




Buddhist Approach to Sustain a Marriage Life Based on Tipiṭaka

Sarita Mahatthanadull^[a]*

^[a] *Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand*
* *Author for coresspondence email; sari_tarn@hotmail.com*



[Abstract]

At present, there are a lot of problems concerning with a marriage life. Husbands and wives treated each other immorally: family violence, stealing behavior, extramarital affair, deception between family members, and substance abuse. These international scale problems abducted a sustainable marriage life and caused divorce. This article aims to understand the practical Buddhist approach to sustain a marriage life based on Tipiṭaka. Buddhism encourages a couple to observe the five precepts (pañca-sīla) and practice the ennobling virtues (pañca-dhamma) as fundamental rules for laypeople. Moreover, a set of doctrines must also be practiced as supporting virtues. They are virtues for laity (gharāvāsa-dhamma), the two directions (disā), well matched (samajīvidhamma), and virtues conducive to benefits in the future (sampadā). Of these, the doctrine in well matched plays a crucial role in perpetuating good living of a couple. These doctrinal principles, under a virtuous frame, render a sustainable marriage life to husbands and wives in whom they live ordinary life smoothly and happily. When living together, a member should truly understand their responsive duties; one

should be self developed, tolerable, supportive, generous, etc. Thus, the Buddhist approach is a key to sustain a marriage life for family institute, and benefits both this life and the life-to-come.

Keywords: Buddhist Approach, Mariage Life, Sustain, Tipitaka

Introduction

Problems on a marriage life seem universal to the societies. Husbands and wives live their directionless couple life which turns to family violence, stealing behavior, extramarital affair, deception between family members, and substance abuse. These international scale problems abducted a sustainable marriage life and caused divorce. However, to avoid some possible misunderstanding, “marriage life” in this article implies a nuclear family or a small size family which includes husband and wife without children. And the discussion in details will be made in the topic “**Marriage Life Problems**” which is the origin of the objective. Therefore, the article aims to truly understand the Buddhist approach for a sustainable marriage life in Tipiṭaka.

In order to cope with these problems sustainably, Buddhism showed a special set of the useful doctrines for a couple to observe and practice. These approaches, under a virtuous frame, render a sustainable marriage life to husbands and wives in whom they live ordinary life smoothly and happily. In the topic “**The Buddhist Approach to Sustain a Marriage Life**” we will discuss more in details the underlined doctrinal principles. In order to create the most common understanding, the author has defined a key terms “approach” that means the five doctrinal principles in the Tipiṭaka, namely: 1. The five precept and the ennobling virtues (*pañca sīla, pañca dhamma*); 2. Virtues for laypeople (*gharāvāsadhamma*); 3. Directions (*disā*); 4. Well matched (*samajīvidham*); 5. Virtues conducive to benefits in the future (*sampadā*). Besides, most of the data are taken from the primary

source of those Suttantapīṭaka in the Tipiṭaka.

Lastly, what benefit will we get from the proposed approach? Readers may find themselves an interesting answer in the topic “**What will we get from applying the approach?**”

Marriage Life Problems

Due to the fact that, each macroscopic society is constituted by multitude number of families. That is to say a family is the basic building block of the society. It may be explained metaphorically to the functions of a large number of small mechanical pinions in machinery. These coactive machine parts continually work to achieve their goal. And every single part count and rely on each other's. Thus if one tiny element is destroyed, the whole system will collapse. The entire system with large macro level could fall down easily and lead to severe problems as consequence. Same as our society, the collapse could occur just because it consisted of unhealthy family institutions. Thus in order for the strength of society, family institutions particularly marriage couples must be reinforced to become sustainable.

In general, marriage life problem can be divided in two classes, ground problem and core problem:

Ground Problem

The first kind of problem deals with human behavior that is very general to our senses. This one of a kind we often look over it again and again. We do not focus on it as we should. At the end these habits will turn to instant ground problem. Surprisingly, there has been a substantial body of evidence in the recent universal societies showing multitude imbalanced issues pertaining with members in family's structure and its associated problems, for example, domestic violence, stealing behavior among family members, extramarital affair, deception between family members, and substance abuse leading to addiction of alcohol and drugs. These problems are recognized as ground problem.

