

QUEST FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IN THAILAND SINCE 1988

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in the partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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NEW DELHI - 110 067
INDIA

1997

To

My

Brother

and

Parents



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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the Dissertation entitled "QUEST FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IN THAILAND SINCE 1988" submitted by CHITTARANJAN MISHRA in partial fulfillment for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University. To the best of our knowledge this a bonafide work.

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PREFACE

Thailand, situated in the middle of Southeast Asia and considered as Newly Industrialized country, is witnessing a Quest for democratization in the past one decade. The present dissertation has tried to analyse the transformation in the attitudes of Thai people and subsequent changes in the prevailing political system. The changes in the political values and political behaviours have been examined and the trends towards greater democratization have been explained in five chapters.

In the First chapter the meaning of the democracy in Thailand and various developments for the evolution of democracy has been discussed.

In the Second chapter, the basic characteristics of the constitution of Thailand and also the nature and function of different political parties in the Thai political system has been explained.

The Third chapter has examined different inherent threats both explicit and implicit to the evolving democratic system of Thailand.

The Fourth chapter has examined the role of religion and the king in Thai politics and their endeavour to act as important pillars of democracy.

The last chapter has concluding observation.

Many people offered me assistance while writing the dissertation and I am indebted to all of them.

First of all my deep acknowledgement goes first to Dr. Ganganath Jha under which supervision I have been able to complete my dissertation. His deep insight on the subject and the sustained guidance throughout the

course of research with his constructive and useful remarks enabled me to complete this work successfully. I am also thankful to all other teachers of division of Southeast Asia and South West pacific Studies for their valuable suggestions. I am also beholder to our Chairperson, Prof. I.N. Mukherji for his encouragement and advise.

I am especially thankful to the staff and members of Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, Indian Council of Social Science Research, who gave me their invaluable cooperation which made my research pursuit a lot enjoyable.

I also extend my hearty felicitations to my friends, Pankaj, Datu, Anup, Jhuna, Leher for giving me the moral courage and high esteem.

Lastly I am thankful to the staff of "Arpan Photostat" without whose support this dissertation would not have attained the neat professional shape.

NEW DELHI

15 July, 1997


(CHITTARANJAN MISHRA)

CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary institutions and democracy had evolved in the West over several centuries, so it should not be expected that Third world countries will achieve the same progress in a few decades.

Thailand occupies the centre of the Southeast Asian mainland and was never colonised by anyone. Since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in June, 1932, Thailand has experienced many forms of government. Starting from the military - bureaucratic rule and then passing through different dictatorial regimes under the military, it reached at an unstable semi-democratic system. Again starting from the unstable semi-democratic system ultimately it has reached within the circle of a democratic form of government. In between this Thai politics has witnessed 19 unconstitutional attempts to overthrow the governing institutions.¹ A number of constitutions have been promulgated and 21 elections have taken place. This vicious circle of politics has finally been reached in a position where the trend of governance is accelerating toward the process of democracy. Some developments is very positive to the maintenance of democracy while some new incidents are altering the direction of democracy. In between this the quest for a healthy democracy is going on.

This chapter has made an attempt to present an overall picture of the Thai political system starting from 1932 especially since 1988. The chapter has also been devoted to discuss different important political and military events for the evolution of democracy and its recent quest to achieve a mature democratic system in Thailand.

1. Clark D. Neher, "Political Succession in Thailand," Asian Survey, July 1992, p.586.

"Democracy" first appeared in Thailand in June 1932 when a group of junior army, navy, and civilian officers overthrow the absolute monarchy and established a constitutional regime based on the rhetoric, if not the reality of democratic governance. Since that year upto the year 1973, the bureaucratic forces, especially the military, have dominated politics. The military domination was increasingly greater after colonel Pibunsongkram became premier in 1938. "For several years after World War II, political parties and civilian groups were able to dominate politics and set up a democratic system. But in 1947, the military staged another coup and seized political control."²

For the next 24 years, between 1947 and 1973, Thai politics was dominated by the military. Army leaders had practically monopolized the top government position. Before 1958, a semi-democratic regime was established most of the time because the military - led governments sought for political legitimacy. Then from 1958 to 1973, Thailand was mostly under a military authoritarian regime. The military junta cited the communist threat and political disorder as the reasons for establishing dictatorship. During this period, while industrialization and policies promoting education were adopted resulting in a rapidly increasing number of workers, intellectuals, university students, and businessmen, democratic institutions were forbidden and democratic rights violated. in 1965, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) began to launch an armed struggle against the government in rural areas.

2. Noranit Settabutr and Kosin Wangsurawat, Thailand under the Parliamentary System (Bangkok : Prae Pittaya Press, 1974), pp.73-99.

A student-led revolt overthrow Thanom's military government on October 14, 1973. It was unprecedented for civilian forces to overthrow a military regime and place army leaders in a position of impotence. The revolt led to civilian leadership, a two-house parliamentary system, with the bulk of power in the hands of the elected lower house, and the establishment of political parties, 42 of which contested in the January 1975 elections.³ Political parties now dominated the parliament and government but despite these differences, the policy direction of the democratic period was not fundamentally different from that of past or subsequent administration.

The causes of the discontent which overthrew the military regime include:

1. Political and economic mismanagement by the military regime;
2. the perception that the military was increasingly ruling in its own corrupt self-interest;
3. factionalism within the military; and
4. the rise of an organized and aroused student population, supported by the citizenry and the king.

The combination of these causes produced the unprecedented demand for more democratic government and this student uprising against the military regime was significant in several respects.

1. It was the culmination of the dissatisfaction of the democratic forces towards the military dictatorship for the first time.
2. It indeed the political monopoly by the military since 1958.

3. Clark D. Neher, "Political succession in Thailand," Asian Survey, July 1992, p.589.

3. It enabled the democratic institutions to function and allowed the people to form unions and freely criticize government policies.
4. For the first time a period of unprecedentedly open politics prevailed in Thailand.
5. More Importantly, while the military was discredited and kept outside the political arena, democratic and socialist ideas, liberal and radical groups were became popular.

Following this change, the campaigns against the land rent law for land reform, for increased wages, against some foreign investment in local areas, and against American military presence in Thailand were on the rise. In the meantime, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) actively expanded its work in urban areas. However, threatened by the growing power of the radical and liberal groups, the military staged a coup in October 1976, abolished the parliamentary system, and set up a dictatorial regime. The cause of the failure of this three years of unrestrained democratic experimentation was:

1. the protagonists of open politics, represented by student and intellectual groups, the burgeoning trade unions and Western-educated professional classes, lacked the ability and resources to curb the wider ambitions of their more extreme members :
2. the political mobilisation of farmers, businessmen and students was inevitably seen as a threat to the established bureaucratic elites.

So the fact that the democratic civilian period lasted only three years, suggests that, the demand for democratic processes was secondary to other

values, such as security and stability. However, the three years of open politics, popular participation and the functioning of the democratic institution established the ground stone for the further democratization in the Thai politics.

"Following the October 1976, military coup, thousands of books on liberal radical views were confiscated and burnt most popular organizations formed after 1973 were banned, and thousands of people were arrested, etc."⁴

The military coup and the return of an authoritarian regime forced thousands of radical and liberal people, mostly students, to escape and join the armed struggle of the CPT. They also left the democratic forces which remained in urban areas no alternative but to support the CPT forces. During the next two years, the armed resistance forces were greatly strengthened and posed a serious threat to the government.

Realising this type of situation, like a civil war drew near and the increasing support of the suppressed democratic and radical elements to the CPT, on October 20, 1977, General Kriangsak staged a coup. But this time, he announced a reconciliation policy by calling those who fled to the jungle to return home. His government released the political prisoners arrested after October 1976 and granted amnesty to those who joined the CPT forces, promulgated the constitution in 1978, allowed political parties to function, and held general elections in 1979. By doing so, the military was able to launch a political offensive against the CPT. Through these government actions and because of internal problems, the CPT forces were rapidly weakened. As the

4. David Elliott, Thailand : Origins of Military Rule (London : Zed Press, 1978) pp.133-141.

military dominated the government and parliament, it claimed that the political system was democratic.

With this type of changing political environment, Thai military leaders in the 1980s came to recognize the advantages of a semi-democratic system. Initiated by Kriangsak between 1978 and early 1980, a semi-democratic rule has been developed and strengthened by General Prem Tinsulanond since March 1980.⁵ This semi-democratic system was one of the very important political process, which actually accelerated the trends toward democracy in the later period, of the Thai political system.

Semi-democracy is a regime in which democratic institutions are allowed to function, but the political system was dominated by the military and bureaucracy, not political parties. Leaders of the military and bureaucracy. Particularly General Prem, had recognized the advantages of this regime.

Since 1978 when Kriangsak allowed political parties to function again, most parties found a new solution. Confronting a powerful military which disbanded them many times in the past and with the ability to do so in the future, most political parties recognized the importance of joining a government headed by a military leader. They were willing to compromise so long as they could be part of the government.

Since 1979, most major political parties nominated a military leader to head a new government. By doing so, they hoped that the military will not stage another coup, topple the government, and abolish democratic institutions,

5. Tanet Charoenmuang, "General Prem's Eight-year Premiership and its implications for Thai democracy," Asian Profile, December 1988, p.502.

particularly political parties. They also hoped to benefit from the budget allocations and in the use of bureaucratic power to gain popularity among the voters. It is also understandable that few political parties wanted to be on the opposition side since the majority of the people did not regard members of the parliament as the protector of their interests but as government officials.

"The willingness of most political parties to join Prem government can be interpreted in two different ways in terms of their role in the democratic development. The first view was an incremental democratization approach. To support and join the military-led government and advocate a semi-democratic system was to enable political parties to function continuously, become stronger both in organization and political work, and strengthen democratic ideas among the masses. The first view anticipated a gradual transition towards a genuine democratic."⁶

The second view did not oppose the democratization of Thai political system in the long run, but disagreed with the way the political parties within the Prem government performed.⁷ According to this view, most political parties did not commit themselves to the cause of true democracy. They felt that the military had been directly involved in politics and hindering democratic development, that popular participation in politics was limited and low, and that they lacked strong mass support. However, these parties did little to build up grassroots organizations, raise the political consciousness of the people, and use other means to democratize the political system. In short, the second view held

6. Ibid, pp.504-506.

7. Ibid, p.509.

that most political parties sought their own interests. They were not working toward a democratic Thailand but strengthening a semi-democratic one. Concerning the opposition parties, the main purpose of most of these parties was to join the Prem government. Since they and the coalition parties had similar policies, they did little in opposing the government policies and in presenting new alternatives to the people. But the willingness of different political parties to take part in the politics, in this semi-democratic system, served the following purpose for the democratization in the Thai political system in the later period.

1. The different political parties increased the process of political socialisation among the Thai citizens.
2. The political participation among the citizens increased, through the open nature of politics represented by different political parties.
3. The political parties popularized different democratic ideas and values in the society, as a result a general attitudinal change appeared among the majority of the Thai citizens toward a representative form of government.

However this semi-democratic system can be characterized as follows :

1. Parliament, political parties and elections were allowed.
2. the people were mobilized to take part in elections but derived to play any role in controlling political parties and the government;
3. the people were given limited freedom of speech and association;
4. the government was headed and dominated by the acting or retired military leader, while political parties played subordinate role both on the legislature and executive; and

5. the military was not only actively involved in politics but also called for legitimacy of its direct involvement in politics and national development.

One important aspect of this semi-democratic system was that while the military and most political parties accepted such a system, it did not mean that there was harmony of ideas and interests within and between these groups. "When Prem talked about democracy, he at the same time pointed out the significance of order, discipline, tradition and national security."⁸ Since democracy in Prem's view was as important as other norms, he obviously did not mean pluralist democracy. What he meant was semi-democracy. But at any rate, while the military and bureaucracy agreed with Prem's views, some political parties and other democratic groups did not.

However Prem played an important role in consolidating the semi-democratic system. Because of his ability to rule and his recognition of the parliamentary system, instead of having a semi-democratic rule interrupted by a coup from time to time, Prem continued with a semi-democratic system without interruption. In this respect, as that political system continued uninterruptedly for a longer period, the political party system become more or less stronger.

But Thai politics underwent a major change on 29 April, 1988 when General Prem Tinsulanond dissolved the parliament.⁹ Prem's decision to quit was due to :

8. The Bangkok Post, June 25, 1987.

9. Dereck Tonkin, "The Art of Politics in Thailand", Asian Affairs, October 1990, p.286.

1. the increasingly active campaign launched by the student movement against non-elected premier;
2. the lack of support from most leading military officers; and
3. a sense of growing dissatisfaction among the public over Prem's long tenure.

