Conclusion

The present research reveals that Buddhist political concepts influenced South Asian ruling circles especially the Mauryan ruler Aśoka. This political concepts depended on Dhamma and the Buddhist conception of Dhamma implied the supreme principle of righteousness and that righteousness was the basis for temporal activities. The moral character of the king was judged by his righteousness. The Buddhists seem to hold the view that "the king of the righteous king is the righteousness". The principle of political righteousness applies not only to the Cakkavatti but also to other kings as well.

The Buddhist view of the state was highly ethical and depended on 'Dhamma' for its substance. Therefore, 'trust' played an important role in the successful preservation of the state. Further, according to the kingship theory of Buddhism, the Buddha might not have lived in an age of realism, like Lock, and Rousseau but his thought was definitely rational. The Buddha looked at the problems from an ethico-sociological viewpoint rather than a political standpoint. The fundamentals of the political problems, the limits of the power of the state and the people were not issues that needed his attention. His state was founded on high moral principles. The contract that set up the institution of kingship is implicit in human faith. People offered tax and their obedience in turn for the services rendered by the king. If the king fails to abide by his promises, people can remove him from that position. This permission to remove a tyrant invests the people with supreme authority. Some critics tend to dismiss the theory of kingship lightly by claiming that under the theory the ruler's part is merely confined to the maintenance of public order while the subjects are reduced to the position of mere contributors.
The Buddha's views regarding the functions and duties of the king as well as people and further the relation between ethics and politics conditioned the welfare of the community. However, the theory marks several significant contributions to the history of ancient political thought: (I) It justifies by reference to historical process the necessity of the king's office in the interest of the institution of property and public order. (II) Ancient Indian thinkers, from the time of the Dharmaśāstras, have contributed to the principle that the king's office was the greatest safeguard of individual and collective security. The Buddhist theory has provided the necessary historical justification for this principle. (III) The concept between the ruler and the people is clearly bilateral in character. It places obligations on both parties. The king is called upon to punish the wrong doers while the subjects are expected to pay the customary dues. (IV) The concept of the temporal ruler's quasi-contractual obligation protecting his subjects receives a tremendous boost by the Buddha who furnishes a significant historical argument. (V) The Mahāsammata, is indicative of the elective as well as secular characters of the king's origin. (VI) The term of the contract involves the just exercise of the sovereign power by the king, and the payment of the specified dues by the people. This two way process establishes a direct relation between taxation and protection and the Buddhist theory of kingship confers a historical basis to this aspect of the contract. (VII) By insisting upon contract as the basis of political order, the author of this theory entrusts the people with a powerful means to justify popular control over the ruler and to counter any claim to total obedience from the subjects. The Buddha did not perceive differently the smooth functioning of the new political order, as he himself had prescribed certain definite norms for conduct of the ruler as well as the ruled.
The main conception of sound political order as stated in by Buddhism consists in a world state, governed by a virtuous and righteous ruler possessing strength and purity, referred to as Cakkavatti or sovereign of the world. The attributes of the world ruler include universal supremacy and competent administration at home and aboard and above all, righteousness. In the sphere of internal administration, righteousness connotes reciprocal love and affection between the ruler and his subjects, and the provision for universal security, which extends to the dumb animal as well. He protects all beings in his realm in accordance with Dharma (Dhamma). Though Dhamma has no exact equivalent in English, it connotes virtues, good deeds, justice, law, duty, moral merit etc. It can also be used as a symbolic expression of ‘avihimsa’ or non-violence, and compassion or Karunā. The world ruler uses only one weapon—that of Dhamma or righteousness and shuns force, use of arms and punishment. Even his governors or mandolins are expected to rule by means of righteousness. Any disparity that might exist between the ruler and the ruled is removed by prescribing a code of morals applicable to one and all.

King Aśoka and some Sri Lankan kings were influenced by Buddhist political concepts and also contributed in the spread of the Dhamma concept in their kingdoms to establish peace and unity. King Aśoka’s Dhamma was based purely on moral and humanitarian qualities and his state administration was also influenced by it. Aśoka’s moral law was independent of any caste or creed. It was both practical as well as doctrinal. In its practical aspect, it comprised a comprehensive code of conduct.

Further, king Aśoka’s view was founded on non-sectarianism and theologicalism. His message depended on peace and non-violence, truth and tolerance,
compassion and commitment, which king Aśoka set through the abhorrence of war and devotion to righteousness as well as the methods adopted to implement his policy and programme of Dhammavijaya. Moreover, Dhammavijaya is a moral concept, which implies human considerations and mental discipline and which conformed to the laws of approved human conduct. It insisted on the expression of good-will and the assurance of territorial integrity, benevolent acts of public utility, and the advancement of the cause of humanity through piety. Hence we can suggest that king Aśoka became a Cakkavatti not by ordinary conquest but by the conquest of piety, the Dhammavijaya. As a result of missionaries activities of king Aśoka, Sri Lanka became the most important centre of Theravāda Buddhism and came to be known as the Dhammadīpa.

According to inscriptive and archaeological evidence, we can emphasise that the origin of the state and kingship was indigenous to Sri Lanka. With the spread of Buddhism in the island in the third century B.C., its cultural impact mirrored the cultural and political distance, which existed among the chiefdoms and petty political rulers in various parts of Sri Lanka in the pre-state period. With the planting of the Bodhi trees, building the stūpas and Buddhist monasteries in various parts of the island, the cultural coalescence developed not only among the rulers but also the subjects of different chiefdoms of the island during this period. Thus, Buddhist concept as well as Buddhist culture influenced the establishment of the unified kingdom in Sri Lanka. All those who avowed the faith and religious activities and ceremonies brought Anurādhapura to a central position and the king who was the central figure of all these religious movements as their lord. This must have helped very much in establishing the authority of the king of Anurādhapura over the petty leaders after the unified kingdom of Anurādhapura.
Buddhism represented an ideology, which encouraged new performances not only in the society but also in the political circles of the island.

