath-Sathabun*), Buddhist Institutions of Higher Education with the blank space containing a numeral indicating the number of student Buddhist clubs currently controlled.

Dhammakaya clubs sent a paper to a central coordinating committee, which purportedly assisted in providing needed services to all of the clubs with the advice and assistance of the Dhammakaya Foundation. In practice, the coordinating committee was the conduit through which the foundation controlled, coordinated, and homogenized the activities of all the clubs, making them centres for mobilizing the manpower and donations needed to promote and build the organization. According to Zehner from the very beginning Dhammakaya controlled only a few university clubs, such as Kasetsart University, Chulalongkorn, and Thammasat University Clubs, as well (Mahidol University (later withdrew). The Chulalongkorn University became coordinating centre for all the clubs, and the Dhammakaya Foundation would later take offices in the Kasetsart University Alumni Building (Zehner 1990:404. In the late 1980s, the Chomlom Buddhhasath coordinating committee officially organized publicity for an annual training programme, and an annual *mass ordination*, operated free weekly bus service from Bangkok to the Pathumthani Centre. There was constant stream of religious instruction, proselytization campaigns, fund-raising activities both on campus and it was extended to the surrounding neighbourhoods, and publications emphasizing testimonials of student participants (Zehner, p., 406).

The movement has developed several forms of teaching and practice at odds with mainstream Thai Buddhism including encouraging lifetime ordination. Although the movement was originally independent, it quickly integrated itself with the Mahanikaya ecclesiastical hierarchy, including sponsoring mass ordinations at Benjamabophit and donating some of its surplus funds to the Mahanikaya Sangha.
hierarchy (Phra Paisal Visalothorn 2003:3-4). It is argued that, its leaders, Phra\textsuperscript{13} Dhammachayo and Phra Dhattacheevo, were educated in marketing and used their skills in business administration to promote their network in Thailand and abroad. Some critics point out that like the new religious movements in Japan, Dhammakaya is run like a modern business.

Swearer attributes the rapid growth of the Dhammakaya movement in the 1980s to the growth of the culture in Thailand. Dhammakaya provided the new growing middle class with links to the traditional symbols of secular power and authority in the monarchy, bureaucracy, and big business. A great royal ceremony to celebrate the king's 60th birthday at the Dhammakaya temple in 1987 was sponsored by the Bangkok Bank, the Thai Farmers' Bank, the Siam Commercial Bank, and the Thai Army, a fact that clearly shows what mighty economic and political connections the Dhammakaya movement has (Swearer 1999:214-215).

These brief highlights of the Dhammakaya movement indicate that the movement does not follow the core teachings of Buddhism, rather, it drifts apart from Buddhist teachings and the movement has an appeal only to the urban middle class who are active consumers of modern amenities. Over the past years their religious figures have been in the eye of a storm over criminal charges of embezzling money from donations, and religious charges of teaching incorrect doctrines. Yet his mammoth Dhammakaya Temple on the outskirts of Bangkok continues to attract thousands of followers every weekend.

"The audience is the globalizing middle class, and Dhammakaya is telling people they can have it both ways," said Suwanna, "It is trying to transform Buddhism to make it comfortable with both capitalism and consumer culture." For example, she said: "One teaching is, you make money Monday to Friday, then on Saturday and Sunday you come to the temple and meditate and your mind will be more supple and clear so that on Monday you can make more money." The temple encouraged staff to compete with each other for the greatest number of donations. To practice meditation as Dhammakaya claimed as a short cut to nirvana, attendants had to donate certain amounts of money in order to participate in the course. The aggressive fundraising techniques and campaigns used by their staff are for one

\textsuperscript{13} The term, \textit{phra}, represents the Pali, \textit{vara}, and functions as an honorific before titles, e.g. Phra Buddha, sacred objects, e.g. Phra Dhatu, as well as a generic term for monk.
reason and one reason only i.e. money (Horn: 1999). This has thrown Thai Buddhism into an uproar. The sect's leader, Phra Dhammachayo, has been accused of fraud and embezzlement as well as religious heresy. Newspapers are filled with demands that he be tried or defrocked or both. The top body of Thai Buddhism, the Sangha, has demanded the abbot's removal and has summoned him for questioning all of which he has ignored, only deepening the public's sense that the traditional religious structure has become weak and irrelevant (Seth 1999; Mackenzine 2007: 254).

