Introduction

For the purpose of the present study the term South Asia refers to India and Sri Lanka. Historical sources reveal that political, economic, social and cultural contacts had been maintained between India and Sri Lanka since ancient times. The geographical location of Sri Lanka in relation to India is such that any major upheaval in the mainland, whether political, cultural or social was bound to generate repercussion in this island, sooner or later. Due to the close proximity and resultant impact of India on Sri Lanka, G. C. Mendis has gone to the extreme limit of naming the period up to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505 as the Indian period of Sri Lankan history. He has again divided the Indian period into two: North Indian and South Indian Periods; since Sri Lanka was largely influenced by North India up to the Chōla conquest of 1017, and by South India from that date up to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505. The North Indian period is further divided into two periods. The North Indian period I begins with the reign of king Devānampiya Tissa (250-210 B.C.), the contemporary of Aśoka (273-232 B.C.) and ends with the reign of king Mahāsena (274-301 A.D.). This period was marked by four South Indian invasions, but the benign influence of Buddhism and Aśokan civilisation preponderated over all else. The North Indian period II begins with the reign of king Mahāsena’s son king Sirimeghavarna (301-328) and ends with the Chōla conquest of Sri Lanka in 1017 in the reign of the Mahinda V (982-1029). Therefore, the contribution made by the subcontinent towards the formation of the ruling elite, shaping of the

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political structure and building the cultural background of ancient Sri Lanka cannot be undervalued, though this contribution has been overestimated in the past, as quoted above. The objective of the present study is to examine the Buddhist notion of kingship and the extent to which this influenced political structures in India and Sri Lanka around the third century B.C. This period saw the rise of the Mauryas and conventionally the Mauryan ruler Aśoka has been credited with the spread of Buddhism. The attempt would also be to locate the similarities and dissimilarities of the ritual traditions of the two countries during that period. Further, this research will examine the question of how Buddhism and political concepts of other religions influenced the rituals that were practised by the ruling circles in ancient South Asia, with particular emphasis on Sri Lanka. For this purpose it is necessary to assess social and political transformation in Sri Lanka up to the fourth century A.D.

Scholars such as E. Durkheim and Raymond Firth have shown that rituals are closely associated with religious ideologies and religious activities. Ritual has been defined by the anthropologist Adamson E. Hoebl, as a recurring performance of a standardised set of acts in the belief that the acts are necessary, either for the maintenance of the status quo, or for the achievement of the specified ends. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown has observed that every society adopted and imposed on its members an attitude of mime and behaviour towards certain objects that may be called the ritual attitudes. Recently, David J. Kertzer highlighted these ideas and attempted to find an interrelation between rituals and politics. According to his view, rituals are usually identified with religious

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activities, but are more important in respect of polities as kings used them in order to show up their authority. However, revolutionaries use rituals to overthrow monarchs. Rituals are sometime used by the political elite to legitimate their authority, but rebels battle back with rites of delegation. Further, Kertzer says that rituals may be vital to reaction, and also the lifeblood of change. 

Rituals as it is applied in concrete situations and life are of extreme importance in understanding religion. In fact the Roman term 'religio' meant something very close to "ritual observance". This shows the seminal role that ritual plays in religion, in other words ritual is religious observance. Ritual is related not only to the ethical aspect of culture, it extends to all that is for the preservation of existence. Hence, food supply, livelihood, trade, war and government are commonly found associated with religious ritual.

Within the focus of this study, it is important to examine the main objectives of Buddhist kingship and Buddhist political concepts. Such an understanding is necessary to understand Buddhist concepts and political rituals in the early period of South Asian history. To realise the importance of symbols in religion one need think only of the immense variety of rituals; of the stylised dress; manner, and speech of officiants; of artefacts used in rituals; of paintings and sculptures, of shrines and sanctuaries of all levels and types. According to this view, some important religious symbols highlighted in the main Buddhist concepts, are Stūpa, images, animals, flowers, and trees. Therefore, it can be shown that some symbols are useful to identify the relationship between religion

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6 David J. Kertzer, Rituals, Politics and Power, New Haven, Yale University, 1988, p. 2.
8 The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol. XII, p. 287.
and political concepts in terms of Buddhist kingship and ritual activities in political circles.

Further, the cultural background played a prominent role in shaping the ancient political structure. The particular religious notions that made an impact on the ruling elite as well as the political structures will be identified and the ritual and the corresponding religious notion that may have influenced the ritual will be traced. Therefore, we must examine the role of the king and the nature of the political structure in South Asian countries. Likewise, the rituals that could be seen in the political structures in this period must be highlighted and categorised. It would then be possible to identify the nature of rituals and activities of the ruling circles in South Asian countries.

In addition, the reasons why such political rituals were developed by the rulers, how rituals came to be associated with the political structures of the time, the manner in which rituals helped to maintain the elite and the social institutions, how such rituals were used to cultivate power, authority and hegemony over subjects will be explored in this study. Another aspect that will be discussed in the present study is whether any restriction had been placed on the exercise of power and authority.