The possibility of utilising ritualised political aggression as an alternative to the actual application of force was generally limited to a situation of struggle for hegemony, as distinct from aggrandisement of the territorial state. However, in the long run, the hegemonic relationship could be the precursor to territorial incorporation. Therefore, we can suggest that the ritualised political aggression also contributed to the expansion of the early Sri Lankan polity.

Further, the state can be considered as an organic whole. This is a point over which we find considerable differences between the early texts and the later commentaries and chronicles written in Sri Lanka. The differences suggest that Buddhist political theory grew dynamically, particularly after Buddhism became the state religion in Sri Lanka. However, the Buddhist state was characterised by a sharp distinction between monarchy and religion, this distinction resting partially on the fact that an organized form of religion existed.

The Sangha was to some extent an autonomous power in the society. It represented a separate distinct wheel of the chariot of the state. The relationship that generally prevailed between the king and the Sangha was close and mutually accommodating. It can be suggested that it helped to strengthen the hold of the rulers over their subjects, but in certain instances the clerics were a source of protest and resistance to royal authority. The ideology propagated by the monks in their writings had a restrictive influence on royal power, in that they decried injustice and excess on the part of the king. These views were consonant with the interests and attitudes of the noble
clansmen. Hence, the close relationship with the Sangha was essential to the king, if he was to be recognized as the legitimate ruler. This cordial relationship between king and Sangha influenced the development of the Dhamma concept in Sri Lankan political circles.

Furthermore, the Buddhist religious festivals, ceremonies and rituals as well as other religious activities of kings contributed to highlight their righteousness. The Mahābodhi and Tooth Relic as well as the Alms bowl of the Buddha are considered as the sacred objects of the state. Hence Sri Lankan kings tried to protect them as royal objects of the state. Further, kings as well as subjects considered that acquiring these sacred objects also confirmed the royal authority. These developments in rituals and ceremonies, related to sacred Buddhist objects provided an interesting insight into the relations between the polity and religion in the Anurādhapura kingdom. The capital with its special ceremonial street had become a 'ceremonial centre' where a series of rituals and festivals took place each year. It was the major venue for the performance of ritual in the island. A new development in this respect was the re-allocation of ritual space, which in effect elevated the palace grounds to the apex of certain ritual networks. On the one hand, mass ritual activity of the Buddhists, which had earlier been largely confined to the outer city, clearly penetrated into the life of the inner city, incorporating even palace grounds into its network, on the other hand, it is equally clear that, in this process, Buddhist rituals were pressed into the service of the state and it transformed these into state ritual. Rituals and ceremonies performed in the city of Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, added a religious aura to political authority and were symbolic devices that helped to legitimise political power in ancient Sri Lankan society.
Thus, the Sri Lankan people believed that the prosperity of the country depended on the exercise of righteousness of the king in the judicial and political affairs of the country. For instance, the popular belief was that the king was actually a "Buddha in-the-making", the most pious religious layman of the realm. Therefore, the king tried to associate with the Buddha's Relics and protect them. His possessions of the Relics gave him access to sacral power that, ideally, he would use for the general well being and security of his people. In this way, "royal power was regarded as an instrument of cosmic power." It was believed that kings possessed magical powers for the maintenance of the moral order; even rainfall in due season, and harvest in abundance. Therefore, the prosperity of the land and the people depended on the righteousness of the ruler, and on the regularity of the performances of certain rituals. Rituals of Bodhi Tree or Relics etc. were magical conduits of power enabling the king to meet his prescribed royal duties. The righteous power was got by the king through ritual performances and was magically radiated to the outlying provinces to ensure stability and order. The king thus, occupied a mediating position between cosmic power and his people.

Furthermore, these were politically significant activities, which helped in mobilising the power of the ruler and enhancing the importance of the capital as the foremost centre of ritual for Buddhists living in all parts of the island and outside. These occasions provided an opportunity for kings to spread their hegemony among the subjects. The expansion of hegemonic domination in turn helped to enhance the power of the dominant polity.

Therefore, we can say that religious festivals and activities were not only important in religious history but also important in political history. Why did the king
take such an interest in religious festivals and ceremonies? When popular ceremonies were converted into religious festivals, they gave the king an opportunity to appear in public and perhaps to display royal glamour. Apart from this, such ceremonies turned out to be a common ground where the ruler and the ruled met for a common cause, that of glorifying the faith they both avowed. Hence religious ceremonies brought the king and the people close to each other and the Sangha became active as a constant link between them.

The chronicles make it clear that no ritual of consecration was performed at the royal court in ancient Sri Lanka prior to the introduction of Buddhism. Instead, the Navayatti or new staff was used by the new king as a symbol of regal authority. It was Aśoka who, is said to have introduced the consecration ceremony of the Indian tradition, and Tissa was the first to ascend the throne in Sri Lanka. This leads us to believe that earlier there were no rājās or kings ruling the island but only leaders of the community, who were called Gamani. Aśoka sent a message of Dhamma with consecration goods to Devānampiya Tissa. It was the first time that the Dhamma concept was been associated with the consecration ceremony of Sri Lanka. Likewise, this consecration of Devānampiya Tissa was certainly an important event in the development of the ideology of political leadership in the island. Further, the consecration ceremony helped to attach a dynastic basis to the ruler in the island which seems to have been absent at an earlier date.

On the basis of above observations it is found that Buddhist political concepts played a dynamic role especially in Sri Lankan ruling circles in parallel with Brāhmanical political concepts in the ancient period of subcontinent.