So when after the July 1988 general election, the King asked Prem to continue as the Prime Minister, he refused in favour of the leader of Chart Thai, General Chatichai Choonhavan. Chatichai's coalition government comprised Chart Thai, the Social Action Party (SAP), the Democrat Party (DP), Rassadorn, the United Democratic Party and Muan Chon.¹⁰

Chatichai's accession to the Premiership was a major step towards democracy in many respects because:

- 1) for the first time since 1976, an elected member of Parliament became the prime minister;
- 2) Chatichai assumed power without relying on the support of the Army;
- 3) the transition of power from Prem to Chatichai was in accordance with the constitutional provisions; and
- 4) the different political parties actively involved in the politics without the dominance of the military.

Chatichai initiated reforms which opened Thailand to a major expansion of the business sector. At the same time, he asserted to concern for developing the country's poorer regions, and secured the passage of Thailand's first social security law. His innovations were particularly notable in foreign affairs.

10. Ibid, p.288.

In spite of these initiatives chatichai's regime began to falter in late 1989. The promises to aid the poorer regions had not been fulfilled. Public concern mounted over corruption, the high rate of inflation, traffic congestion in Bangkok, pollution, drug additions, AIDS and environmental issues. Once again the demand rose for a strong leadership to solve the various problems of the country.

So on 23 February 1991 chatichai was overthrown on a bloodless military coup. A National Peace-keeping Council (NPC), headed by General Sunthorn Kongsompong took command of the country. Martial law was declared, the constitution suspended and the National Assembly dissolved. Thus "the military perceived the ineffectiveness of the civilian government as unstable and corrupt and deemed the military rule necessary and appropriate to provide the kind of leadership that could be counted on to work for the country's unity, security and development".¹¹

Although politically-active, Thais had believed that an unquestioned military intervention was no longer possible, there was little reaction to the country's 17th coup because the public was too disenchanted with the corruption and unscrupulous capitalism of chatichai's regime to be willing to defend it.¹²

Though the coup temporarily ended Thailand's steady progress toward democratization the NPC moved quickly to establish an interim constitution. A distinguished civilian diplomat, administrator and businessman, Anand

11. Likhit Dhiravegin, "Political Principles Wither Away in Thailand" Bangkok post Weekly Review February 1992, p.8.

12. Ibid, p.12.

Panyarachun was named as the Prime minister on 2 March 1991. Anand appointed an interim cabinet consisting of outstanding technocrats, scholars and senior military officials to govern until the next election. Anand's administration took some effective measures like supporting privatization, trade liberalization, tax reform, labour constraints including the abolition of state enterprise unions, and infrastructure projects.

The elections on 22 March 1992 resulted on a narrow victory for parties aligned with the NPC. Despite Suchinda Kraprayoon's unequivocal declaration not to accept the premiership, he was named by the coalition and the nomination was approved by the King and Parliament. His assumption of the premiership crystallized civilian unease and some 50,000 protestors demonstrated against the new government in early May. On 17-20 May 1992 after unsuccessfully trying to wait out the protests, Suchinda and his chief supporters resorted to violence that led to the deaths of an estimated 100 unarmed demonstrators, and several hundreds were injured. Finally King's wise and effective intervention pressurized Suchinda and the military strong-man to step down and retire from politics, ending the month long confrontation.

The following causes can be attributed to the largest demonstrations against Suchinda that led him to step down from politics.

- 1) Rule by a non-elected military man was sanctioned by the new constitution and was historically very familiar.
- 2) Suchinda failed to recognise the potency of the pro-democracy parties and the growing democratic mood among the Thai urban middle class.
- 3) Suchinda's own military backing was not strong.

However the May 1992 protest against General Suchinda represented a new phenomenon in Thai politics. The anti Suchinda movement was very broad-based both in leadership and rank-and-file participation. The demonstrators were mainly middle class residents of Bangkok and other urban centres. So for the first time, the majority of the urban middle class citizens were in favour of establishing a representative from politics, thereby started a new era of representative politics in Thailand.

Following Suchinda's resignation, the five government coalition parties nominated Somboon Rahong, the leader of Chart Thai, as Prime Minister. "The fact that Somboon was perceived, however, as having close links with the military leaders led to fears of new unrest, and his appointment was not confirmed.¹³ Instead, on 10 June 1992, the king again appointed Anand Panyarachun as Prime Minister. On the same day of his appointment, the National Assembly approved constitutional amendments, reducing the powers of the non-elected senate and stipulating that the prime Minister must be an elected member of the Assembly.

On 1 August 1992 Anand demoted the military leaders regarded as being responsible for the violent repression of the May demonstrations.¹⁴ Officers who had a reputation as professional soldiers of integrity were appointed in their place. Anand also reduce military control of state enterprises, appointing civilians instead of military officers to head the national airline, the

13. Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 August 1992, PP.28-30

14. Kusuma Snitwongse, "The trials of Transition". Asian Survey, February 1995, pp.197-198

communication and telephone authorities, and other institutions hitherto regarded as the preserve of the armed forces.

The actual democratic process started from the 13 September 1992 General election in which the Five "angel" parties who opposed the military's political intervention, came to power in a coalition under Democrat Party (DP) leader Chuan Leekpai as prime minister.¹⁵

A new era of democratization has begun in Thai politics have been reflected in:

- 1) General Wimol Wongwanit's shrewd promotion of younger and more professional Generals to senior posts replacing the politically minded generals who dominated most senior posts until May 1992;
- 2) the free interest articulation of different political parties, without the dominance of the military interest; and
- 3) the beginning of a truly representative politics under the premiership of an elected member, according to the provisions of the constitution.

On assuming office the Prime Minister, Chuan, had declared his intention to eradicate corrupt practices, to decentralize government from Bangkok to the provinces and to pay increased attention to rural development. On 31 March 1994 a joint session of the upper and lower houses of the National Assembly was held to consider government proposals to democratize the constitution, principally by reducing the powers of the appointed Senate and broadening the method by which its members were chosen. However in January 1995 Chuan finally obtained the approval of the National Assembly for a series of

15. Ibid, p.199.

amendments to the constitution to expand the country's democratic base.¹⁶ The reforms adopted in 1995 included :

1. a reduction in the size of the appointed Senate to two-thirds that of the elective House of Representatives;
2. the lowering of the eligible voting age from 20 years to 18;
3. equality for women;
4. the establishment of an administrative court;
5. the introduction of parliamentary Ombudsmen; and
6. the prohibition of senators and members of the Government from holding monopolistic concessions with government or state bodies.

Although Chuan's integrity as Prime Minister remained unquestioned, widespread dissatisfaction with his style of leadership began to emerge. The Social Action party (SAP) was openly critical of Chuan's alleged indecisiveness and slow progress in the implementation of national policy. In May 1995 the opposition tabled a motion of 'no confidence' in the government, in connection with a land reform scandal. Following the decision of, Palang Dharma would not support the coalition in the 'no-confidence' vote, Chuan dissolved the House of Representatives on 19 May 1995.

A new trend of representative politics appeared in the reign of Chuan, which may strengthen/weaken the process of democracy in the later period. These are:

16. Jim LoGerfo, "Attitude toward democracy among Bangkok and Rural Northern Asian Survey, September 1996, pp.905-907.

1. a coalition politics appeared without the dominance of the powerful military;
2. the opposition staged no-confidence motion against the ruling coalition frequently without any comprehensive ground; (The Chuan administration had faced the motion of no-confidence four times) and
3. the constituents of the ruling coalition were always to serve their own vested political interest without serving the national interest.

The elections to an enlarged House of Representatives with 391 seats took place on 2 July 1995. The leader of Chart Thai, Banharn Silapa-Archa formed a coalition government comprising Chart Thai, New Aspiration Party (NAP), Palang Dharma, Social Action Party (SAP), Prachakorn Thai and later Nam Thai. "The composition of Banharn's Cabinet was widely criticized, owing to the lack of technocrats and the predominance, despite pre-election assurances, of professional politicians, who were often subject to allegations of corruption."¹⁷

However, in March 1996 Banharn announced the composition of the new Senate, the first to be appointed by a democratically elected Prime Minister. In contrast to the previous Senate only 39 active military officers were named as senators; other appointees included academics and business executives.

The Benharn administration was subject to severe criticism by the national media, which accused the regime of corruption and nepotism. Thailand's revered monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej has indirectly criticised ministers for their failure to address the country's pressing infrastructure problems.

17. Michael Vatikiotis and Rodney Tasker, "Democratic Dilemma", FEER 26 October, 1995.

People were disgusted with politicians tainted by scandals and accusations of vote-buying. Three ministers in the Banharn government had their assets seized by the 1991 military regime for alleged corruption. The Banharn governments relation was not good with the bureaucracy who handled most of the flood and traffic problem effectively. Again military commanders viewed Banharn with suspicion because of his alleged money-backed methods toward achieving political power.

An opposition-led parliamentary no-confidence debate was held on September 19-21. The debate accused on Banharn and his administration's alleged corruption and mismanagement of the economy. At last Banharn dissolved the House of Representatives on 27 September 1996.

After all the period of Banharn's government reflected some new elements, in the process of democratization of Thai political system. These are :

1. the election to the House of Representatives was marked by widespread vote buying methods;
2. the ministers were accused of severe corruption charges;
3. the elected representatives did not fulfill the demands and aspirations of the common citizens; and
4. public confidence in the parliamentary system has been destroyed.

On 17 November 1996, a general election was held to a 393-member House of Representatives. But "the election campaign was one of the dirtiest in Thai history. The report claimed that vote buying had cost politicians the equivalent of around US \$ 1 billion and that other abuses were widespread."¹⁸

18. Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 November, 1996.

On 18 November 1996 General Chaovalit Yongchaiyut formed a six party new coalition government comprised the New Aspiration Party, Chart Patthana, Social Action Party, Prachakorn Thai, Muan chon and Seritham. Chaovalit promised to use his Premiership to revive the faltering Thai economy and to inspire foreign investors' confidence. His plan of action would emphasize "forging a sense of national unity and common purpose."

But if the current and future democratic government could not succeed in curbing corruption and vote-buying and to solve the basic problems of the country, direction of the process of democracy might be altered.

In the Introductory chapter various important political and military events have been carefully described starting from 1932 upto the government under Chatichai and the implications of these events has been critically examined for the evolution of democracy. Then the chapter has been devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the performance of different non-elected and elected governments upto the reign of Chaovalit, there by exploring the direction of the democratic process of the country.

CHAPTER - II
CONSTITUTION AND POLITICAL
PARTIES IN THAILAND

In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss the essential features of the constitution of the kingdom of Thailand and thereby to understand the basic political processes of the country which shapes the functioning of the democracy of Thailand. Also this chapter has been devoted to study the nature and function of different political parties of Thailand.

The constitution of a state may be defined as "a collection of principles according to which the powers of the government the rights of the governed and the relations between the two are adjusted".¹ According to where, the word 'constitution' "is commonly used in at least two senses in the discussion of democracy. First of all, it is used to describe the whole system of governments of a country, the collection of rules which establish and regulate or operate the government. These rules are partly legal, in the sense, that the courts of law will recognize and apply them, and partly non-legal or extra-legal taking the form of usages, understanding-customs and conventions which courts do not recognize as law but which are no less effective in regulating the government than the rules of law strictly called. It is possible to speak this collection of rules as the constitution"²

In this sense Thailand has a constitution of its own which describes all the fundamental elements of the political organisation and all the rules for the governance of the country.

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1. C.F.Strong: Modern political constitutions, P.4
 2. K.C.Wheare: Modern constitutions, P.1

A revolution in 1932 transformed Thailand into a constitutional monarchy after centuries of rule by absolute monarchs. Since then a number of constitutions has been promulgated to serve the vested interests of the military and semi-democratic regimes.

All constitutions that had been promulgated were in unity with one another in adhering to the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State who should exercise the legislative power through the National Assembly, the executive power through the council of Ministers, and the judicial power through the courts. The essential difference between them lied in the relationship between the legislative and the executive powers, depending on the changing situation of the country. This revealed the faithful adherence of the Thai-people to the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State.

A new constitution was promulgated on 9 December 1991. Though in June 1992 and in January 1995, a set of constitutional amendments was adopted, the 1991 constitution is currently in effect. So the basic characteristics of the constitution, that promulgated on 9 December 1991, is discussed in this chapter.

Thailand adopts a democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State. The sovereign power emanates from the Thai people. The king who is Head of State shall exercise such power through the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers and the Courts in accordance with the provisions of this constitution. The provision of any law which is contrary to or inconsistent with this constitution shall be unenforceable.

THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

"The King as the Head of the State appoints the Prime Minister and not more than forty-eight other Ministers to constitute the Council of Ministers having the duty to carry out the administration of the State affairs."³ "The Prime Minister shall be a member of the House of Representatives."⁴ The Council of Ministers which will assume the administration of the State affairs must state its policy to the National Assembly but no vote of confidence is required. The Ministers shall carry out the administration of the State affairs, in accordance with the provision of the constitution and shall be responsible individually to the Senate and the House of Representatives for the performance of their duties and shall be responsible collectively for the general policy of the council of Ministers.

The council of Ministers vacate office in the following circumstances.

- (1) The passing of a vote of no-confidence by the House of Representatives.
- (2) The expiry of the term or the dissolution of the House of Representatives.
- (3) The resignation of the Council of Ministers.
- (4) The termination of Ministership of the Prime Minister.

The ministership of an individual Minister terminates upon:

- (1) death;
- (2) resignation;

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3. As amended by section 3 of the 1991 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand Amendment (No.4). B.E. 2535 (1992).

4. Ibid

- (3) being disqualified or being under any prohibition provided in the constitution;
- (4) being sentenced by a judgment to imprisonment;
- (5) the passing of a vote of no-confidence by the House of Representatives;
- (6) Having done an act prohibited by constitution;
- (7) a Royal command issued under the provision of the constitution.

For the purpose of maintaining of national or public safety or national economic security or averting of public calamity, the King may issue an Emergency Decree which shall have the force as an Act. The issuance of an Emergency Decree shall be made only when the Council of Ministers is of the opinion that it is an emergency case when there is an urgent necessity which is unavoidable. In the next succeeding sitting of the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers shall submit the Emergency Decree to the National Assembly for consideration without delay. If the Senate and the House of Representatives approve the Emergency Decree or if the Senate disapproves it but the House of Representatives reaffirms its approval by the votes of more than one half of the total number of its existing members, such Emergency Decree shall continue to have the force as an Act.

If during a session, it is necessary to have a law on taxes, duties on currency, which in the interests of the State, requires an urgent and confidential consideration, the king may issue an Emergency Decree which shall have the force as an Act. The Emergency Decree issued must be submitted to the National Assembly for its approval.

The King has the prerogative of issuing a Royal Decree which is not contrary to the law. The King has the prerogative of declaring and lifting the martial law in accordance with the conditions and manner under the martial laws. The King has the prerogative of declaring war with the approval of the National Assembly. The King has the prerogative of concluding a peace treaty, armistice and other treaties with other countries or international organisations. The King has the prerogative of granting pardon. The king has the prerogative of removing titles and recalling decorations.

The king appoints and removes officials in the military service and in the civil service holding the positions of permanent secretary of State, Director-General and their equivalent.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The National Assembly consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. "The President of the House of Representatives is President of the National Assembly. The President of the Senate is Vice-President of the National Assembly. In the case where the President of the House of Representatives is none or is absent or is unable to perform his duties, the president of the Senate shall act as the President of the National Assembly. The President of the National Assembly shall have the powers and duties as prescribed in this constitution and shall conduct the proceeding of the National Assembly at the joint sittings in accordance with regulations or rules of procedure." ⁵

5. As amended by Section 3 of the 1991 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand Amendment (No.1), B.E. 2535 (1992).

A Bill may be enacted as law only by and with the advice and consent of the National Assembly. After a bill has been approved by the National Assembly, the Prime Minister shall present it to the King for signature within thirty days as from the date he receives such bill and it shall come into force as an Act upon its publication in the Government Gazette.

THE SENATE

The Senate is composed of members to be appointed by the King from qualified persons possessing knowledge and experience in various branches of learning or affairs which will be useful to the administration of the State in the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State.

The essential qualifications of a senator is:

- (1) being of Thai nationality by birth,
- (2) being not less than thirty-five years of age,
- (3) not being a member or holding any position or being consulting of any political party;
- (4) not being member of local assembly or local administrator which holding such position by mean of election
- (5) not having been terminated the membership by the resolution of the Senate or the House of Representatives,
- (6) and not having been terminated the membership by the resolution of the constitutional tribunal.

The Senate consists of two hundred and seventy senators. Membership of the Senate is six years as from the date of appointment by the King. On the completion of three years as from the date of the first appointment by the King,

one-half of the total number of senators shall retire by drawing lots and shall be regarded as retirement at the expiration of terms of office, and the King shall appoint new senators equal in number to the number of senators which is retired to replace. On the completion of six years the senators who remain in office after drawing lots shall retire, and the appointment of senators equal in number to the number of senators which is to retire shall be made every three years. Any member who retire may upon the Royal prerogative be re-appointed.

Membership of a senator terminates upon:

- (1) the expiry of term of office;
- (2) death;
- (3) resignation;
- (4) loss of Thai nationality;
- (5) becoming a member or holding any position or becoming consulting of any political party;
- (6) becoming member of local assembly or local administrator which assuming such position by mean of election;
- (7) disfranchisement;
- (8) acting in contravention of the prohibition;
- (9) The Senate passing a resolution terminating the membership or the constitutional tribunal passing a resolution terminating membership;
- (10) having been absent throughout a session which is not less than ninety days without the permission of the President of the Senate;
- (11) having been imprisoned by a final judgment to a term of imprisonment except for an offence committed through negligence or for a petty offence.

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House of Representatives is composed of three hundred and sixty members to be elected by the people.

The election shall be conducted by direct suffrage and secret ballot. A person having the following qualifications has the right to vote at an election:

- (1) being of Thai nationality, provided that a person who has acquired Thai nationality by naturalization must also possess this qualification not less than ten years;
- (2) being not less than twenty years of age on 1st January of the election year; and
- (3) having his name appeared on the house register in the constituency.

In each constituency, a person having the right to vote at an election shall have the right to cast votes for candidates equal in number to the number of members of the House of Representatives to be elected in such constituency.

In the general election, the political party, the members of which shall have a right to stand as candidates, must be the party sending its members of not less than one hundred and twenty to stand as candidate in the election. When any political party has sent the candidate to stand for election, that political party or its candidates cannot withdraw the candidatures.

A member of the House of Representatives shall not: (1) hold any position or have any duty in any government agency or State enterprise, or a position of member of local assembly, local administrator or local official except the position of the Minister or any other political official;

- (2) receive any concession from the State or a government agency or State enterprise or become a party to the contract of the nature of economic monopoly with the State or a government agency or State enterprise, whether directly or indirectly;
- (3) receive any special money or benefit from any government agency or State agency or State enterprise apart from what the government agency or State agency or State enterprise gives to other persons in the ordinary course of business.

The provision of (2) shall not apply in the case where a member of the House of Representatives received the concession or became a party to the contract before he is elected.

The term of the House of Representatives is four years from the date of election. The King has the prerogative of dissolving the House of Representatives for a new election of members of the House of Representatives. The dissolution of the House of Representatives may be made only once under the same circumstances.

After the Council of Ministers has assumed the administration of the State affairs, the King will appoint as Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives a member of the House of Representatives who is leader of the political party having its members of the House of Representatives holding no ministerial position, and having the largest number of members of the House of Representatives among the political parties having their members of the House of Representatives holding no ministerial position, and such number must not be less than one-fifth of the total number of members of the House of Representatives existed at the time of appointment.

PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO BOTH HOUSES

The Senate and the House of Representatives shall each have one President and one or two Vice-Presidents who are appointed by the King from the members of such House in accordance with its resolution. The President of the Senate and the President of the House of Representatives shall have the power and duty to carry out the business of the Houses in accordance with their rules of procedure. The Vice-President shall have the power and duty which is entrusted by the President and shall act on behalf of the President when the President is absent or unable to perform his duty.

"The National Assembly shall, within thirty days as from the date of the election of members of the House of Representatives, be summoned for the first sitting. Each year there shall be two ordinary sessions of the National Assembly".⁶

The King convokes the National Assembly. He opens and prorogues its session. The King may be present to perform the opening ceremony of the First annual ordinary session. When it is necessary for the interests of the State, the King may convoke an extraordinary session of the National Assembly.

Bills may be introduced only by the Council of Ministers or members of the House of Representatives, but money bills may be introduced by members of the House of Representatives only with the endorsement of the Prime Minister. A member of the House of Representatives may introduce a bill only if the political party of which he is a member has passed a resolution approving the

6. As amended by section 3 of the 1991 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand Amendment (No.2), B.E. 2535 (1992).

introduction thereof, and the bill is endorsed by not less than twenty members of the House of Representatives who are members of that political party.

The Senate and the House of Representatives are, by virtue of this Constitution, vested with the power to control the administration of the State affairs. Members of the House of Representatives of not less than one-fifth of the total number of existed members of the House of Representatives have the right to submit a motion for a general debate for the purpose of passing a vote of no-confidence in an individual Minister or in the Council of Ministers. The vote of no-confidence must be passed by more than one-half of the total number of existed members of the House of Representatives.

THE COURTS

The trial and adjudication of cases are the power of the court, which must proceed in accordance with the law and in the name of the King. Judges are independent in the trial and adjudication of cases in accordance with the law, Judges shall not be political officials.

The King appoints and removes judges. The appointment and removal from office of a judge of a Court of Justice must be approved by the Judicial Commission under the law on judicial service before they are tendered to the King.

Military courts have the power to try and adjudicate cases as provided by the law. The appointment and removal of a military judge shall be in accordance with the law.

In the case where there is a dispute on the jurisdiction between the Court of Justice and other Court or between other Courts, the Constitutional Tribunal shall decide it.

SUPREME COURT

Supreme Court (Sarn Dika) is the highest Court, which is the Court of final appeal in all civil, bankruptcy, labour, juvenial and criminal cases. Its quorum consists of three judges. However, the Court occasionally sits in plenary session to determine cases of exceptional importance or where there are reasons for reconsideration or overruling of its own precedents. The quorum, in such cases, is one-half of the total number of judges in the Supreme Court.

COURT OF APPEALS

A single Court of appeals (Sarn Uthorn) has appellate jurisdiction in all civil, bankruptcy, juvenial and criminal matters. Appeals from all the Courts of First Instance throughout the country, except the central labour Court, come to this Court. Its quorum consists of two judges.

COURTS OF FIRST INSTANCE

Courts of first instance included:

- (1) Civil Courts with jurisdiction in civil and bankruptcy cases in Bangkok;
- (2) Criminal Courts with jurisdiction in criminal cases in Bangkok;
- (3) Central Juvenial and Family Court with original (jurisdiction over juvenile delinquency and matters affecting children and young persons;)
- (4) Central Labour Court with jurisdiction in labour cases throughout the country;
- (5) Magistrates Courts with jurisdiction in minor cases with minimum formality and expense;

- (6) Provincial Courts with unlimited original jurisdiction in all civil and criminal matters, including bankruptcy, within its own district which is generally the province itself;
- (7) Thon Buri Civil Court with Civil jurisdiction over nine districts of metropolitan Bangkok;
- (8) Thon Buri Criminal Court with criminal jurisdiction over nine districts of metropolitan Bangkok.

RIGHTS, LIBERTIES AND DUTIES OF THE THAI PEOPLE

All persons are equal before the law and shall enjoy equal protection under the law. All persons shall enjoy political rights. The exercise of political rights shall be in accordance with the provisions of law.

Every person shall enjoy full liberty to profess a religion, a religious sect or creed and to exercise a form of worship in accordance with his belief; provided that it is not contrary to his civic duties and to public order or good morals.

Every person shall enjoy the liberty of his person. The arrest, detention or search of person, irrespective of any circumstances, shall not be made except by virtue of law.

Every person shall enjoy the liberty of dwelling. The property right of a person is protected. The extent and the restriction of such right shall be in accordance with the provisions of law.

Every person shall enjoy the liberty of speech, writing, printing, publication and any other method of communication. No grant of money or other properties shall be made by the State as subsidy to a private

newspaper. Every person shall enjoy the liberty of education; provided that such education is not contrary to his civic duties under the constitution, and to the law relating to compulsory education and the law relating to the organisation of education establishments.

Every person shall enjoy the liberty to assemble peacefully and without arms. The restriction on such liberty shall not be imposed except by virtue of the law specifically enacted for the case of public meetings and for securing public conveniences in the use of public places or for maintaining public order during the time when the country is in a state of armed conflict or war, or when a state of emergency or martial law is declared. Every person shall enjoy the liberty to form an association, union, league, cooperative or any other group.

Every person shall enjoy the liberty to form a political party for the purpose of carrying out political activities through the means of a democratic regime with the King as Head of State as provided in this Constitution. A political party shall prepare an account showing its assets and liabilities and shall publicly declare sources of its income and expenditure in accordance with the provisions of law.