The reasons that have led to the choice of this topic and the period are: first, the spread of Buddhism and Buddhist culture within and outside the Indian subcontinent after third century B.C. Secondly, patronage by the Buddhist kings; Mauryan, some kings of the post-Mauryan period and Sri Lankan, to the growing Buddhist culture, Buddhist ceremony and Buddhist rituals. Thirdly, beginning of a tradition to practice Buddhist ceremony and rituals such as worship of the stūpa, Buddha and Boddhisattva images. Fourthly, the emergence of Theravāda, Mahāyāna and other sects of Buddhism and the
development of a relationship between the kings and Buddhist sects. Finally, the
evolution of concepts such as Dhamma, Cakkvatti and Bodhisattva in Buddhism which
influenced political institutions in this period.

The period of investigation is from the third century B.C. to the fourth century
A.D., Since the third century B.C. marks the beginning of the Mauryan king Asoka’s
reign (273 B.C.). Particular attention will be focused on Indian and Sri Lankan
epigraphical and archaeological sources which relate to this topic. The reason for taking
this period into consideration is the availability of epigraphic evidence in India and Sri
Lanka which dates back to the third century B.C. Further, it is generally accepted that the
end of the last phase of the early form of Brähmi inscriptions in Sri Lanka dates to the
third century A.D. and it is also known that the writing of the Dipavamsa and the
Mahāvamsa came to an end in this era.

A survey of the secondary literary sources

Many scholars have studied different parts of South Asian history of the ancient
period (before the fourth century A.D). These studies can be divided into a few themes
such as religion, polity, society, economy, art and architecture. My area of research is
primarily based on the political concept of Buddhism and it would be relevant to consider
research in these fields during the last few decades. There is an equally extensive
literature on ancient political thought and cultural customs and rituals. After 1950,
many scholars have attempted to study Buddhist kingship and political thoughts.

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10 King Mahāsena’s reign (274-301 A.D.) marks the end of the period of history related in the Dipavamsa
and Mahāvamsa.
11 Radha Kumud Mookerji, Local Self-Government in Ancient India, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1920; N. N. Law, Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921; B. K. Sarkar,
Political Institutions & Theories of the Hindus, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1922. U. N. Ghoshal,
Hindu Political Theories, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1923; K. P. Jayaswal, Hindu Polity, Calcutta:
B. G. Gokhale is one of the scholars who has studied various aspects of Buddhist political concepts in the Buddhist Canonical Pāli literature. He attempts to highlight specific points, which are related to Buddhist political views. Of these, Cakkavatti concept\(^{14}\), Dhamma concept\(^{15}\), state and the early Buddhist kingship\(^{16}\) are most important.
Further Gokhale has tried to highlight the importance of the concept of Cakkavatti and the spirit of higher morality which is included in early Buddhist kingship. According to him the two main principles of early Buddhist kingship are:

1. High morality as the guiding spirit behind the state.
2. The equally important idea of a Cakkavatti being the leader of the temporal realm, and the Bodhisatta, pre-eminent in the spiritual domain.

Gokhale has shown that according to early Buddhism the state was a moral institution of the society. Therefore, Dhamma was the spiritual power of the state for the guidance of the rulers. Although Gokhale presented the Buddhist political views, he did not examine these concepts with regard to their influence on kings and their actual adoption.

R. S. Sharma, R. Gard, U. N. Ghoshal have also highlighted the origin of kingship in Buddhism. Sharma compares Brāhmanical literature with Buddhist literature and states that the latter did not directly form a part of the contract theory. But Sharma agrees that the Dhamma concept has dominated the political concepts of early Buddhism. Gard and Ghoshal have accepted that a contract theory is based on early Buddhist kingship. Though, other Buddhist political concepts have been discussed by them, they did not emphasise specific political points of early Buddhist literature. Rahul Sanskrityayana has criticised the contract theory. According to his view, the Mahāsammata, the first king, mentioned in Buddhist literature was not given the designation of a king (rājā). Therefore, he says that the Mahāsammata concept was recognised by people to maintain

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17 Ibid., 1966, p. 22.
19 Sharma, op. cit., 1959, pp. 64, 65, 68.
law and order and enforce the customary laws of the community or tribe. Hence, Sanskrityayana describes the Mahāsammatā as a judge. 21

Trevor Ling has studied Buddhism, Buddhist doctrine, Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist culture in the context of South and South East Asia. He has argued that kingship and state in the early Buddhist view are focused mainly on the model of the Republican government. 22

As an anthropologist S. J. Tambiah has examined the historical background of kingship especially in South and Southeast Asia. 23 Tambiah has divided the concept of early Buddhist kingship into three parts;

1. Concept of ‘Great Elect’ (Mahāsammatā) in Aggañña Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya
2. Concept of ‘righteous king’ (Dhammiko Dhammarājā)
3. Concept of ‘Universal king’ (Cakkavatti)

Tambiah also attempts to show the concept of Dhamma as an universal cosmic law and presents a comparative study between king Aśoka and his Dhamma and the concept of the Cakkavatti. 24 Melford E. Spiro and Romila Thapar have criticised some part of Tambiah’s view: Spiro argues that Canonical Buddhism does not have a conception of kingship in the sense of a theory of monarchy or government. For him Mahāsammatā and Cakkavatti are mythical concepts. The myth of Cakkavatti which

