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**A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
OF BUDDHIST MONKS DURING THE POLONNARUWA PERIOD
(FROM 11TH TO 13TH CENTURY A.D)**

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Much of the research done in ancient Sri Lankan historiography paid attention to political and religious issues. However, currently there is growing enthusiasm to explore and to further research other areas that are of relevance to understanding this important period in Sri Lankan history. The existing scholarship mainly focuses on the link between the state and Buddhism and that between the monastic life style and the economic role of the monks. As these studies have ignored political participation and the influence of Buddhist monks as a group, the main intent of the present study is to explore that aspect through primary sources.

It is generally accepted that Buddhist monks played a prominent role in Sri Lankan politics during the Anuradhapura period and such political involvement continued throughout the latter era with certain notable developments. The present study aims at paying special attention to this political development during the Polonnaruwa period.

The politics of ancient Sri Lanka was greatly influenced by the involvement of Buddhist monks. However, their activities and responsibilities changed over time. In this respect they seem to have taken a practical approach to diverse issues that confronted them. Therefore, it is proposed to discuss the contribution of the monks by concentrating on the exact nature of the *Bhikkhu* community, the challenges they had to confront and their responses to such issues in order to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of the monks in the political sphere and their intervention in the dynamics of the contemporary political situation.

It is important to underline the fact that political connections were extremely important in the formation of a powerful *Sangha* organization. The evidence from primary sources shows that the role of the *Sangha* community was extremely important in the field of politics in the Polonnaruwa period in Sri Lankan history.