The right of a person to sue a governmental agency which is a juristic person to be liable for an act done by its official is protected. However, no person shall exercise the rights and liberties as prescribed in this chapter against the Nation, religions, the King and the Constitution.

Every person shall have a duty to uphold the Nation, religions, the King and the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State under Constitution. The other important duties of every person are:

- (1) to exercise his right to vote at an election in good faith;
- (2) to defend the country;
- (3) to serve in the armed forces as provided by law;
- (4) to pay taxes and duties imposed by law;
- (5) to render assistance to the official service as provided by law;
- (6) to receive education and training under the conditions and in the manner provided by law; and
- (7) to conserve natural resources and environment as provided by law.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The administration of local government shall subject to the law, be in accordance with the principle of self-government according to the will of the people in the locality. The administrative organisation of local government shall consist of a local assembly and a local administrative committee or local administrators, or other forms as provided by the law.

Member of a local assembly shall be basically elected. Members shall be appointed only in case of necessity in accordance with the provision of law, and whose number must be less than the number of elected members. The election of members of a local assembly shall be by direct suffrage and secret ballot. A local administrative committee or local administrator shall be basically elected. A local administrative committee or local administrator shall be appointed only in case of necessity as provided by the law.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL TRIBUNAL

"The constitutional Tribunal is composed of the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Senate, the President of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General and six other persons appointed by the Senate and the House of Representatives, three persons each, from qualified person in law and political science. The President of the National Assembly shall be President of the Constitutional Tribunal." ⁷

In the case where the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly, the Senate or the House of Representatives resolve that there is a problem which requires on interpretation of the constitution, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Senate or the President of the House of Representatives, as the case may be, shall refer such problem to the Constitutional Tribunal for decision. The decision of the Constitutional Tribunal shall be deemed final and shall be published in the Government Gazette.

DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICIES

The 'Directive Principles' of State Policy' constitutes a very comprehensive political, social and economic programme for a modern democratic state. Some important directive principles for legislating and determining State policies are:

- (1) the State shall protect and maintain the Constitution of kingship, the independence and integrity of its territories;

7. As amended by Section 5 of the 1991 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand Amendment (No.1), B.E. 2535 (1992).

- (2) the State should organise the system of judicial process to ensure justice to the people;
- (3) the State should promote and support education and professional training;
- (4) the State should conserve and promote national art and culture;
- (5) the State should conserve environment;
- (6) the State should promote, protect and preserve the interests of the farmers in the production;
- (7) the State should support economic role in the private sector;
- (8) the State should arrange social work for the welfare of the people
- (9) the State should support the people of working age to obtain employments; and
- (10) the State should promote public health throughout the people and other socio-economic benefits to raise the standards of living of the people.

The Economic and Social Development plan arranged by the State should be in accordance with the Directive Principles of State policies.

AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION

A motion for amendment must be proposed either by the Council of Ministers or members of the House of Representatives of not less than one-third of the total number of existed members of the House of Representatives or members of the Senate and the House of Representatives of not less than one-third of the total number of existed members of both houses. The members of the House of Representatives may propose or jointly propose such motion only in accordance with the resolution of the political party to which they belong.

A motion for amendment must be proposed in the form of a draft Constitution Amendment and the National Assembly shall consider it in three separate readings with some specific procedure for each reading. After the resolution has been passed in accordance with these three readings, the draft Constitution Amendment shall be presented to the King for its signature.

RECENT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

A set of constitutional amendments was adopted in January 1995. These include:

- (1) a lowering of the minimum voting age from 20 years to 18;
- (2) a reduction in the size of the Senate to two-thirds that of the elective House of Representatives; and
- (3) the prohibition of senators and members of the Government from holding monopolistic concessions with government or State bodies.

A joint session of parliament on September 14, 1996 approved a Constitution amendment bill. The bills passage would pave the way for the election of a constitution drafting assembly which was to draw up a new constitution within 240 days of its first meeting.

"On 17 May, 1997 the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) in Thailand has cleared a draft of the new Constitution that is being drawn up for the country'" ⁸This exercise, which might take another year to complete, now enters the crucial second phase, when the political currents begin to influence the process.

8. The Hindu, 18 May 1997, p.7

After a detail discussion of the important features of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, it is important here to explore the nature and function of different political parties to understand, how far the functioning of the political system in Thailand has incorporated the democratic elements for the quest for democratization in Thailand since 1988.

So this part of the chapter has been devoted to study the role of different political parties in the functioning of a democracy, the varying nature and function of the different political parties according to the changing political environment and the electoral practices and traditions in the Thai political system.

Political scientists throughout the world are divided in their opinions on the importance of parties in a democracy; but the fact remains that the parties do exist, and play vital roles, in all modern democratic states, and indeed in most states, whatever their ideological orientation. It is one of the axioms of the contemporary politics that party system has become an indispensable factor in the working of a representative form of government. It lays down this irrefutable rule that a political party, in one form or another, "is omnipresent"⁹ This phenomenon signifies the maximisation of political participation for the reason that it enjoins upon the members of a ruling community to take the people, as much as possible, in confidence to justify the very legitimacy of their leadership and authority. This phenomenon also indicates a mark of political modernisation in the sense that it calls for the involvement of more and more

9. Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, Political parties and political development, p.3

people in the process of decision making that leads to, as David Easton says, the "authoritative allocation of values".

A political party is a group operating to secure the control of a government. Obviously, the first important point about political parties is that they are groups with some degree of organisation and permanency. Secondly, parties must have definite aims and objectives. In a formal democracy parties are organised around constitutional questions. To attain political power by constitutional means is their aim. Parties are fighting groups. They are constantly engaged in retaining or capturing governmental power. Also the political parties in spite of their differences, possess, generally speaking, a unity of outlook on fundamental matters. Combining the different aspects of the nature of political parties, the political party may be defined as a group consisting of cross/sections of human beings, more or less stably organised, with the objective, in accordance with the constitution of securing or maintaining for its leaders the control of a government, and of giving to members of the party, through such control, ideal and material benefits and advantages.

Taking into account the above nature and definitions of the political parties, it is important here to study the nature and function of different political parties of the Thai political system.

From June 1932 to October 1973 student led revolt, Thailand was ruled by military governments for 36 of those 41 years. Political parties were banned or coopted by the military who viewed the parties as corrupt, a threat to the smooth functioning of government, and under the control of self-interested politicians. In the second Phibun administration when the parties were allowed,

they functioned to enhance the military's image as a democratic institution and to mobilise mass support to strengthen the leader's power base against dissident military forces. ¹⁰

In Thailand many political parties have been established but usually have not survived for a long time. The parties of today are of fairly recent origin. In the "democratic period" of 1973-76 there were at one time 42 parties; and in the 1983 election, 14 parties nominated candidates.¹¹ One encouraging factor for parliamentary democracy is that parties are now accepted by many as the legitimate device to achieve power. Another factor is that some parties now appear to be well established, with effective organisations, wide appeal and a solid group of supporters. Moreover, they have proved themselves capable of representing the new forces in the society as well as the old. They are important vehicles to propagate ideas and to channel grievances and demands on to the political agenda. The accuracy of their perception of public opinion in resisting military pressure was confirmed in the election, with the main parties opposing the military all increasing their representation in parliament.

Another factor for the success of the parties has been the appeal of their leaders, who appeared to be better qualified to tackle the seven problem areas than the military. Leaders of the Social Action Party (SAP), Kukrit have also helped to preserve the conservative nature of the main parties, which is important in a society such as Thailand where traditional values are still strong.

10. Niyom Rathamarit, *Military Governments in Thailand: Their policies Toward political parties, 1977-1983* (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1984) p.68.

11. *Ibid*, p.72

To gain wide support, the parties have to respect and support traditional values and institutions, especially the monarchy. Yet, they also proclaim their commitment to development, and the Social Action party in particular have put forward policies to help the poor. Many former military officers have joined political parties, and senior civil servants have resigned to join them as well.

Since 1988 the political parties overall have contributed towards stability and development. During a controversy over the constitution and the election campaign, they behaved in a responsible fashion. They spoke out strongly for legitimate forms of activity, for law and order, and against violence and extreme action, which the military could claim was a legitimate reason for direct military intervention. The parties, moreover, did not agree with the more violent protests against military pressure and possible dictatorship. They did resist military pressure to sign the request for a recall of parliament, and their refusal to vote for the constitutional amendments ensured that these were defeated. The military has become aware of the importance of the political parties, thus, recognising the political parties as a legitimate and essential part of the constitutional and parliamentary system.

But the political parties do not always help to solve the problems of Thailand and at times they can make the problems worse because of their continual power-seeking and self-interest. In Thailand the parties are not the tightly-controlled, centrally organised, disciplined bodies. The parties are relatively weak because their adherents have no tradition of loyalty to party policies or ideology. There is constant rivalry within and between the parties, with local and personal interests taking the first place as against national or party goals. Members are unreliable, and there is a tradition of corruption, electoral

violence and buying of votes. Some politicians are mainly concerned with power, financial gain and protecting their own interests, and so help to create unstable governments. Others are imbued with a care-taker mentality and avoid taking difficult decisions.¹² It is also true that military dominance and the executive's abuse of the legislative body have stultified the growth of democratic political parties and a democratic parliament.

Factions within Thai political parties consists of a number of different types with differing degrees of loyalty among members. A single member of parliament may owe loyalty to several factions, with different degrees of loyalty owed to each. The different types of factional ties based on the amount of cohesiveness and shared loyalties are:

- (1) Ideological ties;
- (2) Regional ties;
- (3) Personal ties;
- (4) Kinship ties;
- (5) Monetary-based ties;
- (6) Business ties and
- (7) Electoral ties.

Whereas the weakest types of factional ties are the factions based around ideology, the strongest types of factional ties are the factions based around the local election network or hua khanaen system.¹³

12. James Ockey, "Political parties, Factions, and corruption in Thailand," *Modern Asian Studies*, 1994, pp.255-258.

13. *Ibid*, pp.258-259

While the factions tend to cluster around individual leaders, the relationship between each individual member of the faction and the leader may have a different basis. While the basis for factionalism varies from individual to individual and from faction to faction the goal of each faction is the same to join the cabinet. ¹⁴Once in the cabinet, a minister can seek to build his faction in order to gain greater power within the party and more lucrative cabinet positions.

With the cabinet contributing so heavily to the success or failure of each faction, and by extension to each party, it becomes clear that no party can afford to remain long in the opposition. Factions in power grow and factions out of power shrink. This need to join the ruling coalition has led to a further determination of ideology. Parties that need to be in a coalition to survive cannot be choosy about the ideology of a potential partner.

The opposition politics also becomes skewed. While some opposition parties seek to attack the government at every opportunity to bring it down and necessitate a new coalition, others act not as a watchdog but as a partner-to-be, balancing criticism necessary to overthrow the government with the tolerance necessary to avoid making enemies in coalition parties that might preclude entrance into a future government.

In Thailand, the current set of political parties and factions has created a system where corruption is an integral part of the political process. The frequent abolition of parliaments and parties and the consequent resort to factions as the base of power for civilian politicians has exacerbated the corruption which often

14. Ibid, p.260.

occurs during the formation of a political party system. While the early stages of party formation may require some degree of corruption/patronage to finance the development of a party organisation, the dilemma is intensified by the existence of factions; these factions push the limits of tolerance for corruption without contributing to the development of the party. Until the parties can take control of their factions or find an alternative means of finance corruption will remain high, parties will languish and the civilian political system will remain vulnerable to coups.

In the Thai party politics, rural parties represent the majority of Thais. There is little concern with policies or issues while vote-buying and the politics of personality are dominant. The constant phenomenon of new parties rising up, individual MPs or entire political factions splitting apart, and old parties holding dominance and then suddenly fading away points to the fact that Thai political parties are best understood as large patron-client networks. Over two dozen political parties contested the April 1992 election, and only seven had been in existence for more than one year.

Each rural MP from these parties serves as a patron of his or her own network of clients. In the July 1995 election, numerous MPs switched parties for money, selling themselves and their networks to the highest bidder and ensuring a supply of cash to support their re-election effort. In this political system, the average rural voter is a sub-client represented by the village headman in the network of rural network politician. The central pattern closely follows James Scott's definition of patron-client relations: "The basic pattern is an informal clusters consisting of a power figure who is in a position to give

security, inducements, or both, and his personal followers who in return, contribute their loyalty and personal assistance to the patron's designs."¹⁵ From the point of the local voter, it is the material benefits that matter. When little concrete assistance can be expected from the Royal Thai Government (RTG), it is no surprise that rural villagers turn to their patron, the local MPs.