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23 His first book was published in 1970, and is titled: Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand, and the second book, World Conqueror and World Renouncer was published in 1976, and is more useful in understanding the main ideas about early Buddhist political concepts. (S. J. Tambiah, Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.)
24 Tambiah did not identify the similarities and dissimilarities of Aśoka, Aśokan Dhamma and the Cakkavatti concept. The lack of a comparison of Aśoka’s Dhamma and Cakkavatti concept is one of the weaknesses of Tambiah’s presentation.
Tambiah singled-out for special attention, constituting a model for the behaviour of real
king and a charter for a political system is hard to credit. Romila Thapar pointed out
that the phrase Rājadharma of the Brāhmanical tenet is inverted in the Buddhist tradition
as Dhammarājā and she believes that the etymological meaning of ‘ Rājā’ in the
Rājadharma section of the Smṛti literature which upheld the Varnāsrama Dharma is the
same Dharma of the Buddhist tenet. According to Thapar, the word ‘ danda’ in the
Rājadharma symbolises the authority of the king through force or physical coercion or
punishment but in the Buddhist context the word ‘ cakka’ symbolises the authority of
Law and is preferred to ‘ danda’ through non-violence means. This goes into the making
of the concept of Cakkavatti, the universal ruler whose widespread authority derives
from just government, Aśoka was seen in later texts as the embodiment of the
Cakkavatti. Further, she states that in interpreting the term Dhamma we must beware of
equating it with the Buddhist Dhamma.

Kamburupitiye Ariyasena has shown that the ideal ruler, the Cakkavatti, who
wields the ‘ cakka’ or authority, first of all must venerate Dhamma or justice. Therefore,
he argues, the universal ruler is depicted as a guardian of moral authority. Ariyasena
attempts to describe the differences between Buddhist political thought and Hindu
political thought.

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25 Melford E. Spiro, “World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in
Thailand against a Historical Background,” JAS, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, 1977, p. 789.
26 Romila Thapar, “Religion and the Social Order,” Contributions to Indian Sociology (N.S) Vol. XXI,
No. 1, 1987, p. 159.
Richard F. Gombrich in his recent work, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, published in 1988, argues that a serious political concept is not included in the teaching of the Buddha's doctrine. He differentiates between two stands in the canonical writings on kingship. One stand deals with real kings and the other fantasy-though the fantasy is created to make an important point. Further, the origin of kingship in Aggañña Sutta is rejected by Gombrich. He says though the concept of the 'Great Elect' is well known to Theravādian tradition, but it did not have any effect on the practice of the polities nor did the Buddha ever think that it could or should.

The concept of Cakkavatti in two main Suttas, Cakkavattisīhanāda and Kūtadanta Suttas has been rejected entirely by Gombrich. He remarks that this concept does not relate to the Buddha’s time. The picture of the ideal world ruler must have been modelled on the Buddhist emperor Aśoka. According to Gombrich’s view, there are two main themes about the Cakkavatti concept of Buddhism namely:

1. The concept of Cakkavatti does not connect to the early Buddhist doctrine.
2. This concept was included in the Buddhist canonical materials during the Mauryan period.

Uma Chakravarti in the book, *The Social Dimension of Early Buddhism*, describes the social dimension of early Buddhism based on Pāli literature, especially the *Vinaya* and *Nikāyas* section of the Pāli *Tripitaka*.

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30 Ibid., p. 81.
31 Ibid., p. 86.
32 Ibid., p. 82.
33 Chakravrti, *op. cit.*, 1996.
In chapter IV, she analyses the position of the king in early Buddhism, especially the concept of Cakkavatti, *Dhammiko Dhammarāja* or righteous universal ruler. Based on this analysis, she categorises three types of political ideas of Buddhists Viz.:

1. General ideas of kingship.
2. Contemporary kingship.
3. Ideal kingship

In her studies, Chakravarti has criticised the origin of early Buddhist kingship of *Aggañña Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* as a myth, but she points out that the information of *Aggañña Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* has important implications for the Buddhist notion of kingship. In the Brāhmanical conception the maintenance of the social order based on *Varṇa* divisions, was one of the most important duties of the king. In contrast, it was the maintenance of the social order based on property with which the king was most often associated in Buddhism.34 Further, Chakravarti pays special attention to examining the concept of the Cakkavatti and evaluates the seven symbols of sovereignty which are related to the concept of Cakkavatti in Buddhist political philosophy. She argues that these seven symbols represent the constituent elements of kingship as envisaged in Buddhism,35 and has shown that the concept of Dhamma influenced the creation of a relation between the king and the subjects.

This study particularly examines the characterisation of king Aśoka and his Dhamma, which is known to us through inscriptions found at various places in India. Aśoka has been identified as the first king who attempted to give importance to the Buddhist philosophical and political concepts through his activities. Further, because of

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his endeavour, Buddhism expanded not only within the Indian subcontinent but also out of the country to Sri Lanka and South East Asia.