Firstly, **family violence** is a one of social problems committed by all members

within our community. It does not distinguish between race, religion, social standing, economic, or educational level. As latent evil, anyone can easily become a victim. The emotional and psychological abuse inflicted by batterers may be more costly to treat in the short-run than physical injury. In a long-run not only parent's body and mind that have devastated but their children that have been influenced to committing youth crime and having anti-social behavior.

Secondly, **stealing behavior**, a common problem especially in childhood and adolescence, is often regarded as an expression of distress and is associated with parental "distance" and family breakups. Ingamells and Epston (2013). According to Miller, it is regarded as an expression of conduct disorder or as an anti-social behavior (Miller & Moncher, 1988) in which we should not be overlooked because the problem of stealing has mostly been addressed alongside other problem behaviors (Sanders & Markie-Dadds, 1992). Then, **extramarital affair** a commonplace occurrence in modern society where the social media, such as Internet and Facebook, is playing a major role in modern extramarital affairs by allowing them to occur with greater anonymity and convenience than ever before (vide Smith, Hall, & Daigle, 2010). The marriage families living in the Era have been unawares misguided by currents of diverse shared social values. Next, **deception between family members**, Deception is one of the most significant and pervasive social phenomena of our age. Starting from little lies ranging from the trivial to the more serious, including deception between members in a family related to the reciprocal exchange of information, the desire to avoid punishment, and individuals' attachment beliefs (Cole, 2001). The truth is that voluntary deception undermines the mutual confidence and trust between members of the family slowly.

Lastly, **substance abuse** leading to addictive disorders including alcohol, illicit drugs, and nicotine. A complex illness that persist even in the face of devastating consequences. Additionally, the dysfunctional behaviors that result from drug abuse can interfere with a person's normal functioning in the family, the workplace, and the broader community (Volkow, 2011). These ground problems can easily be found in the everyday life.

Core Problem

Apart from the mentioned ground problem, there is another kind of problem which can completely rip apart a couple's life. According to the Buddhist view, there are four factors to shorten lifespan of a marriage couple which are faith, precepts, generosity, and wisdom. The Aṅguttaranikāya explains the undesirable behavioral factors forming a bad family;

one who abuses and reviles recluses and Brahmins [unmatched in faith]. . . one who takes life, steals, a wrong-doer in sense-desires, a liar, and one given to the use of liquor fermented and distilled which causes sloth [unmatched in precepts]. . . one who lives at home with a heart soiled by the taint of stinginess [unmatched in generosity] (Woodward,1933)

In this case, a couple does not share the same faith in religion, does not observe the five precepts, living together with different kinds of generosity. Besides, if a couple lack of same level of wisdom they surely cannot share the same goal of expanding their happy life together. Thus we can say the serious problem for a marriage life is that they can no longer stay together as a role of husband and wife. At a final state, the only serious problem is divorce.

These undesirable conflicts can effectively easily diminish the sanctity of marriage life. They eventually turn a perfect balanced family life to separation and divorce affecting the society they live even much worse.

Regardless of races, religious beliefs, customs and traditions, these problematic behavioral issues have been pervasively deteriorating living quality of every single family member in modern society of the world. Therefore the analytically thinking on the sustainable of life and family is what we really need.

The Buddhist Approach to Sustain a Marriage Life

A marriage life can either be short or long lasting one depending on many relative factors. One clear cut criterion to judge whether it is sustainable

is the divorcement. Therefore the word “sustain” in this context means the achievement of either of two benefits (*attha*). That is to say either the benefit for a marriage couple achieved in this life (*diṭṭhadhammikattha*) or the benefit for a marriage couple which will be possibly expected for the life-to-come (*samparāyikattha*). Therefore, *paramattha* benefit will not be mentioned here in the article.