Thailand is still searching for the right formula and framework for its electoral practices. Most constituencies are two or three member constituencies, so at election time, with as many as 16 parties putting up candidates, the Thai voters can be faced with no fewer than 48 names on the ballot paper. Another problem is that political parties need to put up candidates in at least 50% of all constituencies. This can be very complex and expensive for the financially less well endowed parties.

There are different perceptions to the issue of leadership between the Thailand's rural and urban voters. Urban people want strong leaders who can guide the country in an era when the country needs to be increasingly integrated with the global economy. The rural people who will elect the vast majority of the 391 members, traditionally make their decisions based on patronage and money.¹⁶

The voting behaviour is also different, between the Thai urban voters and rural voters. When the urban voters want 'get things done' by the leaders in the higher interest the rural voters are motivated by the fulfilment of the basic needs

15. James C.Scott, "Patron-client politics and political change in Southeast Asia" (American political Science Review, 66:1, March 1972, P.92.

16. Ibid,p.96

by the leaders. Every political party have to confront this urban-rural gap in the changing political environment of the Thai political system.

Here is the list of some important political parties in the Thai political system:

- (1) Chart pattana
- (2) Chart Thai
- (3) Democrat party
- (4) Ekkaparb (Solidarity)
- (5) Muan chon (Mass party)
- (6) Nam Thai
- (7) New Aspiration Party
- (8) Palang Dharma
- (9) Prachakorn Thai (Thai Citizens party)
- (10) Seritham Party (Justice Freedom party)
- (11) Social Action Party.

This chapter has presented the important characteristics of the constitution of Thailand to understand the role and function of the basic political institutions and organisations in the Thai political system and has analysed the importance different political parties in the establishment of a healthy democratic system.

CHAPTER - III

THREATS TO DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IN THAILAND

This chapter has explored different types of internal threats which have both direct or indirect bearing in restraining the smooth functioning of the evolving democratic system in the Thai political system. A part of this chapter has been devoted to outline the nature of the threat perception perceived by the Thai decision makers and the conceptual framework under which these internal threats have been derive its meaning. Then this chapter has presented a detail analysis of the potential internal threats, that is, the threats from the conflict over the organizing ideology, from the centre periphery conflict from the military, from the corruption in civilian elites themselves, from the Islamic insurgency, and from the links between the Thai logging companies with the Khmer Rouge. Though the political implications of these internal threats has been emphasized, due emphasis has been given to the security and economic dimensions also, which have a bearing to the viability of the emerging process of democratization of the Thai political system.

Threat definition and security policy making in Thailand as in many other developing countries, have been the preserve of a select group of the elites. National security issues are seldom the subject of public discussion and therefore public input into security policy making is almost nonexistent. The people simply accept the perceptions and policies of those in power. However the base of the elite group concerned with security issues has of late broadened.¹ This

1. Kromol Tongdhummachart et al, The Thai Elite's National Security Perspectives: Implication for South east Asia (Bangkok: Chulalongkin University, 1983) p.5.

change has been accompanied by a fair amount of open discussion of the issues affecting Thai national security both by those in government and by academics.

General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth states that the incomplete democratic form of government in Thailand created economic and social problems and conditions that were conducive to the development of insurgences and revolutionary war which he believes, are the greatest threats to national security.² In his view, national security is dependent on political security, which he defines as "a secure political system based on an appropriate system of government, popular support, correct policies and a capability to operationalise these policies."³ The attachment of political security requires the development of a complete democracy and a democratic system of government with the king as the head of the Thai nation and people. Democracy is the only instrument to solve all the country's problems be it political, economic or social. Therefore, development of and support for democracy is, in his view, central to the "security of the nation, religion and monarchy for even more".⁴

A good indication of the official conception of national security, especially of its domestic dimensions is determined to maintain strictly the nation, religion and monarchy and the democratic form of government with the king at its head; harmonize the people's interest and preserve the Thai national identity; resolve the economic, political and social problems justify and

2. Lieutenant General Chavalit, Yongchaiyuth, "The role of the military in National Security" ISIS Bulletin 2, No.1, January 1982 p.7.

3. Ibid. p.8

4. Ibid, p.9.

peacefully and instill the Thais a sense of idealism especially one which encourages the sacrifice of the individual for common interest.

The Thai conceptions of national security generally emphasize the domestic dimension of national security. The increasing complexity of the domestic environment and the growing plurality of the forces therein challenged the incumbent regime and its organizing ideology increased the focus on the domestic threat perception of the Thai political system. The ensuing domestic political instability, coupled with the dramatic growth of the communist insurgency forced a reorientation from the internal to the domestic environment.⁵ To build inner strength, nearly all the definitions accord primacy to the political sphere and view the development of democracy as the main instrument to eliminate internal contradictions and to create a just and united Thai society.

Based on the above conceptual framework of the perceptions of domestic national security by the Thai elite, the primary important threats to the political systems of Thailand are mainly from the conflict over the organising ideology from the centre-periphery conflict, the threat from the military the threats from the corruption in civilian elites themselves to the evolving democratic system, the threats from the emergency Islamic insurgency and the threats from the links between the Thai logging companies with the Khmer Rouge. A brief analysis of all these important threats to the democratic system of Thailand are discussed here.

5. Muthaih Alagappa, The National Security of Developing States: Lessons from Thailand (Massachusetts: Auburn House Publishing company 1987) p.39.

The conflict over the organizing ideology indicates a lack of consensus over the organizing ideology. The current political ideology of Thailand, which is based mainly on the traditional institutions of religion, king and nation and which is infused with certain elements of democracy and capitalism is a product of evolution. Unlike in other developing countries, Thailand's organizing ideology is not new and has not been imported. Despite claims to the contrary, real political authority in Thailand lies with the monarchy and the bureaucrats, especially the armed bureaucrats, both of whom have major stakes in the preservation of the status quo. Radical reform and revolution is likely to alter the status quo and undermine their position. Hence the most that can be expected from them is gradual and evolutionary reform.

The unwillingness and inability of the bureaucratic regimes to devise and develop a political system capable of meeting the aspiration of the "Progressive" forces that demand political participation and major changes in the political and socio economic order led to the emergence of Marxism - Leninism political thoughts particularly the communist party of Thailand (CPT).⁶ The stated aim of the CPT was to "create and consolidate the support of all patriotic and democratic loving forces to eliminate U.S. imperialist influence topple the fascist, reactionary regime and set up people's government composed of representatives of the entire revolutionary forces to build an independent, democratic and prosperous Thailand."⁷

6. Ibid. pp 62-63.

7. Ibid, p.65.

The CPT is perceived as a threat in that it endangers the traditional institutions of the Thai state. Consequently the revolutionary alternative of the CPT clashes head on with the ideology of the bureaucratic elite. This confrontation over the organizing ideology also permeates the centre-periphery conflicts, and the CPT has been quite successful in mobilizing the support of regional forces and minority groups to its cause. The CPT also attracted the reform-minded students and others, although this marriage was short-lived. Notwithstanding the setbacks suffered by the CPT, the government still considers it a serious threat to national security.

To summarize, the organizing ideology of the bureaucratic elite has been challenged by the radical reform-minded loosely organised "Progressive" forces and by the CPT, with the latter resorting to armed struggle to impose its ideology. The reform-minded forces were defeated by the status-quo forces in 1976 and the ensuing marriage between the "progressive" forces and the CPT did not last. For the moment the reform minded "Progressive" forces are not organised to challenge the bureaucratic elite, but the CPT still provides a revolutionary alternative and is committed to seizing state power through armed struggle.

Nearly all the centre-periphery conflicts in Thailand can be traced to the process of state formation.⁸ A substantial part of the present north, northeast and south Thailand were vassal states, with Thailand only exercising minimal control. This political arrangement was reinforced by the economic pattern.

8. General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, "Security threats Facing Thailand are numerous", National Review, 13 July, 1983, P.42.

The central plains, with a good network of rivers and canals, experienced rapid growth in the mid-nineteenth century and transformed itself into a money economy, whereas the north and the northeast remained isolated and self-contained subsistence economies. Only when confronted by the territorial ambitions of the colonial powers did Bangkok institute a number of reforms designed to bring the peripheral regions under its direct political control and also undertake to negotiate and demarcate the borders of modern Thailand. The attempt to absorb the peripheral regions as an integral part of Thailand through greater political, economic, and administrative reach resulted in tension between the centre and the periphery and gave rise to problems in the northeast, the north, and the south.

Isan Regionalism in the North east: The northeast forms one third of the population and land area of Thailand. The emergence of the Isan identity is a twentieth-century phenomenon brought about by the separation of the ruler and ruled in ethnic terms, the subordination of local interests to the interests of the centre and the negative effects of exposure to the centre.⁹ Through the greater exposure to the centre, the north east came to realise its interior position in political and socio-economic terms and this resulted in the search for its own political identity.

This search manifested itself in the form of political opposition to the centre. In the 1940s, many of the political leaders from the northeast were accused by the centre of being communists. The phibul government to justify its

9. Ibid, P.58.

coup in 1947 arrested several north eastern members of parliament on charges of plotting a separation of the north east from Thailand.¹⁰ The Thais in Bangkok looked down on the northeasterners as culturally inferior. The northeast has the tradition of electing MPs who demand a fair deal for the region and often these demands are perceived by the centre as threats of separatism and communism.

The CPT exploited the grievances of the northeast and the later became a fertile base for CPT recruitment and activities. The armed struggle of the CPT to overthrow the government and seize political power was launched in the north east. Thus the centre-periphery problem in the north east became intertwined with the conflict over the organizing ideology. Although the issue of Isan regionalism is currently not in the forefront, it could easily become a major issue if exploited by the future military regimes to justify their coup in the name of reducing the regional disparities of the country. It is relevant to note that despite several decades of development efforts in the northeast, the provinces in this region continue to be the poorest in the country.

The Hill Tribesmen Problem in the North: In the north there are many tribes; the largest is the Meo tribe. These people have long been independent and practiced local agricultural style. They have engaged in opium cultivation for several decades. The Thai government became concerned with this area in the late 1950s out of fear of communist infiltration from Laos and undertake a

10. Ibid. P.60

series of measures to fully integrate the region into Thailand.¹¹ The Meo people resented this intrusion into their life style and took up arms. the CPT exploited the grievances of the Meo people, and many of them became members of the CPT, thus aiding the growth of the latter. Here again, regional and ethnic problems became intertwined with the conflict over the organizing ideology.

The centre-periphery conflicts were further aggravated by the inequity in the distribution of the fruits of economic development the limited access to the political process and the consequent denial to the periphery of participation in the exercise of political power and the problem of legitimacy of many of the regimes in Bangkok. However, it is pertinent to observe that the centre-periphery conflicts in the north and the northeast became significant only when the fused with the conflict over the organizing ideology.¹² The CPT successfully exploited the regional grievances to its advantage. And of these regional imbalances are not reduced substantially it may create potential opportunities to the future military regimes as a means to justify their presence in the decision making of the country.

The threats from the military is the most potential threat to the evolving democratic system of Thailand in the whole history of Thai politics. Since their overthrow of the absolute monarchy in June 1932, Thai politics has witnessed nineteen military coups to over through the governing institute ions, thirteen of which were successful. Out of the twenty one elections in the constitutional

11. Thomas A.Marks, "The Meo Hill tribe problem in North Thailand" Asian Survey, No.10, October 1973, PP. 929-944.

12. Ibid., p.936.

history of Thailand fourteen elections have served to perpetuate the military regimes in power.¹³

This is the birth history of the authoritarian military and undemocratic rule which posits the most serious. Threat to the emerging democratic system of governance in the Thai political system. The military have dominated the system and are still the most important power group in the country. One major justification for the position of the military has been the continual threat to the internal and external security of the nation, threatening its survival. The military are seen as the main protectors of the essential traditional institutions of "Nation, Religion and King". These institutions are highly regarded in urban and rural areas as to a great many, probably the great majority of villagers, these symbols continue to have a kind of unquestionable legitimacy".¹⁴ Because of their long experience in government, since 1932, and because they appear to be the only group in the society which can offer security and stability, the military are supported by significant groups.

Stability is one of the key aims of the military, with their claim that nothing can be achieved without stability, including the development of democracy. Government stability is very important because this is an immediate problem. The military believed that this was due to the activity of politicians and political parties which threatened the security and stability of Thailand because they weakened government and prevented strong leadership. It is also

13. Clark D. Neher, "Political Succession in Thailand", Asian Survey, July 1992. P.586.

14. A. Turton, J. East and M. Caldwell (Eds.), Thailand Rots of Conflict (Nottingham: spokesman, 1978,) p.127.

argued by the military that stability is necessary for development because foreign business would not invest in unstable countries and they, the military, were the best body to provide that stability.