Julian points out over the last three decades that the soft-spoken abbot has built up a following of close to a million, amassed tens of billions of baht in donations, and set up branches around the world, making Dhammakaya the richest temple in the kingdom. His new enormous prayer hall gives followers what they crave, a modern religious venue in which to pray and meditate, in an atmosphere far removed from the thousands of antiquated and backward temples that dot Thailand (Julian: 1999).

**Dhammakaya distorts Buddha's Doctrine**

To Dhammachayo's critics, he is commercializing Buddhism. The Buddha taught that merit could be earned through good deeds (including donations to monks), but opponents say the abbot's streamlined fund-raising techniques including glossy brochures and telemarketing go too far. Most serious, perhaps, are allegations that Dhammachayo's teachings deviate from the core principles of Theravada Buddhism, which is effectively the state religion of Thailand (Phra Dhammapitaka 1994:28). According to his detractors, the abbot teaches that Nirvana is a kind of permanent heaven, whereas the Buddha's concept of Nirvana was merely the total absence of desire, anger and delusion. It might seem like a fine distinction, but many Thais are concerned. "This is the worst crisis ever faced by Thai Buddhism," says Deputy Education Minister Arkom Angchuan. "If this deviation goes unchecked, there will be further deviation, and ultimately Buddhism will be destroyed," (Liebhold, *ASIA News*, 28 June, 1999).

Attempting to defuse things, Dhammachayo says there is room for various interpretations of ancient texts. The insights gained through deep meditation, he says, can be difficult to express in words. He could also argue that Thailand's traditional Buddhist monks have some doctrinal shortcomings of their own. Many temples offer fortune telling, astrology and lucky charms (none of which accords
with Theravada doctrine), and donations are expected in return. “Dhammachayo’s popularity is based on the weaknesses of the mainstream monks” (Ekachai: Bangkok Post, 19, 1999). She adds, “The Thai clergy has largely lost touch with society, especially the middle class.” Prawese comments, ‘if this gazing on the Dhammakaya leads one to Nibbana all by itself, then it must be a different Nibbana than the one the Buddha taught” (Prawese 1987:37).

Dhammakaya and Thai Rak Thai Party (one of the political parties in Thailand)

The abbot of Phra Dhammakaya Temple was the first one to initiate contact with members of Thai Rak Thai. It was believed that the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) would have Dhammakaya’s backing. Thai Rak Thai representatives were given the opportunity to speak to the temple’s followers, who were urged to cast their votes for the party, as it would naturally be beneficial for their master and temple (Mettanando Bhikkhu: 2006, 27, September, The Nation).

General Sonthi Boonyaratglin argues that the recent coup in Thailand was triggered by the deep divisions in Thai society. There is little doubt that the unholy alliance between Phra Dhammakaya Temple and Thai Rak Thai has contributed in no small part to this polarization. In the wake of the coup, both Thai Rak Thai and Phra Dhammakaya Temple have kept a low profile. Their greatest concern is what the coup-makers and the interim civilian government plan to do with them in the course of trying to uproot the culture of deceit and corruption by the Thai Rak Thai Party and what the likely repercussions of this would be for Phra Dhammakaya Temple. In a way, Thaksin and Dhammakaya Temple are a natural alliance. Thaksin is one of the Kingdom’s richest people and Dhammakaya Temple is known for its business-like accumulation of wealth and merits (Ekachai 1999, 21, Bangkok Post). The temple is full of expensive modern mega-edifices, such as a giant hall shaped like a flying saucer. Its covered prayer hall, where the administrators meet, is surely one of the country’s largest halls. The Dhammakaya is clearly a state-supporting institution and part of the state sangha, whereas the Santi-Ashoke group provides an alternative to the state Sangha and is outside the state hierarchy (Ibid.,). Apinya, the assistant abbot of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, confirms this view when he summaries the symbolic relations between Buddhism and politics in these words, ‘monks can by no means put any pressure on the politicians. But when a monk has charisma,