One of the earliest polities known from South Asia was that of the Mauryas and therefore, many scholars have examined the nature of the state under king Aśoka. Besides, the study of the Mauryan period in particular and of ancient India in general underwent a veritable revolution after James Prinsep’s decipherment of the Aśokan edicts written in Brāhmi and Kharoshti scripts. It is the work of Prinsep that has laid the basis of historical research on the Mauryan period in India. One of the major concerns of scholars has been to establish the role of religion in this early state. Different scholars have engaged in comparative studies of the Chronicles and Aśokan edicts and their concepts. Since the publication of the Aśokan inscriptions some scholars have questioned the validity of the Chronicles and also expressed divergent views regarding the faith professed and preached by Aśoka.

In order to place these studies in perspective, a survey of the secondary writings is now being presented on Aśoka and his Dhamma. From an analysis of the writings which appeared between 1835 and 1995, two trends become apparent: One, group of scholars argue that Aśoka had converted to Buddhism and the Buddhist doctrine influenced his edicts, while the second, opinion is that Aśoka’s Dhamma that prevails

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was Hinduism or a moral and ethical code of conduct that was common to all religions of the subcontinent. The above interpretations and explanations are valuable not only for a study of Aśoka and his Dhamma but also to show the vast literature that exists on the subject.

In addition to re-examining this issue, especially with regard to the archaeological context of Aśokan inscription, this study will also focus on the pre-state and early state formation and the role of Buddhism, Buddhist concepts and state, Buddhist ceremony and festivals and rituals in ancient Sri Lanka. Many books and articles have already been published on this subject after the first quarter of twentieth century. Among the literature relevant to the political, social and religious situation in ancient Sri Lanka are "Two Royal Titles of the Early Sinhalese and the origin of the Kingship in Ancient Ceylon" by S. Paranavitana, "Some Titles of the Sinhalese kings as Recorded in The Inscriptions of 3rd Century B.C. to 3rd Century A.D.," by C. W. Nicholas, first part of the thesis, *Institutions of Ancient Ceylon from Inscriptions* by Lakshman S. Perera are based on the study of the early state and kingship through the inscriptive evidence of Sri Lanka. They have attempted to emphasise that the origin of the state and kingship was


38 S. Paranavitana, "Two Royal Titles of the Early Sinhalese and the Origin of the Kingship in Ceylon," *JRAS* (G & I), 1936, pp. 443-462.


indigenous and it began in Sri Lanka and further details about these arguments will be discussed in subsequent sections. In 1946, E. W. Adikaram focused on the study of Buddhism, the state and society and Buddhist ceremony and rituals that are highlighted in the Pāli Commentaries in Sri Lanka. Walpola Rahula analyses the history of religion of Sri Lanka from the Pre-Buddhist period up to the tenth century A.D., with regard to state and religion, Buddhist society, Buddhist ceremony and rituals and Buddhist education. Hema Ellawala's study is an attempt at examining the early society of Sri Lanka, the influence of Buddhism on the society, social custom and ceremonies. Tilak Hettiarachchry, focuses on the origin of kingship in Sri Lanka, and how Buddhism relates to the development of state and kingship and function of officers of the state. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana has written a few articles on this theme. These works relate to pre-state formation, the early state, kingship, and Buddhism in ancient Sri Lanka. L. Smith Bradwell has based his arguments on legitimation of power and relation of king with the

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Buddhist Sangha in ancient Sri Lanka. S. U. Deraniyagala has described Proto and Pre-historical period of Sri Lanka through the archaeological evidence. Sudharshan Seneviratne discusses Pre-history as well as the nature of the state based on a comparative study of pre-state formation in South India and Sri Lanka, while Gunaratna Panabokke describes the Buddhist Sangha, kings and their role in India and Sri Lanka.

**Objectives of the study**

According to the survey of secondary literature of ancient Indian polity discussed above, it is clear that though some scholars have focused on aspects related to the political or religious background in India, most of them have discussed and analysed traditional political concepts of India without reference to religion. Much less attention has been paid either to how far these concepts are reflected in contemporary politics or to a comparison with the archaeological evidence. These scholars, although, highlighting the Brähmanical political view in the elite circles of the Indian subcontinent, have neglected a description and evaluation of Buddhist political concepts.

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50 See foot notes No. 11.
Therefore, the first part of this study attempts to examine the main political concepts in early Buddhism and the extent to which these were different from other contemporary political concepts such as those in Hinduism and Jainism. The main political concepts included in the Buddhist Canon and Jātakas, will be studied under several categories such as origin of kingship, concept of the Cakkavatti or Dhammiko Dhammarājā and Dhamma, qualities of righteous and unrighteous kings, qualification of kingship, rituals, festival and ceremonies which are related to kingship. Some Buddhist political concepts have been modified, or added from Brāhmanical political ideas in certain Jātaka stories, for instance, Uluka Jātaka, Dasarata Jātaka, Mahasutasoma Jātaka, and Mahājanaka Jātaka. Hence one aim of this study is to identify what are the unique Buddhist political ideas as contrasted with non-Buddhist ideas that have been adapted in Buddhist literature. Further, symbols, ceremonies and rituals discussed in the Buddhist Canon will be identified and analysed with reference to the inscriptive sources of India and Sri Lanka.