The military claim that they are committed to democracy, and that is why they are prepared to talk about the constitution rather than take direct action. Democracy, however, they believe should be suitable to the Thai situation and it should be introduced gradually with more time given to the education of the people. It also involved increasing the freedom of individuals and allowing them to choose the representatives they wanted. That is why the military opposed the proposed new 1983 electoral system which was unsuitable because it forced people to vote for a party list covering a whole province rather than being able to select individual candidates from small constituencies.¹⁵ According to the military the most suitable and best form of democracy could be through the Senate which should be appointed from representatives of every group and occupation including civil servants, military personnel and the poor.

The military also justify their activity by claiming to represent the mass of the people, especially the poor, more truly than the politicians. Because of their work in the rural areas, the military are in a position to know the candidates of the people and to be able to offer assistance. They resent the claims of the politicians to represent the people which the military officers believe is based on the use of wealth to buy votes.

15. James Elliott, "Towards Parliamentary Democracy in the Third world: The case of Thailand," *Parliamentary Affairs*, spring 1984, p.p. 217-218.

The military believe their activities are legitimate and they not only have a right but a duty to be involved in all matters affecting Thailand. Therefore since 1932 most Prime Ministers and a substantial number of cabinet ministers have been military officers of former military officers, particularly army generals.¹⁶ They have used their power not only to occupy political positions but also positions in the civil services, public corporations and the private sector. Increasingly over the years they have joined, or even formed, important economic groups and political parties. The power of the military is found throughout the society. for example, they own or influence several radio and television stations, and they also organise protests in urban and rural areas against their opponents.¹⁷

However after substantial sharing of power of grievances of the military between 1932 and 1991 in May 1992 thousands of Thais, largely members of the emerging middle class, took to the streets in bloody pro-democracy demonstrations that brought down the military led government. Since that assertion of civilian will, the risk of another coup has diminished.

But even of after the military withdrawals from politics, the brass are retain a considerable influence in Thai foreign policy, politics and business. the military has a large say on border issues, particularly with Malaysia. They also participate in policy making. The foreign ministry only comes in at a government level. the Thai defence Ministry has a general who acts as Liaison

16. Ibid. P.219.

17. Ibid, P.220.

officer between the Foreign Ministry and the military. The general is not only a conduct between defence ministry and the military, but also takes part in policy making in the regional and local affair. Apart from this serving and retired military officers also form a majority on the appointed Senate. The Thai military is also deeply involved in business, with officers dotting the boardrooms of state enterprises, particularly those dealing with our and maritime affairs.

In summary, in Thailand the military are often the dominant power group in the country, and they believe their position is legitimate because of their responsibility for the security and stability of the nation, concern for democracy and the welfare of the mass of the people, especially the poor. Moreover, they see themselves as providing a counter-balance to the self-concern and ineffectiveness of the political parties and leaders. However, their dominant is not complete, because of divisions within the military and the opposition of other forces within the society. Still the military plays a decisive rule in the Thai political system, though the degree of interference has been substantially reduced after the military withdrawal from politics since 1992 onwards. whatever may be the degree of interference, still the democratic leaders of the Thai politics perceives any type of military influence and interference as a threat to the smooth process of democratization of the Thai politics.

Within the democratic system of governance itself, the widespread corruption of different forms and degrees prevalent among the Thai elite class posits the most potential threat to the legitimacy and credibility of the democratic system of government.

The god father system in Thailand began in the 19th century with Chinese immigrant merchants acting as war lords to protect their own communities.¹⁸ From these beginnings, the jaopoh system exploited the patron client tradition which threads through the fabric of Thai society. The "Jao poh" is known as Thailand's crime god father.¹⁹ Many jao poh financed frontmen in parliament in return for political patronage. One factor which emerged in the 1988 election was the appearance of alleged jao poh in parliament, with influential tycoons deciding to take a more direct hand in government.

The jao poh's recent rise is associated with the evolution of Thai politics. When the military held a more obvious and stronger role in Thai politics. through the 1970s, the Jao Poh were kept under control. with the advent of more civilian-dominated politics the Jao Poh found a new source of power. they supplied money, and the means to make it, to politicians who needed funds for their campaigns. From area to area the jao poh mountain distinctly different roles. Bangkok's jao poh are mostly involved in gambling rackets. In the north east, the jao poh's status rose when the region, the country's poorest, became popular with politicians wanting to buy themselves into power. Their networks for illegal lotteries and money - lending reach all the way down to the poorest villages and are very efficient means of buying votes.²⁰

18. Philip S. Robertson, Jr. "The rise of the rural Network. Politician", Asian Survey, September, 1996, P.P. 926-927.

19. Ibid. P. 928.

20. Paul Handley, "Shady connections" Far Eastern Economic Review, April 1991 p.p. 28-29.

The way to eliminate the jao poh problem was not so much by enforcement, but by improving the quality of police officers. Because of the inadequate education system the police force could not recruit sufficient men of quality, which in turn meant the average policeman was open to bribery and coercion. Also the police force suffered as nepotism and patronage played a large part in recruitment and promotions. Law enforcement had also become tougher because crime bosses were now backed by politicians and other financiers, while the low calibre of policemen remained the same. The fact that the jao poh influence now extended up to the cabinet was a further complication as a potential threat to the evolving democratic system of Thailand.

Chalor kerdted, a top policemen was sacked in September 1994, when he was arrested in Thailand's biggest scandal, the theft of US\$ 20 million in jewellery from the Saudi royal family in 1989. He is one of more than a dozen top policemen charged with stealing the games.²¹

Thailand's elections may be free and fair by regional standards, but vote-buying remains widespread. The practice has helped to magnify the influence of local power brokers. Many of them are businessmen engaged in illicit activities. In Thailand's centuries-old patron-client political culture the rich and powerful politicians broadened the scope of their vote buying methods. Some politicians have come under suspicion of involving themselves directly in illegal activities to finance their campaigns. In 1993, three opposition legislators have been denied visas by the United States because of alleged connections to narcotics trafficking. Especially in rural areas much political finding comes

21. Gordon Fairclough, "Course of the Jewels", For Eastern Economic, Review, 29, September 1994. p.14.

from illegal and untraceable sources. Some politicians rely on underground lotteries, drug trafficking and oil - smuggling to fund their campaigns. the god father with patron-client political culture and the politicians emerging nexus has made the corruption in the Thai political system an inevitable phenomenon. One way to the god father down to size is to reduce their role in politics. Gangland connection are often the key to raising the vast sums of money needed to buy votes in general elections. Local god fathers have the funds and the connections to help politicians get elected. In turn, they want protection and legitimacy. However parliament's decision to amend the constitution to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 could go some way to reducing the practice of vote - buying.

Out of the various short coming of bureaucracy, the real problem lies in the organizational structure of the bureaucracy. the critical factor is the lack of incentive within the bureaucratic rewards system for timely delivery of appropriate services to the rural population. Since decision making and appointment power in the bureaucracy remains centralized in Bangkok and promotion is made through patron-client connections, the natural focus of provincial will servants is towards pleasing their bosses in Bangkok rather than exploring ways to solve the problems faced by local people. The result is that the bureaucratic system leaves the field wide open for the rural network politician as a patron, to fill the service-provider role and thus garner popular support. Until the rise of a more participatory system the villagers generally fear the bureaucratic power. when visiting a civil servant, a villager is often expected to give money in exchange for rendering a service which discourages people from seeking services unless absolutely necessary.²²

22. Philip S. Robertson, Jr. "The rise of the Rural Network politician", Asian Survey, September 1996, PP. 936-937.

When little concrete assistance can be expected from the Thai administration it is no surprise that rural villagers turn to their patron, the local MPs or jao pho.²³ Also the rise of participatory democracy and greater economic wealth has given rise to higher expectations, and the rural network politicians are now the primary fulfillers of these expectations. In this way the failure of the Thai administration through democratic means to solve the day to day problems of the rural masses erodes the credibility and legitimacy of the democratic way of governance as the best way of governance of the country.

Another potential threat to the democratic system is the rise of armed separatism and the consequent rise of the Islamic fundamentalism in the southern part of the Thailand.

Following the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty, Thailand ceded control of the vassal states of Kedah, pertis, kelantan and Trenggannu to Britain but acquired recognition of its control over the seven mini states that previously constituted the state of Pattani and over Satun, which was formerly a vassal state of kedah. Efforts were then made to absorb these mini states as an integral part of Siam pattani was in continuous rebellion, even when it was a vassal state. Siam responded by defeating the rebellion, dividing the state into seven mini states, each with a separate tributary relationship with Bangkok resettling ethnic Thai in these states and increasing direct control over the appointment of the rulers of these states. The traditional rulers of pattani resented the loss of political authority that followed the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty. this resentment,

23. Ibid. P.938.

coupled with the long history of separateness, territorial attachment and identification, and differences in ethnicity, religion, language, and socio cultural mores, have fueled separatist movement in the South.²⁴ The centre views these separatist movements as a threat to the territorial integrity of Thailand and thus a threat to national security, where-as the periphery views it efforts as vital to maintaining socio cultural identity and regaining lost political independence.

Armed separatism in southern Thailand is confirmed to the four provinces of pattani, yala, Narathiwat and satun which have a predominantly Malay-Muslim population. According to the 1980 population census, That Muslims population constitute 3.82 percent of the Thai population and approximately 80 percent of the Thai Muslim population live in the deep south and consider themselves as Malay - Muslims.²⁵ The Malay-Muslim community is the second largest minority community in Thailand. The implementation of the administrative reforms of 1902 created discontent in the Malay - Muslim community. The reforms deprived the political and religious elite of their traditional power and status in the Malay-Muslim community. The close interaction between people of two different belief systems started. Generally national integration policies initiated by Bangkok had the effect of, or at least were perceived by the Malay - Muslim community as, working toward its cultural disintegration. The center's repression of the periphery's political demands for a certain measure of autonomy and the continued imposition of

24. Muthiah Alagappa, *The National Security of Developing States: Lesson from Thailand* (massachisett: Auburn Hose publishing company, 1987) P. 69

25. *Ibid.* p.198.

centre oriented integrationist policies would appear to have been an important catalyst in transforming the conflict into a violent confrontation between the separatists and Bangkok. The world wide resurgence of Islam and the concern expressed by certain international Islamic and the concern expressed by certain International Islamic forums for the welfare of the minority Muslim communities have also aided the cause of armed separatism in southern Thailand.²⁶

A series of disputes between southern Thailand Muslims and Bangkok based bureaucrats and security officials have revived fears that religious, cultural and economic differences and disparities may be transformed into widespread local support for nascent separatist sentiments. The protests at Yaha town and the Kruze mosque in Pattani have highlighted that the root cause of Muslim disaffection still appears to reflect political, economic and employment inequalities rather than any serious movement towards ideological, Islamic fundamentalism. The attitude of many security officials, who tend to see the opposition as a manifestation of Shiva-sponsored separatism, further deepens the divide between the Muslim community and the Bangkok appointed bureaucracy.

For many Thai Muslims, the central issue is the lack of a significant role in local administration. All southern governors are Buddhist, as are their senior staff. The south's rural, less-educated population also faces serious economic problems. Rubber prices, important to the local economy, have fallen while staple food prices, especially rice, are on the rise. Thus situation leaves many southern Muslims feeling they have no part in Thailand's vaunted economic

26. Book review.

boom. large Muslim rallies led by a Iran-linked Shiva activist in Thailand's southern provinces have sparked fears of a resurgence of communal arrest in the region while the threat of Shiva military remains small, the rallies have highlighted increasing discontent among young Muslims.

The murder of four Saudi Arabian Diplomats in Bangkok during the 1989 has increased Thai worries of growing Shia Muslim activity in Thailand. Pattani's kruze mosque is a brick superstructure without a roof, which was abandoned, half built, in the 17th century. But the emergence on the site of a popular Chinese strive based upon an ancient myth, and differences between Muslims over the proper use of the mosque, have turned it into a potent symbol and a source of ethnic and religious conflict.²⁷

This emerging Islamic fundamentalism, could be transformed into a new campaign for autonomy or separatism if the authorities continue to dwell on the success of past efforts to quell unrest in the south rather than address the problems of the present and future potential threats to the evolving democratic system in the Thai political system.

But though the concerted assimilation drive by Bangkok has been moderately successful through extensive educational reform and mass media, the assimilation efforts have spawned new problems. Young Muslims in the south, resentful of what they view as a government campaign to integrate the Muslim minority into a "Buddhist-Thai" nation, are demanding basic religious rights and some form of cultural autonomy. Thailand more democratic environment since

27. Paul Handley "Site of Conflict" Far Eastern Economic Review August 1990 p.25.1

1992 onwards-coupled with the worldwide resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism has produced a new assertiveness among the country's Muslims.