Thus, Buddhism provides legitimizing authority to certain types of political discourses and to the political process. Importantly, Buddhism also lends legitimacy to counter-discourses critical of the government of the day, the power of the centralist state bureaucracy and the expanding influence of capital. Rationalist Buddhism, in particular, provides a framework for a discourse of political criticism often aimed at supernatural beliefs and the political affiliations of monks who reputedly possess super natural power. This power is immanent in ethical action and is believed to be capable of transforming the social world for the better.

Santi Ashoke Movement in Thai Society

Santi Ashoke has been particularly controversial and cause of considerable concern among establishment circles, but for different reasons. The leader of the Santi Ashoke movement, Rak Rakpong was born in Srisaket Province in northeastern Thailand in 1943. At the age of 36 he was ordained as Buddhist monk - first as a Dhammayutta sect, and later moving to the Mahanikaya. Phongpaichici describes that Phra Phodhirak’s critical and fiery sermons won him followers as well as enemies within the Buddhist establishment (Phongpaichit, Chris, 1999:167). Phodhirak moved with his followers to Nakorn Pathom Province where the group built a small building in which to practice Dhamma, which he sees as a mixture of both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. They called their place “Santi Ashoke’s Land”, and despite several orders to destroy it, they managed to survive and gradually grow in numbers. From Santi Ashoke Movement, it became the Ashoke Community (*Chom-chon Ahoke*). They are spread in nine provinces, a group of

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14 Santi-Ashoke’s Social Movement was a name that The Ashoke Buddhist Community used in the beginning of the group. Now, Santi – Ashoke is a name of Ashoke people who live together at an Ashoke Buddhist community centre in Bangkok. However, this name is still known by Thai people and foreigners to represent The Ashoke Buddhist Community.

15 The Ashoke Buddhist Community has nine centres as

i) Srisa Ashoke in Srisaket, northeast, 1976
ii) Salii Ashoke in Nakornsawan, central Thailand, 1976
iii) Santi Ashoke in Bangkok, capital, 1976
iv) Pathom Ashoke in Nakorn Prathom, north of Bangkok, 1980
v) Sima Ashoke in Nakorn Rachsima, northeast, 1990
vi) Rajthanee Ashoke in Ubolrachathane, northeast, 1994
vii) Taksin Ashoke in Trang south, no. date
viii) Phu-pha Fa-Nam in Chianmai, north, 1995
ix) Hin-pha Fa-Nam in Chaiyaphum, northeast.
Buddhist practitioners in Thailand which defines itself as an authentic Buddhism, in which its followers can decrease their desires and simultaneously increase their productivity and creativity.

The followers must strictly observe 5 or 8 precepts and become vegetarians. Santi Ashoke adheres to a strictly moral-based community, following the Theravada precepts with ten extra codes for monks and lay followers. It extols the virtues of an economic doctrine of ‘meritism’ that is anti-materialist and anti-consumerist, preaching “eat little; use little” with an emphasis that can be expressed as “work a lot, save the rest for the society.” However, for almost thirty years, Phodhirak has persisted in his efforts to build new forms of Thai community based on his interpretation of Buddhist philosophy (Sangsehanat 2004:5-6).