According to historical evidence, there is a close relationship between Buddhist political thought and political activities of emperor Aśoka. Therefore, the second chapter will be an examination of the role of king Aśoka and the relationship between his Dhamma and Buddhism through an analysis of the literary and archaeological evidence. Attention will be paid to investigate the accounts of Aśoka and his pious activities mentioned in Pāli and Sanskrit literature. In this study accounts of Aśoka’s activities in Pāli literature will be analysed.

52 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 461, pp. 123-130
54 Ibid., Vol. IV, No. 539, pp. 30-68.
Sri Lankan Buddhist literature in Pāli reflects the spirit and personality of Asoka, which earned him a reputation for benevolence and tolerance that was never again matched by any South Asian monarch. The accounts of literary sources can be described as legendary narratives. But it is clear that they draw upon primary sources of the earlier period. For example, the Sri Lankan Chroniclers have highlighted the character of king Asoka as an ideal Buddhist monarch in India. King Asoka has been introduced by the Chroniclers as “Dhammāsoka.” Pāli Commentaries refer to king Asoka as a Cakkavatti. An inscription as late as the second century A.D. from Salihundam in Andhra Pradesh, mentions this monarch by the name ‘Dharma Rājno Asoka Sirino’. This clearly shows that Asoka was famous and remembered as a model king, ‘Dharma Mahārāja’, in coastal Andhra even after several centuries.

Sri Lankan historical records seem to have paved the way for the compilation of a systematic work, which, on the evidence of fifth century Pāli commentaries and the ninth or tenth century, Vamsatthappakāsinī (Commentary of the Mahaṇvamsa), had been named the Sīhalatthakathā Mahāvamsa (The Great Chronicler of the Sinhala Commentary), developing from the third century B.C. Such a work, in at least two versions—one maintained by the Mahā Vihāra and other by the Uttarā Vihāra (Abhayagiri) was utilised by the author of the Vamsatthappakāsinī in elaborating data on many events relating to Asoka. According to these accounts, authors of the Dipavamsa and the Mahāvamsa have

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55 Dipavamsa, Ch. VII, V. 24, Ch. XI, V. 26; Mahāvamsa, Ch. V, V. 189, Ch. XI, V. 18.
57 El. Vol. XXXI, pp. 87-88.
used these documents to compose their Chronicles. The Mahāvamsa provides testimony to support this argument.\(^{59}\) (*Porānehi katoposo*).

The historical literature that developed in Sri Lanka, commencing with the *Sīhalatthakathā-Mahāvamsa* consists of:

1. Historical notes and comments in the Pāli commentaries on the Buddhist Canon;
2. Chroniclers who made an effort to write a systematic court and monastic history of Sri Lanka; and
3. A vast body of works called *Vamsa* or *Vamsakathā* on the history of certain religious objects and shrines.\(^{60}\)

In the historiography of Sri Lanka much attention has been paid in highlighting the introduction and spread of Buddhism and patronage of kings. Therefore, they have focused specifically on king Aśoka and his career. Hence, one aim of this study is to examine details of Aśoka and his activities that have been included in the Sri Lankan and Indian literary sources. These will be contrasted against archaeological information available from the subcontinent.

Likewise, an examination of the distribution of Aśokan inscriptions is crucial to formulate some assumptions on Aśoka and his career. According to archaeological evidence, more than one hundred fifty inscriptions were erected by Aśoka in various parts of the subcontinent to give advice to his subjects, officers and neighbours. Most of the rock inscriptions, pillar inscriptions and minor pillar inscriptions are located at different

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\(^{59}\) *Mahāvamsa*, Ch. I, V. I.

points in North-west, West, South, North-eastern and eastern parts of the subcontinent. It is important to analyse the location of Aśokan inscriptions and their relation with the Buddhist monuments. Some Buddhist monuments comprising of ruins of monasteries or stūpas have been discovered near Aśokan inscriptions. For example: at Sāñchi, Sārnāth, Rummindei, and Kosambi. Some are located a few miles away from inscriptions such as at Rupnāth, Dhauli, Maski, Brahmagiri. When explaining the relationship between Buddhist monasteries and Aśokan edicts, an issue that would need discussion is the relationship between the king Aśoka and Buddhism.

The Aśokan edicts indicate his conception of Dhamma and his policy of Dhammavijaya and also reflect the ideology and preference of a resolute but intelligent and benevolent ruler who dominated the Maurya court and administration. One of the issues discussed by scholars is the extent to which Buddhist concepts influenced the edicts of Aśoka. Hence, a comparative study of Aśokan inscriptions and the Buddhist Canon as well as the Chakkavatti concept is necessary to understand the influence of the Buddhist discourse on the edicts of Aśoka. Further, this examination may highlight what was the main purpose of Aśokan edicts and what was the message that was given to the subjects, officers and neighbours.