The Five Precepts and the Ennobling Virtues (*pañca-sīla/pañca-dhamma*)

The Buddhist approach to deal with those problematic matters mentioned earlier is of the following set of Dhammas. Starting with the most basic rules for general lay people, the five precepts as the Dīghanikāya stated; people should abstain from five prohibited, taking life; taking what is not given; sexual misconduct; lying speech; and consuming alcoholic drinks. So a good Buddhist couple is one who equipped with the observance of *pañca-sīla*.

The Buddhist doctrinal principles relevant to the creation of balance of life and family are the five precepts and ennobling virtues (*pañca-sīla/pañca-dhamma*) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2011).

The five precepts or five rules of training (*sikkhāpadāni*) as exhibited in the Dīghanikaya:

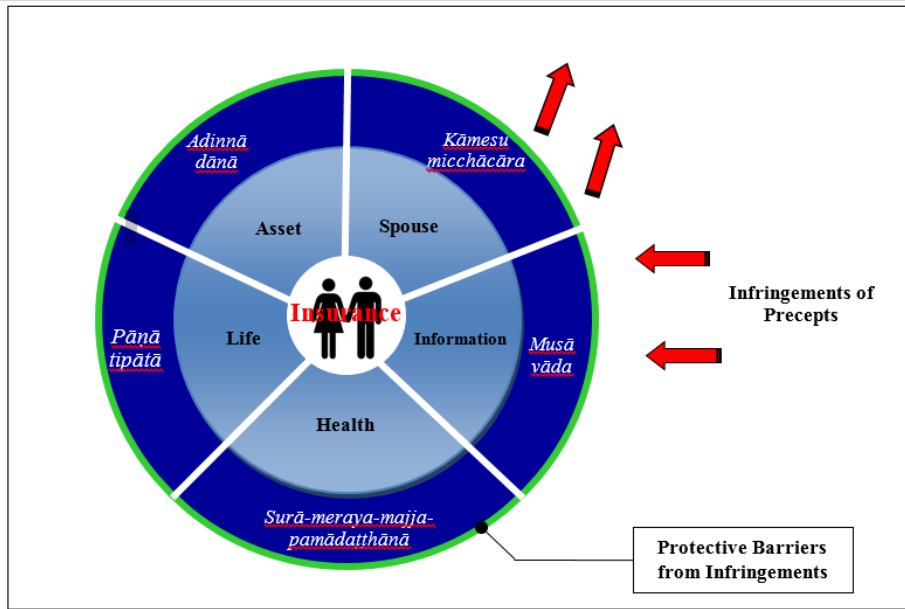
1. Refraining from taking life,
 2. Refraining from taking what is not given,
 3. Refraining from sexual misconduct,
 4. Refraining from lying speech,
 5. Refraining from strong drink and sloth-producing drugs.
- (Walshe, 2012).

Above mentioned Fives are training rules that protect fearfulness from comes upon a layman life, a layman lives the home-life with confidence, the Exalted One says he [layman who observed those rules] is duly

thrown into heaven (Hare,1961).

In one hand, these basic practices ensure that each member in family will not violates others human rights. On the other hand, they also protect member by means of “marriage life insurance”. The life, asset, spouse, information and health will be, in sequence, safely protected and framed based on the concept of *pañca-sīla* and its functions. As a barrier to those undesirable devil behaviors, they can effectively protect member in a family from all infringements. As stated below, the functions of the five precepts as insurances to a marriage couple:

Chart 1: Showing Functions of the Five Precepts as Marriage Life Insurance



Enjoying by the mentioned five precepts, the abstinenances, the ennobling virtues (*pañca-dhamma*) should also be emphasized by the abstainers. They are loving-kindness and compassion (*mettā-karuṇā*), right means of livelihood (*sammā ajīva*), sexual restraint (*kāmasaṅvara*), truthfulness or sincerity (*sacca*), and mindfulness and awareness (*sati-sampajañña*) (Pa-yutto, 2000)

Looking from the different angle, the ennobling virtues work as a supporter

to the precepts respectively;

<i>mettā-karuṇā</i>	supports	the first precept
<i>sammā ajīva</i>	supports	the second precept
<i>kāmasamvara</i>	supports	the third precept
<i>sacca</i>	supports	the fourth precept
<i>sati-sampajañña</i>	supports	the fifth precept

