

# Brahmanism Rituals Appeared on the Thai Novel “Four Reigns” (*Si Phaen Din*)

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**Abstract**—Though Thailand is the land of Buddhism due to the majority respect Buddha and his followers; the country has been influenced by Brahmanism like other countries in Southeast Asia such as Lao, Cambodia. Brahmanism is considered as a holy and elite religion. The rituals embraced by the royal family and high classes from birth till death. The well-known Brahmanism rituals in Thailand were So Kan (top knot-cutting royal ceremony or ritual), the oath of allegiance ceremony and coronation ceremony.

Four Reigns or in Thai (*Si Phaen Din*) was the novel written by Kukrit Pramoj, Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) showing the changes and transition of Thailand related with Thai Monarchy from King Rama V to King Rama VIII through the view of Mae Ploy, who was a woman living in the four reigns and joined Brahmanism rituals and ceremonies since she was from the background of Royal Palace officer and in high-class society.

This research aims to study Brahmanism rituals appeared on the Thai novel “Four Reigns” (*Si Phaen Din*) by using descriptive analysis from the content of the novel.

**Index Terms**— Four Reigns, Si Phaen Din, Brahmanism, Rituals, Ceremony

## I. INTRODUCTION

Four Reigns (*Si Phaen Din*) is the novel written by Kukrit Pramoj, Mom Rajawongse (M.R.), telling the values, beliefs, cultures and tradition of Thailand since 1882-1946 (the period of Mid-Reign of King Rama 5 to the End of Reign of King Rama 8) through the eyes of Mae Ploy, the main actress. During that time, Thailand has changed economically and socio-culturally, for example, the national modernization in King Rama 5 Period, westernization, particularly arts and performance in King Rama 6 Period, democratization in King Rama 7 Period, and nationalism in King Rama 8. Even there are lots of changes in the transitional period (four reigns); Brahmanism rituals in royal family and high classes have still remained in Thailand and they have passed from one generation to the next till today (2016).

The novel has been considered as the classic literature since it has been reproduced many times in forms of drama on television and play on stage (Figure 1). The reasons of the reproduction were that the novel represents Thai values and images, which Thai people idealistically hold such as pride of the national culture, adoring of kings and his royal families.

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Furthermore, the novel is one of the escapist literatures which many Thai readers find it was the way to relax and go back to the peaceful time. The readers can learn lives of royal families and high classes from the novel through Mae Ploy, the main actress, since she was an officer in the royal palace and works for princess duties. (Figure 2) In addition, Mae Ploy was also in high class since her birth in the noble family and also married with the noble husband, an heir of Chinese-Thai rich person. Mae Ploy also transferred her high class to her children, Un and Odd, who studied abroad in the elite universities as Sorbonne University and Oxford University, respectively.



Fig. 1. Drama and Play of “Four Reigns” (*Si Phaen Din*)

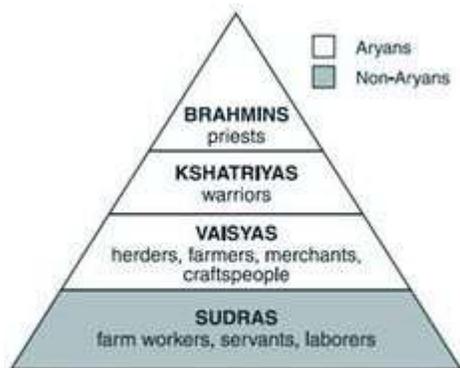


Fig. 2. Supervisor Sai teaches Mae Ploy how to dry things such as flowers, clothes. It is one of the duties in the palace.

Four Reigns is the interesting novel reflecting the beliefs of Thais in the old time and has still influenced nowadays, especially the matters of king and his royal family and the religion. In Thailand, the matter of king and his royal family and the religions are high related and respected. The matters of these are the cores of the nation. Brahmanism rituals (as a part of the religious ceremony) are used as the instrument to support the king and his royal family based on the notion of divinity right. However, Thai people still hold the main religion of Theravada

Buddhism as many countries in Southeast Asia such as Burma, Cambodia, and Lao. Though, the Brahmanism rituals are much attractive, inspiring and elegant, rather than Buddhism rituals, which are simple, sufficient and common. Therefore, the Brahmanism rituals play much important roles in Thai high classes, for instance, top knot-cutting ritual, the oath of allegiance ceremony and coronation ceremony, etc.