The surviving Mauryan archaeological monuments such as columns, pillar symbols, and stūpas show extensive distribution across the subcontinent, with marked clusters in peninsular India and the north-west. More than fifteen columns were erected to

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61 See map No. 1-2-3.
mark the holy spots associated with Buddha and Buddhism e.g. Rummindei, Sārnāth, Kosambi, and Sankisa. The pillars and their symbols reveal an appreciation of concepts such as the ideal of the Cakkavatti or Dhammarāja. For instance, the lion pillars of Aśoka in Sārnāth or Sāñchi depict the four lions roaring in the four directions of Asoka's vast realm with imperial dignity, while the ‘chakra’ expressed his law of piety. The Dhamma as supreme guiding force, expressed the ideal of a Cakkavatti. Further, the stūpas which were built by king Aśoka in various places of India, indicates his righteous and Cakkavatti concept. Therefore, in this section an attempt will be made to highlight king Aśoka, his Dhamma and his career through literary and archaeological evidence with a comparative study of Buddhist political concepts.

The third section of this study focuses on Sri Lanka to examine the influence of Buddhist political concepts on early Sri Lankan political structure and the evolution of kingship and its role.

The origin myth of the state and kingship in Sri Lanka seems to have been closely connected with the colonisation of the island by north Indian immigrants. According to the Sri Lankan Chronicles, settlers from north India, headed by a Kṣatriya prince named Vijaya populated the island for the first time. This prince, so the story goes in the Mahāvamsa, met a Yakkhini (demon lady) with whose aid he conquered the whole multitude of Yakkhas (demons) who inhabited the island. The followers of Vijaya requested him to be consecrated as the king of Sri Lanka but the prince would not consent unless a Kṣatriya maiden was consecrated with him. The followers of Vijaya surmounted this difficulty by procuring a princess from the king of Madurā. The arrival

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63 Mahāvamsa, Ch. VI, V. 34, Ch. VII, V. 1-39.
of the princess from Madurā and the consecration of Vijaya as the king of Sri Lanka thus established state and monarchy in the island.64 This story was taken at face value in the middle of the nineteenth century, but later historians analysed it critically on the basis of the Sri Lankan archaeological evidence and inscriptions.

Recent excavations have revealed the socio-economic background of Pre and Proto-historical period of Sri Lanka.65 Furthermore, inscriptive evidence indicates a different picture about political, religion and socio-economic developments in Sri Lanka after third century B.C. According to archaeological and inscriptive evidence, S. Paranavitana argued that the village leader system formed the foundation of early kingship of Sri Lanka and later Mauryan political concepts influenced the development of Sri Lankan political structure. Paranavitana based this argument on the basis of some specific titles used by early kings, chieftains, élites, leaders of village or community, such as Gamani, Parumaka, Maparumaka, Devanapiya, Raja, Maharaja to prove his argument.66 This argument was further elaborated by scholars like C. W. Nicholas,67 Lakshman S. Perera,68 Tilak Hettiarachchy.69 C. W. Nicholas believed that the Gamani was a headman in the earlier period of Sri Lanka.70 Perera on the contrary assumed that the association of the word Gamani with kingship did not rise out of the village system.71 Hettiarachchy argues that in the early period Gama means not village but large

64 Ibid., Ch. VII, V. 46-71.
65 See foot not Nos. 47-48.
66 Paranavitana, op.cit., 1936, pp. 443-462.
68 Perera, op.cit., 1949, pp. 35-78.
69 Hettiarachchy, op.cit., 1972.
71 Perera, op.cit., 1949, p. 45.
settlements, perhaps of clan. Therefore, Gamani was the leader of these large settlements and not a village headman.\(^2\)

They also agree that the beginning of the early state and kingship of Sri Lanka was not brought from the Indian subcontinent, but that cultural relations with the Mauryas contributed to the development of ancient Sri Lankan political structure after the third century B.C. The spread of Buddhism was accelerated by the formation of the state and kingship in ancient Sri Lanka after the third century B.C. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana has shown that the statement in the chronicles of Sri Lanka that kings held sway over the whole island from the time of the mythical Vijaya has influenced modern historical writings on the early stage of the island’s history and have blurred the understanding of its early political development.\(^3\)

The first part of this section, however, attempts to identify the early political situation in Sri Lanka through the archaeological and inscriptive evidence. Further, it will investigate Buddhism and Buddhist political concepts and how these influenced development of kingship and socio-political structure in pre and early state period.\(^4\)

As a result of the expansion of Buddhism and Buddhist concepts in the island, there was a coalescence in the regions of Sri Lanka after the third century B.C. Buddhism and its cultural impact reduced the hiatus and political enmity and resulted in the spread of common cultural traits which were conducive to the development of political unity on a mass scale.

After second century B.C. the consequent religious enthusiasm on the part of the

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\(^2\) Hettiarachchey, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

\(^3\) Gunawardana, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 137.

\(^4\) See map. No. 5.
king of Anurādhapura kingdom was brought into prominence. The capital of Anurādhapura became the centre of the political structure and Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This must have helped in establishing the authority of the king of Anurādhapura over the petty leaders after the unified kingdom of Anurādhapura.

The relationship between the clergy and the political elite is best exemplified by literary and archaeological sources, which indicate that Buddhist monks acted as advisers or counsellors of the king and this situation influenced the establishment of a link between the Buddhist political concepts and ruling circles in ancient Sri Lanka. Therefore, Sri Lankan kings tried to adopt Buddhist political concepts and highlighted their righteousness involving themselves in religious activities. Hence, the relationship between the rulers and Buddhist monks and their role in the political evolution since third century B.C. will also be discussed.