The following chart indicates relationship between the five precepts and the five ennobling;

Chart 2: Indicating Supportive Relationship between the Five Precepts and the Five Ennobling

<i>Pañca-dhamma</i>	<i>Pañca-sīla (Abstinences)</i>
<i>Mettā-Karuṇā</i>	<i>Pāṇātipātā</i>
<i>Sammā ajīva</i>	<i>Adinnādānā</i>
<i>Kāmasamvara</i>	<i>Kāmesu micchācāra</i>
<i>Sacca</i>	<i>Musāvāda</i>
<i>Sati-sampajañña</i>	<i>Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā</i>

The five precepts and five ennobling virtues are the disciplinary rules for the laity that reciprocally support to each other. In the context of social institution, a family whose member observes five precepts also needs to follow five ennobling virtues. Observing and practicing both of these principles accordingly a member can promote and support oneself with the fundamental morality and ethic resulting good living and becoming perfect human beings. Furthermore, they lead balanced life and balanced family for all aspects. Consequently the problems of family violence, stealing behavior, extramarital affair, deception between family members, and substance abuse will be washed away from our society and substituted with all forms of peace.

Virtues for Laity (*Gharavāsa-dhamma*)

Another doctrinal principle taken from the Saṃyuttanikāya is *gharāvāsa-dhamma*, the four qualities for a good household life or virtues for lay

people. In order to achieve a happy marriage life, this practical principle cannot be overlooked. It is stated that;

Doing what is proper, dutiful,
One with initiative finds wealth.
By truthfulness one wins acclaim;
Giving, one binds friends.
That is how one does not sorrow
When passing from this world to the next.
The faithful seeker of the household life
In whom dwell these four qualities-
Truth, adjustment, steadfastness, generosity
Does not sorrow when he passes on (Bodhi & Fischer,2005).

It is so clear that Buddhism emphasizes on the good conduct. Good and proper behaviors always being advised for laypeople to practice their secular life. Plus they also need to realize their duties in living various carriers. Therefore in this context, a family member, among others, should perform truthful and honest to his or her spouse since the truthful information will maintain the trustfulness among others. One must also be self-developed in every possible way towards one's volitional conduct, through one's bodily action, through one's verbal action, and through one's mental action. By regularly taming and training oneself or adjustment of one's weak points in order to improve all the undesirable behaviors. This is because humans can indigenously do mistake in everyday living so that if one knows intelligently how to deal with this nature, one will be called a self-developed person and always be a desirable spouse. This is where wisdom taking part in self-developing mission.

Then one should be tolerated to any hard circumstances. Like an examination, an indefinable number of unpredictable tests in which one will counteract in a real marriage life. One must endow with endeavor as great as one can in passing through those hard times smoothly and flawlessly. At last, after earning income or any asset honestly, one should give them back to society. The generosity can make us free from the stinginess. Thus not only can develop one's mind to become a generous one but one can make

contribution towards society in a broader sense.

The Two Directions (*Disā*)

As mentioned earlier, the members in a marriage family consisted of husband and wife. Speaking of how should one acts to his or her couple. The Buddha suggests a number of responsive duties particularly for husbands and wives as appeared in the *Sīgālovāda Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. The Buddha says;

“There are five ways in which a husband should minister to his wife:

By honoring her,

By not disparaging her,

By not being unfaithful to her,

By giving authority to her,

By providing her with adornments.

In the same way that a good wife will reciprocate her husband;

“By properly organizing her work,

By being kind to the servants,

By not being unfaithful,

By protecting stores,

And by being skilful and diligent in all she has to do.”(Walshe, 2012).