Brahmanism is a long history religion before Buddhism. It is categorized as theism and later on multi-theism after it transformed to Hinduism. Brahmanism follows the vedic books, which keeps myths, songs, preaches and instruct disciplines of how to behave. The well-known discipline is about proper code of behavior conduct based on caste system or Varna. (Figure3). The vedic books instructed that people should behave and work based on their caste system since their births as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras because the Brahma God has already set human being and destiny from birth. The violation of the caste system may cause a penalty such as discrimination of the untouchable child from the cross-caste system marriage. Historically, the reason of caste system is to divide Aryans (the rulers) and Non-Aryans (the followers) in the colonization period in India.



Source: *Guide to the Essentials of World History*, Prentice Hall, 1999 (adapted)

Fig. 3. Caste System or Varna in Brahmanism.

## II. BRAHMANISM AND ITS RITUALS

Brahmanism and its rituals have been in Thailand as well as many countries in Southeast Asia, like Cambodia, Lao. In Ayutthaya period, a king was assumed as the god or divine king and he had the power to rule and punish people. However, the notion of Brahmanism has changed when the kings in Rattanakosin period welcome Buddhism and its principles. The Brahmanism and its rituals become the part of Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism). The kings in Rattanakosin period adopted Buddhism principles, show his worship through building and renovating the temples and support the Buddhist activities. Though, Brahmanism has still practiced by the royal families and high classes in Thailand.

### Research Objectives

To study the Brahmanism rituals appeared on the Thai novel "Four Reigns" (Si Phaen Din)

### Research Methodology

1. The research is the documentary research.

2. Scope of the study is the Thai novel "Four Reigns" (Si Phaen Din).
3. The samples are Brahmanism rituals appeared on the Thai novel "Four Reigns" (Si Phaen Din)
4. Research methodology is done by the following steps:
  - 4.1 Collecting the data: The researcher reads the novel and studies the Brahmanism rituals appeared on the novel.
  - 4.2 Using descriptive analysis to the content of the read novel and list the rituals based on the objectives, activities, and summarized content from the novel.

### Research Results

Based on the novel "Four Reigns" (Si Phaen Din), the Brahmanism rituals (as a part of ceremony or festival) have appeared on four reigns of King Rama 5 to King Rama 8 (King Chulalongkorn, King Vajiravudh, King Prajadhipok and King Ananda, respectively) as:

1. Top knot-cutting ceremony
2. Oath of allegiance ceremony
3. Coronation ceremony
4. Loi Krathong festival
5. Royal funeral and cremation ceremony

## III. TOP KNOT-CUTTING RITUAL

Top knot-cutting ritual is the important ritual for the children or grandchildren of kings. The ritual was done through the children or grandchildren of kings who turned to teenagers or at 13 years old. In the old time, Thai people believed that children should have top knots on their heads. The top knots were the place where the god (in Brahmanism) stayed and the god (in Brahmanism) would protect the children from the evils. Once the children turned to teenagers, they were strong enough to protect themselves and did not need the top knot anymore. There are some beliefs for top knot-cutting such as children should not have a top knot-cutting ritual on Tuesday and they will not be allowed to turn to the West when they have top-knots on heads.

Therefore, the objectives of top knot-cutting ritual were to inform the transition of children to teenagers and to celebrate the children and show the financial status of the family, who established the ceremony. In the topknot-cutting ritual, there would be a decorated place to be similar to the forest of God. The decorated place included the forest, flowers, Brahmin animals, and waterfall. (Figure 4) The children attending the top knot-cutting ritual have to be put make-up on their faces like little gods. (Figure 5) In the novel, Mae Ploy heard the top knot-cutting ritual of King Rama 5 children from her supervisor, Aunt Sai. She also attended her own top knot-cutting ritual since she was born in the high class family with her friend, Mae Choi. (Figure 6). Top knot-cutting ritual was done to Princess Induratana and disappeared after King Rama 7 Period in 1931. (Pengpoom, 2016).



Fig 4. Decoration of mountain and city in the top knot-cutting ceremony in the reign of King Rama 5



Fig 5. Princes and Princesses in King Rama 5 reigns (Children of King Rama5) who attended top knot-cutting ceremony

Sources:

<https://m.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=443562365787389&id=119437984866497&set=a.120142734796022.30235.119437984866497>, Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.



Fig 6. Mae Ploy and Mae Choi, attended top knot-cutting in Mae Ploy's house since Mae Ploy's father is the noble who serve and work for King Rama 5.

Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX\\_LDj\\_CGBo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX_LDj_CGBo) Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.