The increasingly complex situation requires a more delicate government approach than in the past. No cultural group would submit to process of integration that would eventually lead to the loss of its value identity. So how to preserve the national unity without its component parts losing their cultural identities is the challenge for the Thai government today. But in the name of preserving the cultural identity of the Malay-Muslim community, the emergence of the Islamic fundamentalism in the southern part of Thailand poses a potential threat to the democratic system of government on the centre.

The links between some Thai business establishment and the Khmer Rouge is a potential issue which may threaten the security of the Thai nation at any moment. Though the issue has an external dimension between Thailand and Cambodia, still it has the potential to influence the Thai elite with its massive money power.

To pursue their own commercial instincts, the Thai loggers and miners may have been well on the way to inadvertently financing the Khomer Rouge's return to power in Cambodia. According to a Thai intelligence document the radical communist group could earn more than US\$1 billion from Thai logging companies, if they were allowed to harvest the forest concessions they have already been granted. If all 16 companies that have been granted logging concessions by the Khmer Rouge were able to extract all the timber they possibly can, these earnings would rise to around Baht 700 million per month.²⁸

28. Ken Stier, "Log Rolling", Far Eastern Economic Review, 21 January 1993, P.15.

The logging contract between the Khmer Rouge and the Thai government owned Forest Industry Organisation (FIO) shows a 100-square kilometer concession area sited 20-30 kilometers inside Cambodia and opposite Thailand's prachinburi province. The contract allows the FIO to extract 1 million cubic metres of timber in exchange for royalty payments to the Khmer Rouge of Baht 2500 (US \$98) per cubic metre. This will yield the communist guerrilla faction some US \$ 100 million in income over the contract's four year life.²⁹

Khmer Rouge earning from Thai business interests include revenue from mining operations, which are earning roughly Baht 100 million per month. Logging, which Thailand banned on its own territory in 1989 to arrest the alarming rate of deforestation, is a much bigger business than gems. The Khmer Rouge timber concessions, which allow Thai firms to take out more than 15 million cubic metres, are for periods of three to five years. The first concessions were awarded in November 1989. But the majority of deals date from early 1992.³⁰

According to the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) of Thailand document, the report confirm that Thai loggers are also providing payment "in kind" beside helping the ammunicions, nations petroleum products and condition to the Khmer Rouge. The payment "un kind" includes "motor vehicles, radios and communications equipment, mobile telephones, generators, quinine etc. to a value of at least Baht 4.5 million so far."³¹

29. Ibid, p.15.

30. Ibid, P.16

31. Ibid, P.16

The logging ban reinforced by the UN sanctions places tremendous burden on Thailand and some of the private sector. Faced with the possibility that sanctions may damage the interests of the military and its allies in parliament, the Thai government has begun expressing scepticism about their political effectiveness. Though the links between the Khmer Rouge and some Thai business class as a potential issue is perceived as an external threat, but the massive blackmoney arising from the logging business of some Thai business groups is a potential factor to influence the democratic system of politics in the Thai political system.

This chapter has explored different inherent threats both explicit and implicit such as the threat from the conflict over the organizing ideology, threat from the centre-periphery conflict, threat from the military, threat from the corruption in civilian elites themselves to the evolving democratic system threat from the Islamic insurgency in the southern part of Thailand and the threat from the links between the Thai logging companies with the Khmer Rouge. A substantial portion of this chapter has been devoted to describe the various causes of these internal threats to understand the relative influence of these threats and to perceive its impact on the evolving process of democratization in the Thai political system.

CHAPTER - IV

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND THE KING

Thailand has gone through many ups and downs in its political history with both religion and monarchy playing their role. Thailand has come across innumerable military coups and their phases of instability but even military leaders have sought the help of either religion or king or both. In the overall perspective, Thailand has been influenced to a large extent by the role of Buddhism and monarchy in the framing of social and political order.

Religion in Thailand

Buddhism in Thailand is undergoing subtle and important changes brought on largely by the fast paced economic and western style social shifts which are eroding traditional spiritual and cultural mores. The changes are primarily an urban phenomenon, leaving the strong traditional role of mainstream religion in the rural areas largely unaffected. However, with rapid urbanisation and the spread of mass media into the countryside, even the more remote areas are unlikely to remain isolated from these trends for much longer.

Thailand's Theravada Buddhism is the near official religion for more than 90% of the country's 56 million people. Many follow an amalgam of Buddhist, Hindu, Brahminist and animist traditions, leading some observers to brand popular Thai Buddhism syncretic.

Buddhism traditionally flourished in rural areas where monks enjoyed great status and temples served as centres of education as well as worship. Now as the rural young stream into Bangkok and other towns, temples have less relevance to their lives. On the one hand Thai's think they are Buddhist, yet the Buddhism they adhere to is often just an outdated form of ritual.

The significance of these changes is not merely an issue of theological interpretation, as the country's stability and resilience owes a great deal to the three pillars of its society : nation, monarchy and religion. While the average Thai's strong nationalism and fierce loyalty to the monarchy have proved a valuable mainstay in promoting social cohesion, the increasingly varied confusing and often negative aspects of Buddhism have eroded the unity around the third pillar.

Some new directions are already evident. Numerous sects, usually sharply, at variance with traditional practices are reaching out to those segments of society disenchanted with the Buddhist mainstream. They range from high knowledge evangelical temples appealing to the comfort seeking middle class to reformist monasteries offering simplicity, rigid self denial and meditation to those disenchanted with the growth of commercialism. ¹

Historically, the countryside has been the source of religious fervors and revolution with its charismatic wandering mystics, while robed hermits and monastic ascetics acclaimed to possess special merit powers. These were individuals who constituted the vanguard of rural millennial inspired movements linked to a distinctively "peasant" counter consciousness or "active ideology" against an existing hegemonic sociopolitical orders in the form of state power. It may be argued that it was not simply an historical accident that the countryside would on occasions spawn these militant religious activities as an expression of intrinsic discontent, confusion and anxiety. Indeed, at times the social and

1. Rodney Tasker and Paul Handley, "Sacred and profane" Far Eastern Economic Review, July 1991, p.21.

economic situation in the periphery and external political pressures tempered the right conditions for instability.

In Bangkok following the development of the state and the growth of indigenous capital (and the middle class) in the sixties controversial Buddhist cults have flourished around urban educated religious leaders. These movements which are in a sense "reform" oriented, attempt to connect directly into the core of normative religion. Since the Buddhist reformation initiated by King Rama IV in the nineteenth century, which resulted in the division of Thai monks into the Mahanikai and the Dhammayut sects, changes in Thai Buddhism have focussed primarily on administrative structure of Buddhist establishment. The fact that the Sangha law and the Sangha administrative forms changed according to the forms of the secular powers. During the period of absolute monarchical power, the Sangha law gave absolute power to the Supreme Patriarch as evidenced in the first Sangha law of 1902. In 1941, nine years after the Democratic Revolution, the Sangha law pronounced a division of powers into the legislative, executive and judicial. Again, about two decades later, under the authoritarian rule of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, the Sangha Law of 1962 centralised all powers under the Supreme Patriarch who ex officio heads the council of Elders (Mahatherasmakam).² However, the past two to three decades has been a dynamic period in Thai Buddhism, involving changes in all major aspects, namely, doctrinal interpretations, the vinaya rules of the monks, the roles of laymen, the establishment of Buddhist communities, and the

2. Suwanna Satha - Anand, "Religious Movements In Contemporary Thailand" Asian Survey, Volume XXX, No.4, April, 1990, p. 396.

incorporation of high technology in the propagation of Buddhist messages. These changes have arisen in the conditions accompanying the intensive development activities of the last 30 years, a process that has given rise to the distinct formation of an urban middle class consisting basically of professional people, owners of small private businesses and lower ranking civil servants.

The three major contemporary Buddhist religious movements - the Suan Moke Movement, the Dhammakaya Temple, and the Santi Asoke Group can be seen basically, each in its own way as a reaction to the changing socio-economic conditions of the Buddhist community and also to the inertia of the Buddhist establishment. The three religious movements have been called the sila group (Santi Asoke), the Samadhi group (Dhammakaya) and the panya group (Buddhadasa). The emphasis and directions of these three movements are basically reformist attempts to make Buddhism meaningful to modern life, both as critique and affirmation. They are also attempts to fulfill the roles of the traditional Sangha organisation which has become inactive, non-committed and uninformed. These movements are representing attempts to revive the role of Sangha on three fronts - doctrinal education, spiritual and administration - all of which have lagged behind the secular world and the daily lives of urban people for almost three quarters of a century. Buddhadasa or Suan Moke movement approach is very much in accord with the spirit of science and rationalism that among other things, is the basis of modern life. Thus the majority of Buddhdasa's followers are the intellectuals and the more educated among the urban populace.

The Dhammakaya movement answers the spiritual needs of the urban middle class, it does offer a new packaging for religion at a reasonable price. This package comes in the form of nature, tranquility, order and cleanliness, all brought about with the aid of high technology. They seem to cater to a segment of the merging middle class that is keen on achieving both worldly pleasure and peace of mind in religious form. ³

The Santi Asoke group chooses an image of poverty and simplicity to counter the strong currents of consumerism. Its aim is not simply to create moral individuals but to create a moral community. It is also facing the severest criticism from conservative wings in the Sangha hierarchy.

The Sangha has long been closely identified with the State and the distinction between the State's ideology and Buddhist purpose was never made. The issue is potentially explosive and may carry wide ranging implications for the future of the Thai Sangha administration, as it is possible that ; one day, the possible conflicts between (the Buddha's) Dhammavinaya and the principles of the state might surface more and more. ⁴

One of the cults of Buddhist has been Thammakaai and was founded in 1970. It is the same Dhammakaya Movement but as a pressure group in Thai politics has evolved itself. Thammakaai foundation set out with the undisguised goal of making money and at one time or other had invested in such ventures as pharmaceuticals, milk-powder, publishing and printing, hotels, land, tourism and -----

3. Suwanna Satha - Anand, "Buddhist Struggles for Modern relevance" Asian Survey, Volume XXX, No.4 April, 1990, p.406.

4. Ibid, p. 407.

oil. Thammakaai utilises a sophisticated and costly media campaign never before seen from a religious movements in Thailand.

Thammakaai monks are expected to have a certain standard of secular education and according to an informant, contrary to traditional Thai monastic practice, make a vow to ordain for life. Among Thammakaai's adherents can be included the former commander - in - chief of the Army from 1982 to 1986, General Aathir Kamlong - ek. Aathir was once close to former Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanond but was sacked in May, 1986 because of using Army secret Fund to destabilise government. Aathir then became leader of the Pnang chon Chaothai party opposed mainly to Prem's leadership.

Santi Asoke emphasizes a return to a very simple way of life, with agriculture as the basis for livelihood. Also, it emphasises the importance of a Buddhist community, not just good individual Buddhists or a righteous King as if often preached in traditional Thai Buddhism. The religious fervour of political representatives became apparent during the July, 1988 general election when Major General Chamlong Srimuang, first elected governor of Bangkok and a prominent member of Santi Asoke, led a political party (Palang Dhamma) to contest the election. There are fears in certain quarters of the Buddhist establishment that if Palang Dhamma Party wins enough seats in Parliament in future, moves to legalize the Santi Asoke group might lead to another sect in Thai Buddhism. Even, Phra Phothirak, the founder of Santi Asoke considers religion and politics as indivisible.

Thammakaai and Santi Asoke in their ways are an active expression of both the desire for change in the wider social order and as opposition to

traditional institutions that have deviated from primordial virtues and active moral ideology. Also, existing institutions have seemingly failed to accommodate themselves to contemporary urban founded realities and sense of community as a " collection of individuals ". The movements may thus be seen as asserting a radical critique of the social order and need for fundamental " reform " .

Phra Bodhirak conflict with Thailand's Sangha (official monkhood), based on his criticism of its religious practices and his effective establishment of his own separate ecclesiastical order, have brought him under the purview of both secular and religious laws. The use of sangha by successive dictators Sarit and Thanom Kittikachorn to shore up their power and conduct anti-communist campaigns between 1959-73 was in a sense, the seed of current situation. Along with sangha monks preaching against greed and materialism but themselves accumulating wealth has eroded the legitimacy of sangha. ⁵

Reacting against this trend and against materialism, the country's liberal educated elite have been drawn to more doctrinaire, reformist sects. In general, these sects preach simplicity, spiritual self-improvement and self-denial, without lucky amulets and creature comforts. The most extreme example has been the Santi Asoke movement, whose leader Phra Bodhirak created consternation in both the government and sangha leadership by refusing to work within the official sangha framework.