From the *Sutta* we clearly saw that the Buddha pointed out how husbands and wives treat one another in a moral and ethical way to generate the perfect relationship into the family. In this way, a couple will be sheltered with peace and freed from any fear in their happy marriage life. Having served by these moral and ethics as foundation of conduct, a couple can productively develop its living to the higher level of practice in the Dhamma to attain the highest goal of living. Wife as part of the family can build the religious atmosphere to the family by encouraging her husband and all family members to practice the good conduct, together with augmenting the mind in order to develop wisdom. One good example is *Visākhā*, a lay female disciple who succeeded to bring her family to the Dhamma. Due to greatness of *Visākhā* as wife, daughter-in-law and inspiration of Dhamma,

she is known as “Migāramāta”, a mother of Migāra, her father in law. The key factor is a proper role played in the family as well as having good Dhammic interactions, a family will not only get fundamental happiness as a monogamic couple where husband and wife will not look for evil extra marital affair, but accomplish true happiness by supporting each other to attain Nibbāna, the ultimate happiness of an intrinsic life.

Looking from one aspect, these responsive duties are established based on nature of differences in humans. Venerable Walmoruwe Piyaratana states:

When you consider a husband and wife, they will both have different social levels before marriage. At the beginning, they will also have different ways of approaching common problems in the family. They have different ways of thinking . . . in body size . . . levels of education (Walmoruwe, 2015).

Having shared a common side and leaving all of those differences aside is what good couples should practice in their life. And duty of responsible based on the Sutta can be reliable guarantee that both husband and wife have shared the rules and regulations as one thing in their common.

Balanced Livelihood (*Samajīvidhamma*)

Another pivotal Buddhist doctrine to help building up perfect balance towards marriage families called Balanced Livelihood (*samajīvidhamma*). It is the most important key factors we are discussing in which lies in “*samajīvi sutta*” of the Aṅguttaranikāya. The Buddha addressed Nakula Pitā and Nakula Mātā that;

On a certain occasion the Exalted One dwells at the house of the housefather, Nakula’s father. He said this to the Nakula’s father and Nakula’s mother:

Herein, householders, if both wife and husband desire to behold each other both in very life and in the life to come, and both are matched in faith, matched in virtue, matched in generosity, matched in wisdom, then do they behold each other in this very life and in the life to come.

If both, believers, self-controlled, well-spoken,
Living as dhamma bids, use loving words
One to the other, manifold the blessings
That come to wife and husband, and to them
The blessing of a pleasant life is born.
Dejected are their foes, for both are good.
So in this world, living as dhamma bids,
The pair, in goodness matched, i'the deva-world
Rejoicing win the bliss that they desire (Woodward, 1962) .

From the Sutta, husbands and wives who expect to live their marriage life sustainably must be:

1. Matched in faith,
2. Matched in virtue,
3. Matched in generosity,
4. Matched in wisdom.

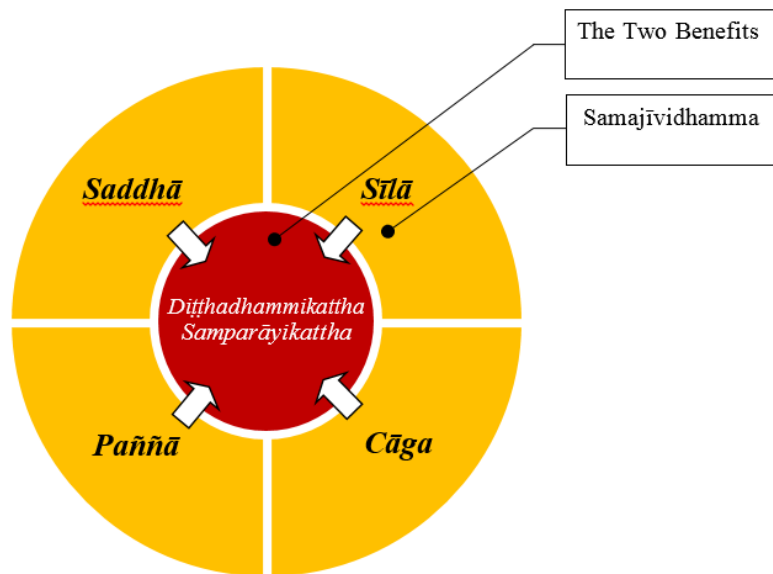
The couples in Marriage families who practice according to these principles are reckoned as the best of lay-disciples, male and female, in “intimate conversation”