#### IV. OATH OF ALLEGIANCE RITUAL

Oath of allegiance ritual is a ritual used when accepting the new royal officers to work for the king. The ritual is done by Brahmins who make the holy water in the big bowl keeping weapons such as swords, knives and spears. The Brahmins pray and give the curses that the disloyal royal officers who betray the king will die from the weapons in the bowl after they drink this holy water. In addition, the new royal officers have to give an oath and swear that they will not betray the king by any reason before drinking the holy water. Otherwise, they will get injured and die because of the weapons. The objective of this ritual is to threaten the new royal officers to be feared of the danger from betrayal and also to show that they will be loyal and obey the king. (Figure 7) The ritual appeared on the novel as stated by Mae Ploy's husband, Prem, who is the high ranked royal officer mentioned about the new royal officers, who did not care of the ritual, fight to abolish absolute monarchy in King Rama 7 reign and create the democracy to Thailand (at the time, it was called 'Siam'). This included Un, Mae Ploy's son, the political revolutionist and new royal officer who graduated from France and does not care of the traditional ritual.



Fig 7. Brahmin is cursing and making a holy water in the oath of allegiance ritual

Source:

<http://www.baanjompra.com/webboard/thread-1164-1-1.html>, Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.

#### V. CORONATION RITUAL

Coronation ceremony is the ritual when entitle and establish the new king. Once the last king died, the new king must attend the ritual. In the ritual, the king will sit in the high seat, assumed that it was a god mountain, since the king is the divine king and assumed the god. Similar to the benediction, the king will listen to the pray of Brahmins in the rituals. The king will be given his crown jewels such as Great Crown of Victory, Royal Umbrella, the Sword of Victory, Royal Staff (or Walking Stick), etc. (Figure 8) The king will sit on the cart and join the parade around the place and later give his first statement after he became the king or Traditional Oath of Accession. In the novel, Mae Ploy experienced the rituals only in the reigns of King Rama 6, 7 and 8 since she was born in the mid-reign of King Rama 5. (Figure 9) The objective of the ritual is to praise, to officially announce the status of the new king to the nation.



Fig. 8. King Rama 6 sat in the coronation ceremony around with his crown jewels.

Source: <http://www.reurnthai.com/index.php?topic=6098.0>, Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.



Fig. 9. King Rama 7 sat in the coronation ceremony around with his nobles.

Source: [http://region1.prd.go.th/ewt\\_news.php?nid=15706](http://region1.prd.go.th/ewt_news.php?nid=15706), Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.

## VI. LOY KRATONG RITUAL

Loi Kratong Ceremony is the Brahmanism ritual for everyone who consumes water and may not intentionally damage water in the river. The ritual allows men to ask for apology for the god of river (in Brahmanism, there is a female river god named Ganges) by giving the floating flower, decorated with candle and incenses. The ritual is also for entertainment and it can be celebrated with fireworks. The ritual is stated in the novel when Mae Ploy followed her princess to Bang Pa-In Royal Palace, Ayutthaya to join the ritual with King Rama 5. (Figure 10 and Figure 11) Today, the ritual is a festival for entertainment and tourism, rather than the religiously related ceremony.



Fig 10. Loy Kratong at Bang Pa-In Royal Palace in the King Rama 5 Period



Fig 11. Loy Kratong at Bang Pa-In Royal Palace in the King Rama 5 Period

Source:

<http://topicstock.pantip.com/library/topicstock/2008/11/K7198628/K7198628.html>, Retrieved on October 27, 2016.

## VII. ROYAL FUNERAL AND CREMATION RITUALS

The rituals were for King who passed away, but King Rama 7 since King Rama 7 passed away in UK after he abdicated due to the change of absolute monarchy to democracy and his sickness. The royal funeral consists of both Buddhism and Brahmanism rituals. The royal funeral is considered as very important ritual for the nations. It shows the great loss since king is a head of the state and soul of the nation.