The Dammakaya Movement emphasized the practice of meditation for its members; the Santi Ashoke group requires strict moral behaviors from its relatively small number of followers. As Suwida points out unlike other reformist Buddhists who try to reinterpret the Buddha’s teachings to be relevant for modern society, Phothirak, the leader of The Santi-Ashoke Buddhist Community, overthrows the contemporary values and social system both in its theoretical and practical dimensions. The result is that the Santi-Ashoke Buddhist Community is the only one that has created alternative communities, with their Sangha congregation which is not under the Sangha Council. It has proven to survive more than four decades as an anti-systemic movement in Thai society (Sangsehanat 2004:275).

In this section, an attempt will be made to discuss the role of Santi Ashoke in political involvement with General Chumlong Srimoung, and utopian Buddhist practice. The section will study on how Chamlong Srimoung and Phothirak have played in political movement in Thai politics. Santi-Ashoke has their political affiliations. McCargo accounts how Santi-Ashoke that operated outside the organizational structure of Buddhism that attracted large numbers of often influential followers, including Major Chamlong Srimuang, founder of the Palung Dhamma Party, raised suspicions about the heterodox movement’s possible political motivations (McCargo1997:102).

Santi-Ashoke became a focus of heated political debate in the second half of the 1980s when senior members of the Sangha hierarchy questioned the legality of
Phothirak’s administrative secession from the state-controlled monkhood. Phothirak had earlier established his own ordination lineage although not qualified or authorized to carry out ordinations (Ibid., p. 103). To justify his actions he cited similar activities of the Buddha which did not allay the simmering hostility of the Supreme Council of Buddhist Sangha mentioned above. Santi-Ashoke in any case repudiates this bulwark of the Thai religious establishment and, up until late 1988, ill feelings continue unabated (Santimatanedol 2005, 12, Bangkok Post). In late 1995 Phothirak was found guilty of the charges, but received only a suspended sentence. In effect, he has been allowed to continue his independent religious path unhindered by state authority because, in the 1990s, it is largely politically irrelevant whether he bows to the Sangha authorities or not (Jackson 1997:78). Furthermore, Jackson describes that the changing character of Buddhism’s relationship to the state is clearly shown by the fact that a greater political cost now attaches to quashing a heterodox movement such as Santi Ashoke rather than to allowing it to continue.

Santi-Ashoke Buddhist way of life and Its Movement

The Santi-Ashoke way of living is mainly concerned with the practice and propagation of Buddhism in a nation where Buddhism consists of 95%. As Marja-Leena analyzes that as such, background on Thai Buddhist practice and responses to modern problems will facilitate a deeper understanding of Ashoke movement’s foundational principles and its significance within the wider Thai society (Heikkilä-Horn 1996a: 93). Ashoke people believe that to succeed in work as a team they have to eradicate the sense of self, which automatically eradicates kilesa (greed). Then, group and society become the most important factors for the Ashoke people in having a place and interaction to develop their mind. This is a good, traditional religion-based strategy to integrate individual with society (Ibid. p.111). While there is a liberty in the individual, there is a concern for the collective. Then both individual and society get usefulness together. Moreover, they elaborate this teaching to cover an abstinence from distressing human, animal, and nature. This issue strongly counters the core-periphery relationship and the destruction natural to the mainstream. Therefore, the Ashoke Buddhist community emphasizes natural agriculture (Mackenzine 2007:256).

As mentioned above, the Santi-Ashoke group has nine centres in Thailand. Being practically self-sufficient in the countryside, the group’s main occupation is
gardening and natural agriculture. Surplus agricultural products are sold in their shops and vegetarian restaurants around Thailand. Only vegetarian food is produced and served. The sect emphasizes recycling and is very conscious of environmental questions. According to one of the first Santi-Ashoke publications, *The New Trend of Buddhism in Thai Society*, religion should be regarded as the "structure of society" or the "structural pillar of society." The Santi-Ashoke thus indicates a greater emphasis on society than on the metaphysical or theoretical tenets of Buddhism:

"A religious institution should help the society in solving its problems, otherwise the existence of the religious institution becomes meaningless, which has happened to the mainstream Buddhist institutions in Thailand. When the principles of any religion start to decline, then a religious leader will emerge trying to find new ways to restore the glory of religion and to revive its role in helping society" (Essen 2002:6).