Further, Buddhism provided the cultural background that resulted in close interaction with neighbouring areas such as the Indian subcontinent. These cultural relations made and influenced the growing cultural and socio-political connections between the two countries. At the same time, this connection may have been relevant for the exchange of political ideas between the political leaders of these countries.

After third century B.C., with the expansion of Buddhism, people required a way of giving expression to the religious sentiment. They needed something more tangible and visible, that appealed to their senses, such as rituals ceremonies and festivals. This requirement, led to the popularisation of ceremonies, festival and rituals based on certain auspicious dates of Buddhism (Vesak, Poson) and sacred objects (Relics, Bodhi). According to the influence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, certain months of the year were
given religious significance (Durutu, Navam, Mādin, Bak, Vesak, Poson, Āsala etc.). This ritualistic notion of months certainly had a tremendous impact on social life. Often these months have some significance based on the life of the Buddha such as Vesak, Āsala etc. The month of June (Poson) is commemorated as the month that Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka. During these days the laity engage in religious activities as well as religious ceremonies and festivals.

Preaching of Dhamma (Dhamma Desana) and chanting of the Paritta were introduced in the daily life of the people in Sri Lanka after introduction of Buddhism. Preaching of Dhamma is useful to people to understand what are the main ideas included in the Buddha’s discourses. The Buddhist monks or nuns explain the Dhamma of the Buddha to the people through the Dhamma Desana in the monasteries or public places. Although, Buddhists have honoured Dhamma since ancient time, the preaching of Dhamma as a religious ceremony now became an important activity.

As the term, Paritta, itself implies it means a safety rune (paritta = protection), the ceremonial recital of which is regarded as capable of warding off all forms of evil and danger (vipatti), including disease, the evil influence of the planets, evil spirits etc. These may be real dangers to the safety of persons and property as well as superstitious belief in calamities. In addition to this curative and positive aspect, Paritta is also chanted for the attainment of general success (sampatti and Sidhi).

Further, many Buddhist ceremonies, festivals and rituals are based on the three sacred objects (vattutvaya) 75 and three type of Cetiyas, viz. corporeal objects (Śārīrika Cetiya), Utilitarian objects (Pāribhogika Cetiya), and commemorative objects (Uddesika

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75 Mahāvamsa, Ch. XII, V. 28, Ch. 85, V. 48,
Cetiya). The tooth and hair relics, bone relic and the ashes of Buddha are corporeal objects and the Buddha’s alms bowl and the Bodhi Tree under which he attained enlightenment are considered utilitarian objects. Some sculptures or images, which represent the Buddha are considered commemorative objects. Among these three, the most important are the corporeal relics. Therefore, many festivals, ceremonies and rituals were held by the Buddhists on the basis of the Buddhist sacred objects like Bodhi Tree, Tooth Relic, Alms bowl of the Buddha and images after third century B.C.

Most of the Sri Lankan rulers contributed and involved themselves in Buddhist festivals and rituals after the third century. Hence, kings participated in Buddhist religious activities like preaching of Dhamma, alms giving, pilgrimage tour, Buddhist festivals and so on. Popular ceremonies, festivals and rituals gave the king an opportunity to appear in public and perhaps to display royal glamour. These ceremonies turned out to be a common ground where the ruler and the ruled met striving for a common cause, that of glorifying the faith they both avowed. Hence the religious ceremonies, festival and rituals must have brought the king and the people close to each other and the Sangha became a constant link between them.76

It may be suggested that Buddhist ceremonies, festivals and rituals may have influenced the kings to develop their authority and power, e.g. king Asoka visited the Buddhist sacred places as a Dhamma yātrā.77 Further, the Sri Lankan king Devānampiya Tissa planted the branches of the Mahābodhi with provincial kings like Kajaragāma, Chandanagāma and subjects78. King Kākavanna Tissa, the father of Dutthagāmani, went

76 Hettiarachchy, op. cit., 1972, p. 122.
77 Mahāvamsa, Ch. XVII, 31-41; Samantapāsādikā, p. 38.
78 Mahāvamsa, Ch. IX, V. 22-55; Samantapāsādikā, pp. 40-41.
Seru Nuwara to build a stūpa with the Buddhist Sangha and his followers.\textsuperscript{79} King Dutthagāmani deposited the Buddha’s relic in the Mahātupa participating with hundred thousands of Buddhist monks, nuns and subjects at Anurādhapura.\textsuperscript{80} The great festival, called \textit{Giribhanda Pūjā}, was held by king Mahādātika Mahānāga, with a large number of people at Mihintale.

Hence this chapter will focus on the main Buddhist religious festival ceremonies and rituals which existed in the ancient time in South Asia and how the kings were involved in the Buddhist festivals and ceremonies at that time.

