

THE DEGREE OF CANDIDATE
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A Study of the Role of Uāsaka and Upāsikā in Early Buddhism
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ABSTRACT

In this study, an attempt is made to examine the role of upāsaka and upāsikā in early Buddhism mainly for understanding their duty towards the Monastic Community. Moreover, their ethics in making benefit, both for own and others, and their capacity in attaining the highest state, Nibbāna are also dealt with. In chapter I, the introduction sets out some of the problems and proceeds with the discussion of the sources. Apart from the Pāli Tipiṭaka and Commentaries, other modern works both in English and Thai, have been examined. Chapter II deals with the discussion of the term 'upāsaka and upāsikā' and examines how a person is initiated into Buddhism. Here, admission of a person into the community is mentioned only by taking the Threefold Refuge. Chapter III contains a discussion on the social background of upāsaka and upāsikā. It shows that they come from several levels of society, namely, Khattiya, Brāhmaṇa, Vessa, and Sudda respectively. Moreover, some wanderer ascetics also become upāsaka and upāsikā. Chapter IV is devoted to a discussion of the role of upāsaka and upāsikā towards the Saṅgha Community. Some lay followers not only provide the four requisites and material sustenance for the Saṅgha, but also move forward by bearing responsibility the growth and decay of Buddha-sāsana similar to that of the Monastic Community. Chapter V discusses lay ethics in Buddhism that deals with social relationship, right livelihood and the code of morality such as five precepts and eight precepts which are conducive for attaining the high stages of inner progress. Chapter VI is devoted to an examination whether lay people can attain Nibbāna, the ultimate goal of Buddhism. It shows that lay people can gain arahantship similar to that of the monks and nuns, but they have to join the Monastic Community shortly. And, the last chapter, conclusion, brings out the principal results of this study.