This seems to be an open declaration of a programme by the Phothirak. Thus, with a mission to revive Buddhism in Thailand, Phothirak and a handful of followers began an experiment in an alternative way of life. Majority of Santi-Ashoke followers are from the lower middle class and are more interested in practice than theory, the doers rather than the thinkers. What characterizes this group is their strictly anti-materialistic practice. Now, the national Santi Ashoke movement encompasses seven thriving communities with altogether 800 residents and several hundred boarding school students as well as roughly 7000 nonresident Ashoke members who support the movement with four lay organizations and participate in local or national activities (Candland 2000:131).

**Santi-Ashoke Community and Political Movement**

The Santi Ashoke group has since formed a political party that works on grassroots level to promote sustainable agriculture among rural farmers. Formal statistics on population are unavailable, yet it is certain that their communities in Bangkok, Nakhorn Pathom and the Isan region continue to grow, with thousands of members. Some centers have factories and shops that produce and sell herbal products such as medicine soap and shampoo. Other locations are simply farms growing food that is prepared and given away free to anyone. Phodhiraksa explains that he is interested in politics because politics is concerned with the life of the
masses. One should therefore know it and understand it - or, as he puts it, "Politics should be based on Buddhist principles" (McCargo 1997:64).

Monks who are working with the people are already in a way involved in politics. Chamlong had long been a devout Buddhist, and had particular respect to the monks Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Panyananda Bhikkhu. In 1979, Chamlong met Samana Phothirak, founder of the controversial Santi Ashoke sect. In the early 1980's, he spent his spare time touring the countryside, giving talks about Phothirak's brand of ascetic Buddhism, and urging people to abstain from beer, cigarettes, meat, and gambling (Daniel 2006). Chamlong ran for governor as an independent, supported by an organization calling itself Ruam Phalang (United Force), made up mostly of volunteers from Santi Ashoke. He ran his organization based on promise of integrity and anti-corruption. The campaign relied heavily on inexpensive posters and door-to-door visits, in contrast to more traditional giant posters and political rallies. Chamlong's candidacy was belittled by the then Democrat Party leader Bhichai Rattakul, as "sidewalk" ware, while the Democrat incumbent was likened as "department store" ware. Chamlong won the election with half a million votes, twice as much as his most popular competitor, incumbent Chana Rungsaeng. Chamlong was the first Bangkok governor to be elected under the new Act. Both the fact of the gubernatorial election, and the manner of his winning it appeared to symbolize the resurgence of democratic principles and practices in Thailand. In the highly centralized Thai political order, the holding of gubernatorial elections in the capital was an important development. In consequence, Chamlong’s governorship was the subject of intense scrutiny by the public, by the mass media, and by both advocates and opponents of democratization and decentralization (Choi 2003:1-19, Kevin 1999:149-153).

According to Duncan, the relationship between politics and Buddhism expounded by Chamlong was almost entirely at the level of moral injunctions. He communicated little sense that Buddhism could provide the blueprint for a new social order, a new political system. By concentrating on exhortations to good