The coronation (\textit{Abhiṣeka}) is an important ceremony of royalty since the Vedic period and many details about coronation ceremony and their rituals have been included in Brāhmaṇical literature. Thus, various terms have been used to define the word \textit{Abhiṣeka}. The meaning of \textit{Abhiṣeka} is anointing, inaugurating or consecrating (by sprinkling water), inauguration of a king or main royal function of king. According to Vedic literature, \textit{Abhiṣeka} indicated the attainment of power of king. The \textit{Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa} says that by consecration the king becomes \textit{Prajāpati} and was bestowed with great power.\textsuperscript{81} As the king became less of a popular ruler and more coercive, elaborate means were devised to legitimise his position. These included sacrifices such as the \textit{Rājasuya}, the \textit{Vājapeya} and \textit{Aśvamedha}. Twelve \textit{Ratnins} were associated with the king in the course of a sacrifice, known as the \textit{Rājasuya}. The most essential part of the \textit{Rājasuya} was the \textit{Abhiṣeka} or sprinkling. Many special objects and equipment, like wood, water etc. were used in the sprinkling ceremony of the king. Further, a Brāhmaṇa

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Dhātuvaṃsā}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Mahāvaṃsā}, Ch. XIX, V. 29-46.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa}, V. 3.3 1-15; 3.4.23; 3.4.
priest got the highest place on this occasion. Thus the first part of this chapter will focus on the Abhiṣeka ceremony of the king both in Vedic and post Vedic period in India.

It is clear, that with the expansion of Buddhism in South Asian countries, some Buddhist ideas were added to the Abhiṣeka ceremony. For example, the narratives suggest that king Aśoka sent a message of Dhamma and Abhiṣeka (coronation) equipment as gift to king Devānampiya Tissa in Sri Lanka. The equipment of Abhiṣeka, which was sent by Aśoka, was similar to the equipment that was used in the Brāhmancial coronation ceremony. But the Vamsattappakāsini states that the clay for preparation of the pots for the coronation ceremony must be taken from eight specific places which were all connected with Buddhist worship in Sri Lanka such as Mahā Bodhi Mahāthupa, Lovāmahāpāya etc. According to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, these coronation ceremonial vessels were made of Palasa (butea frondosa), Udumbara (ficus glomerata) Nigrodha (ficus indica) and Asvatta (ficus religious) wood. Although many features of the Indian coronation ceremony, such as animal sacrifice, which would have come into direct conflict with Buddhist ideologies, must have been absent in the ceremony introduced by Aśoka who was himself a protagonist of ahimsā, the Abhiṣeka differed from the Indian ceremony. Animal sacrifices such as Vājapeya, Aśavamedha were replaced by water ceremony or Dhammayātra or religious activities in Sri Lanka.

Participation of Brāhmans was important in the coronation ceremony in India. But Kastriya maidens got an important place in the Abhiṣeka ceremony and their ritual

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82 Dipavamsa, Ch. XII, V.1-8; Mahāvamsa, Ch. XI, V. 28-36.
84 Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, V.3.5.10-14.
in the early period of Sri Lanka. After second century B.C. Buddhist monks also participated in this occasion, e.g. Thera Sanghamitta arrived from India to Sri Lanka to participate in the coronation of king Mahāsena\textsuperscript{85} and some other coronation ceremonies held inside the Buddhist holy places such as Mahātupa in the later period.

According to the above explanation, and keeping the above assumptions in mind, this study focuses on Buddhist ceremonies and rituals that influenced the ruling circles to enhance their power and hegemony.

Based on the above description the main objectives of the study can be summarised as follow:

1. To examine major political concepts in the early Buddhist Canon.
2. To examine Buddhist rituals and their prevalence under king Anoka; the role of Aśoka in the spread of Buddhism; his image in Indian and Sri Lankan sources as the upholder of the faith and the role of the Dhamma concept.
3. To study the influence of Buddhism and Buddhist culture on pre-state and early state rulers and political structures in Sri Lanka.
4. To examine changes in Buddhist concepts, rituals, ceremonies and symbols as adopted by South Asian kings.

**Scope of the study**

This study attempts to identify Buddhist political concepts and rituals associated with the ruling circles of ancient south Asia. In its broadest sense ritual means culturally defined sets of behaviour or performance of cultural activities. But within the scope of this study, rituals that relate to political structure will be taken into consideration. It is

\textsuperscript{85}Mahāvamsa, Ch. XXXVI, V. 3.
important to mention that thorough attention will be given to examine first, the relationship between rulers and religious or social rituals, ceremonies, and second, how, rituals influenced the rulers to cultivate their power and hegemony. Since this study focuses on Buddhist political concepts and associated ritual, ceremonies and symbols, much emphasis will be paid to study the role of the Buddhist kings of ancient South Asia.

The term ‘ruling circles’ refers here to the political leaders, chieftains, heads or kings of states, kingdom or chiefdoms. In this period, we can identify various types of political structures in South Asia, such as king Aśoka (273-232 B.C) at the head of the Mauryan state, king Devānampiya Tissa, (250-210 B.C) the contemporary of Aśoka, as a chieftain of Anurādhapura chiefdom during the pre-state period of Sri Lanka, and king Dutthagāmani (161-137 B.C.) as a ruler of Anurādhapura kingdom in the second century B.C. Therefore the term ruling circles is used interchangeably to identify political leader, king or chieftains of South Asia.