5. Rodney Tasker, "Divine Rights" (Far Eastern Economic Review July, 1991), P.23.

Supreme Patriarch Sorndej Yanasangrom since his elevation in 1989 has quickly dealt with the most scandalous cases, such as those of fake monks, sexually promiscuous monks and the misuse of funds. In addition, the most prominent practitioners of syncretic practices have also been warned. But the most crucial reform is to decentralise the Sangha administration so as to make it more responsive to fundamental issues of dogma and practice and worshippers needs. This delay in reform of sangha Act has frustrated a so-called democracy movement of younger mainstream monks centered around the university in their desire to reform from within.

The one major figure who has unquestioned power to change the country's political direction is king Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Role of king in Thai Politics

Modern Thai concepts of monarchy have their origins in the Sukhothai period, back in the 13th century. The Sukhothai kings were paternalistic rulers, alert to the need of their people and generally accessible to them. Although monarchy in its absolute form came to an end with the Revolution of 1932, the institution has enjoyed no less reverence since. In many ways it is an even more powerful and unifying force than ever before. It provides a focal point for the country which brings together people from all different backgrounds and ways of life, uniting people with different shades of political opinion. Much of the intensity of respect that the Thai people feel for their king stems from the distinctive form the modern monarchy has taken under the leadership of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. For more than fifty years he has worked

tirelessly to fulfill his pledge and in so doing has won the unquestioned love and support of his people.⁶

As a constitutional monarch, His Majesty has little direct involvement in the nation's politics. Yet it is clear that his quiet influence behind the scenes has seen the kingdom through periods of political instability. His Majesty has been through 15 constitutions, 17 coups and 21 prime ministers, so it is hardly surprising that he has been called an important unifying force in the kingdom. Under the constitution His Majesty possesses " the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn." In practice, this generally means that His Majesty gives private audiences to the prime minister of the day. Though the content of these meetings is always kept secret, it is clear that what His Majesty has to say will be taken seriously. Several critical moments in the recent history of the kingdom have made it clear to the world that his Majesty's influence is still crucial in defusing national crises. He has redefined the role of the sovereign in a nation that has been ruled by military strongmen for much of his reign. Indeed, he is effective in part because he is viewed not as opposed to the military but above it. He has not hesitated to speak his mind about Thailand's problems and though his voice is soft but his moral authority is supreme. One example was the student uprising in 1973 when a massive popular revolt against Thailand's military leaders led to bloody clashes and a loss of control by government. His majesty appeared on television to end the conflict and installed one of his own privy councillors as prime ministers. In the more

6. Rodney Tasker, "Sovereign Guide" Far Eastern Economic Review, June, 1996) P. 20.

recent times in 1992 when the government which had become out of touch with the people ordered troops to quash a pro-democracy uprising. His majesty summoned the two principal antagonists in the affair to the Chitralada Villa where he gave them advice while they knelt on the floor in front of him.

Bhumibol, who also has the little king Rama IX, has restored the monarchy's central role in the political and cultural life of the nation. Using ancient royal rituals and symbols and judiciously exercising extraordinary political power, he has built a close and enduring relationship with his subjects. The king exercises his power in other ways as well. In public statements he confronts the problems of the country frankly and admonishes citizens and officials alike to do better. Privately, he meets regularly with the prime minister and his cabinet and high ranking bureaucrat to warn and advice.

The king worked to establish contact with his subjects at all levels. He made frequent trips to the countryside, receiving petitions and dispersing aid. He also established the practice of personally conferring degrees on all the country's university graduates, and presents graduating military and police officers with their commissions.

It is not just that there rituals serve the monarchy. They also help reinforce the hierarchical and centralised structure of Thai society. Members of the elite rely on royal patronage to bolster their status. The king sponsors marriages of prominent business and political families. Association with the monarchy has lent political legitimacy to the military. Thai military strategy stresses that the armed forces first responsibility is the defence of the monarchy. Personal ties linking the monarchy and the military are strong.

The elite support to the king and his mass popularity gives him the latitude to guide politics. In the process he has gained reserve powers that he has put to good use whenever circumstances require. He has never used the legislative veto accorded him under law yet in audiences with ministers and bureaucrats he exerts enormous influence over the government. His orders to implement new plans are almost always obeyed instantly cutting through the bureaucratic obstacles that hold up other public works. ⁷

The king's own political views, as revealed in his speeches and writings, suggest a rather conservative attitude. The king has a bottom line, local observers say, which balances political freedom with the welfare and security of his subjects. On a purely political plane, the king asserts a non-partisan, paternalistic influence on government. But for society at large, the king represents a deeper, more mystical force; one that borrows from the people's semi-divine reverence for monarchy.

Some observers also worry that Thai society and its political system have become very dependent on the umbrella of stability provided by the king but it is true that only king can be instrumental in achieving democracy at every political sphere in Thailand.

In the overall perspective, sangha i.e., Buddhism in Thailand and monarchy have evolved themselves into two different institutions. Sangha still wields enough power in the political circles with Thammakaya foundation and Santi Asoke having supported political parties in the general elections and also

7. Michael Vatikiotis and Gordon Fairclough, "Advice and consent" (Far Eastern Economic review, June, 13, 1996, p.22.

floated new political parties to contest elections. The urge to secure power through democratic institutions shows that religion and politics have amalgamated in Thai Society. The monarchy has been strengthened because of wisdom of king Bhumibol who took the pains to evolve Thailand from a rural economy to robust dynamic economy of the 1990s. King acted as a balancer between the military and the people and to a large extent has been instrumental in subducing the influence of military in the politics by the government while creating appropriate sphere for Thailand's transition to democracy. Certainly to a large extent king is going to play a major role in the Thai politics compared to Sangha because of young generation not being able to come to fake religious rituals and political affiliations of monks.

CHAPTER - V
CONCLUSION

The democratisation of political institutions is a long term evolving process for the establishment of a stable democracy. However, only the establishment of a representative government is not sufficient for bringing democracy. The existence of a constitution from which all the powers and functions of the government emanates is the sine-qua-non of any democracy. Apart from that the internal functional democracy of different political parties operates in the representative politics, the freedom of press and mass media and the state guarantee over a large number of political and socio-economic rights to the individual forms the salient features of democracy. Democratisation fosters with increased political participation of the citizens and it is a democratic way of life also. So democratisation is not a simple process to be achieved in a very short time and in a very simple way.

The process of democratisation in Thailand first started with the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in June 1932. Over the years the autocratic military rule restrained the process of democratisation to operate in the Thai political system. The process evolved a new direction particularly in the October 1973 student-led revolt and the consciousness for political participation gained importance among the Thai citizens for the first time. The semi-democratic nature of the Prem Tinsulanond's military regime fosters the growth to the democratisation process. Though the term "semi-democracy" in theory is misleading, still the way of governance in the semi-democracy gave the impetus for the future process of democratisation.

This thesis has examined the problems and prospects of the process of democratisation since 1988 onwards. Because in 1988 for the first time an

elected member of parliament became the Prime Minister, which forms an essential characteristic of a true democracy.

To study the actual process of democratisation the thesis has examined different salient features of democracy. The existence of a recognised constitution as the final source of all authority for the operation of the traditional institutional structures of democracy is inevitable. The thesis has comprehensively examined the validity of different constitutional guarantees to a large number of rights enjoyed by the Thai citizens. It is found that the provisions under the constitution are feasible to the democratic functioning of the government but the freedom of the press has been eroded over the years by the civilian elites themselves.

Though there are few provisions in the constitution to maintain internal democracy of various political parties, the lack of any fixed code of conduct of the political parties at the time of election, has led to many unhealthy trends among the political parties like the wide-spread vote buying in the election time and rampant corruption to fund the campaigning of the political parties.

The thesis has explored the inherent electoral practices prevalent among the Thai citizens. It is found that the existence of the "patron - client" relationship and the role of rural network politician is the dominating factor for any voting behaviour among the citizens. The prevalent voting behaviour and the attitude of the Thai citizens towards the democracy is not so matured which is a restraining factor for the smooth functioning of the Thai democracy.

Since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in June 1932, the role of military in Thai politics is the most dominant factor which determines the trends

of the democratic ways of functioning in the Thai political system. This thesis has comprehensively analysed the February 1991 military coup and its impact on the Thai citizens. The April-May 1992 middle class protests against the military coup has represented a new phenomenon in the democratization process. It is found that the growing democratic mood among the Thai urban middle class has reduced the probability of any future military intervention and there by for the first time the military substantially withdrew from the politics in 1992. However, it has been shown that the marginalisation of the role of military in Thai politics is possible only, when an effective and stable civilian rule solves the basic problems of the masses.

It is found that in the name of giving stability to the Thai political system and giving due importance to the "King, Religion and Nation", the military has always justified their interference in the politics. The ineffective, unstable and corrupt civilian government has been perceived as a threat to the security of the nation by the military. The thesis has pointed out that though the military interference in politics has been substantially reduced since 1992 onwards, the probability of a future military intervention in politics fully depends on the effectiveness and the cleanliness of the civilian administration to solve the basic problems of the country. In the prevalent widespread vote-buying method, corruption and ineffectiveness of the civilian administration, the military's future role in politics cannot be fully ruled out.

This thesis has also discussed the process of professionalisation of the military since 1992 onwards. It is found that the apolitical role of the military on the one hand has increased the professionalisation of the army and on the other

hand has developed an attitudinal change in favour of the democratic way of governance. So the attitude of the military toward the democratic system of government and its readiness to allow the democratic process to take root in the Thai political system depends upon the extent of professionalisation of the armies of Thailand.

Any form of government whether it is the military regime or the civilian government, requires some kind of legitimacy from the Thai citizens for its effective and stable functioning. Generally the Thai citizens given legitimacy to a credible and reliable government who can help to create opportunities for their all round development. The democratic form of government derives its legitimacy by getting elected by the people. But the attitude of the citizens and the grounds of voting depends on the responsible and clean nature of the civilian administration.

It has been shown in the thesis that especially since 1992 onwards, the method of vote-buying and the widespread corruption to fund the campaigning of political parties has been on the rise among the different political parties. The emerging role of money power and muscle power in the elections has increased substantially. The emerging politics-criminal god father nexus for financing the political parties have increased the criminal activities. The irresponsible and ineffective bureaucracy has not solved the day-to-day problems of the rural masses. As a result this aspect of the democratic regime has eroded the legitimacy of the democratic system of governance and the Thai people in general has lost their faith in the viability of the democratic system of government. But as the Thai citizens have the final say to allow any type of

regime to function, this negative attitude of the masses toward the democratic system is an unhealthy trend to the successful functioning of the democracy in the Thai political system.

The democratic system of governance has allowed more function to the Thai people than any other system. So different stresses and strains in the form of domestic problems and various internal threats has developed from the political life. It is found that the role of an effective state mechanism to accommodate these different problems and threats is very much essential for the maintenance of the democratic system.

This thesis has examined different types of internal threats and domestic problems arising in the Thai politics which has restrained the smooth functioning of the democracy. The centre-periphery conflict, the conflict over ideology, the emerging Islamic insurgency in Southern Thailand are causes of some potential internal threats frequently disturbing the smooth functioning of democracy. But the democratic state should establish an institutional framework and effective state mechanism to successfully solve such problems. It is found that the Thai democratic system has not succeeded in establishing any effective state mechanism through which these problems will be diffused. Without any such permanent arrangement, a large number of potential problems can destroy the evolving democratic process. So the establishment of an effective state mechanism is vital to the functioning of a stable democratic system.

This thesis has analysed the role of the religion and the King in the Thai nation-building process. It is found that Buddhism as a state religion has played an unifying force in sustaining the different elements of the Thai polity. The

Thai nationalism and the sense of proudness among the Thais has been cemented over the years by the strong influence of the Buddhist religion. The role of religion as an important societal force has favoured the unity of the country against all odds and has given the democratic government the legitimacy to govern.

The role of monarchy in the time of the crisis is praiseworthy in the Thai political system. Over the years the monarch has solved many political crisis, especially the crisis in the May 1992 demonstration successfully. The complete reverence of the Thai citizen toward the King and the clean and broad image of the King has contributed significantly to the role of the King as a stabilizing factor to solve the different potential political crisis in the Thai politics. However, the thesis has pointed out that the excessive dependence of the Thai political system on the influence of the King to solve the political problems have led to the lack of any permanent state mechanism to solve the different issues connected with democratisation.

To conclude it can be said that the process of democratisation is still continuing in Thailand. It will take some more years to evolve democratic culture to nurture democracy in Thailand. Though the quest for democratisation is continuing, yet it can be added that the democratic norms has yet to take its roots in Thailand.

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