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16 Samana is a prefix for monks in The Ashoke Buddhist Community. It is used ins instead of Phra that is a common prefix for monks in the state Buddhism after the Sangha Council accused Samana Phothirak and clergies in The Ashoke Buddhist Community.
behaviour, he was ignoring or neutralizing the radical agenda implicit in Santi Ashoke's attempt to create Utopian Buddhist communities. His failure to promote that radical agenda had two main causes: his conservative realism, which led him to shy away from unpopular or impractical proposals, and his fundamental lack of intellectual vision (McCargo., p., 104). During the subsequent May events, Suchinda's attempt to discredit Chamlong by claiming in parliament that he was trying to establish a new Buddhist order was widely seen as a ploy to divert attention from the real political issues at hand. Chamlong's hand was actually strengthened by allegations that he was in league with a dangerous sect (Ibid.p. 74). Santi Ashoke however would see themselves as essentially 'reformist', correcting the misnomers, fallacies, inconsistencies and so on which has befallen mainstream Thai religious. Santi Ashoke was for a time in the 1980s a very important sect, (Keyes 2006: 17). It argued for a greater political and social role for the monkhood. "We might not be able to live like Santi Ashoke, but we admire them for having the courage and stamina to live their humble lives," says Sanitsuda a writer on religious affairs. As Phra Thep sophon puts it, "as a top administrator who could become Prime Minister in the future should not support Santi-Ashoke, which has introduced a religious cult that could be detrimental to national security (Ekachai: Bangkok post. 26 March 1997).

It is suggested that when we look at the contemporary religious scene, we may discern a variety of developments. Buddhadasa-inspired rational Buddhism remains influential among urban intellectuals; tradition- and power-oriented practices are as vital as ever and coalesce in the new middle class-based cults; others set on serious ethical and religious practice, such as the Santi-Ashoke sect; others still feel attracted to the discipline and esoteric meditation of the Dhammakaya movement. For a long while, the urban intellectuals were the most conspicuous group. They are the people who want to bring modern relevance to old practices, they identify with both Buddhism and Thainess, and they are uneasy about this identification in modern time (Mulder 2000: 107).

From the above discourse, Buddhadasa, Dhammakaya, Santi-Ashoke movements- all carry enormous potential for change, both for the future of Buddhism in Thailand, for 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 lives of people living in nuanced socio political cultural existence. Dhammakaya is explicitly aiming to reform and purify the Sangha from the inside. Dhammakaya offers legitimation to the Thai state by accepting patronage from the monarchy, by arranging Buddhist state ceremonies and by accepting financial support from the leading politicians (Taylor, Jim 2004: 11-13, Chris 2005).

The roles and activities of the *Arannavasi*\(^{17}\) and the *Gamavasi*\(^{18}\) (The term, *gamavasi* or monks who dwell in towns, does not mean that monks actual lived like householders but, rather, that they resided in monasteries located within the borders of towns) in the new Buddhist movements have thus changed. The modern *Arannavasi*, the Ashoke sect studies, teaches and has taken up social - if not administrative - duties. The modern *Gamavasi*, the Dhammakaya, concentrates on pure meditation. The Dhammakaya is clearly a state-supporting institution and part of the state sangha, whereas the Ashoke group provides an alternative to the state sangha and is outside the state hierarchy (Phra Dhammapitaka 1999:464-465).

Santi Ashoke follows the path of the *phu mi bun*\(^{19}\) tradition, as it wants to revive the idealistic social conditions, where a morally virtuous political leader rules the people because he or she is believed to be morally virtuous. Santi Ashoke excludes the traditional military and business elite, because, according to the Santi Ashoke ideology, lavish merry-making and participation in Buddhist state ceremonies does not manifest any moral virtue. Moral virtue can only be gained and manifested by working harder, consuming less and sharing the rest of what one has with society. Despite new movements such as Santi Ashoke, there remained no likelihood of Thai Buddhism mounting a serious challenge to the existing political order.

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\(^{17}\) The term, *Arannavasi* sangha forest tradition practice.

\(^{18}\) The term, *Gamavasi* or monks who dwell in towns, does not mean that monks actual lived like householders but, rather, that they resided in monasteries located within the borders of towns.

\(^{19}\) *Bunniyom* does not emphasize profit, but emphasizes instead the spiritual merit gained when donating goods to the customers or when receiving as low profit as possible from the customers. The four guiding principles of *bunniyom* economy are - selling for low profit - changing for equal price - changing for lower price - giving for free.