In the royal funeral, there are two major activities as 1) Praying and 2) Cremation. 1) Praying: The body of king who passed away kept in the golden urn called 'Kot' and set on the high place in the grand palace. The royal family will come to visit and they will pray after the monks and Brahmins for many days and nights. 2) Cremation: After praying in the grand palace for days and nights, the body of king is brought to royal field near the grand palace (Sanam Luang). The place of the cremation ceremony will be established like the mountain where gods stay since the king was assumed as avatar god or divine king. The king was born to work and then he will go back to heaven. The established mountain will be decorated by flowers, animals (in Brahmanism, such as elephants, lions, fish, birds) and some small palaces and houses could be built nearby. The Brahmins and Buddhist monks also pray to send the king back

to heaven and finally the king were cremated. During the ritual, there can be Thai traditional music played. (Figure 12)

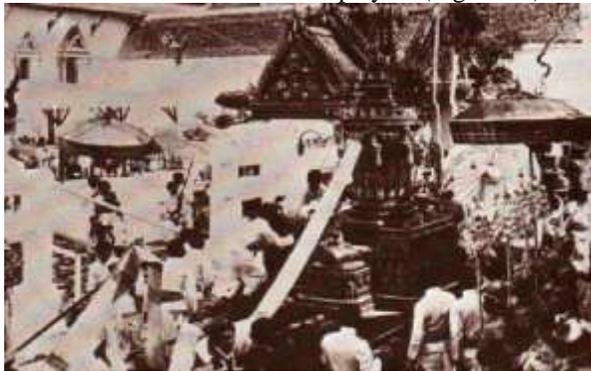


Fig 12. The urn of King Rama brought to royal cremation at the royal field near the grand palace (Sanam Luang or Thung Phra Men)

Source

<http://topicstock.pantip.com/library/topicstock/2007/10/K5942229/K5942229.html>, Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.

In the novel, the funeral of King Rama 5 is the biggest since he was the great king who has adorable achievements to Thailand (at that time called ‘Siam’), such as modernization and building infrastructure, fighting against colonization of Britain and France and bloodless abolishment of slavery. Therefore, he was greatly respected. In the novel, it did not mention about the cremation of King Rama 7 since the King died in UK and also King Rama 8 since Mae Ploy died of heart attack after the death of King Rama 8. Therefore, she could not go the funeral of King Rama 8. (Figure 13).

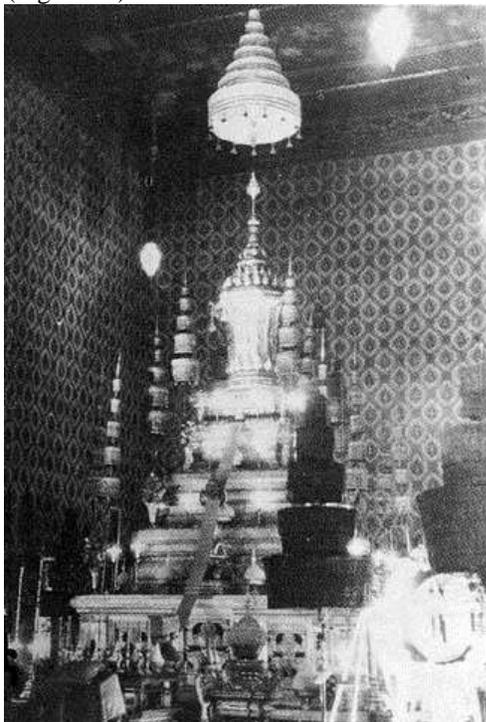


Fig 13. The Golden Urn of King Rama 8, which was not appeared on the Novel since Mae Ploy died of heart attack on the Day King Rama 8 passed away.

Source:

<http://topicstock.pantip.com/library/topicstock/2009/02/K7566829/K7566829.html>, Retrieved on October, 27, 2016.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Brahmanism is the religion focusing on the different caste and give high important to the high class. Therefore, it creates lots of meaningful to serve the high class through the notion of divine right or divine king. The Brahmanism hence becomes the holy rituals and is embraced by the high class in Thailand, especially kings and royal families, even though most of Thai people are Buddhists. However, this is not strange as the neighbor countries of Thailand also accept Brahmanism rituals, such as Lao, Cambodia. In general, Brahmanism rituals offer greatness, holiness and power to the ones who use and join and it prefers to the high class based on birth. Brahmanism rituals were accepted by Thai people since Thai people needs holiness and inspiration to live and to work (Kamek, 2015).

Though, Brahmanism rituals have been run in Thailand for a long time as appeared on the Thai Novel “Four Reigns” (Si Phaen Din), the simple, common and natural religion like Buddhism plays much important roles to every class in Thailand. The reasons are that Thai people in every class prefers simple, flexible and balancing lifestyles, rather than serious, mysterious and serious religion like Brahmanism, which they prefer only some rituals. In addition, Thai kings has embraced the Buddhism Principles such as tenfold virtue of the ruler, mercifulness as they have been in the reigns (Chanraung, 2014)

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