To be more specific on this, the Longknee, the Koliyan or the Dīghajāñu Sutta of the Aṅguttaranikāya gives a clearer explanation that; to be achieved in **Faith** means one must believe in the Buddha and believe in the awakening of the Tathāgata: *arahant*, fully awakened, adept in knowledge and conduct, well going, a world-knower, incomparable, a tamer of tamable men, among *devas* and men the teacher, Buddha, Exalted One. To be achieved in **Virtue** means the abstinence of the five precepts, that is to say the abstaining from taking life, from taking what is not given, from carnal lusts, from lying, abstains from taking sloth-causing liquors, spirits, and wines. To be achieved in **Generosity** means having mind free of the stain of meanness, Dwelling at home with heart purged of the stain of avarice mind free of the stain of meanness; freely bounteous, open-handed, gladly giving, yoke-mate to asking, he is a cheerful giver. To be achieved in **Wisdom** means being endowed with wisdom as to the way to the utter destruction of ill.

In the Dīghanikāya indicated benefits of *sampadā* as; “No begins arise in happy, heavenly state after death because of the gain of relatives, wealth or health; but beings are reborn in such states because of gains in morality and right view” (Walshe, 1995).

The following chart exhibits *samajīvidhamma* as factors leading to the two benefits:

Chart 3: Exhibiting Samajīvidhamma as Factors Leading to the Two Benefits

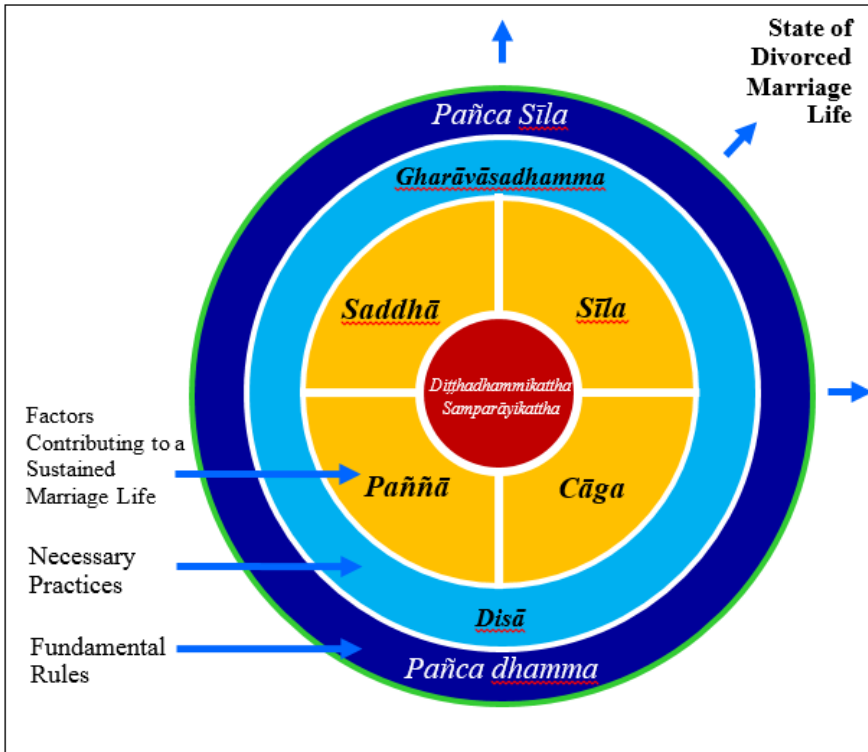


The teaching on the doctrine of “well matched” thus plays a crucial role in perpetuating good living of a couple as the meaning of the doctrine named “*samajīvidhamma*”.

What Will We Get from Applying the Approach?

At this point, all of the Dhamma principles that have been suggested by the author, if properly practiced, the two kinds of benefit can be attained. They are *diṭṭhadhammikatta*; the benefit in this life, and *samparāyikatta*; the benefit in the life to come, as evidence shown in the Mahā Nidesa scriptures “*Diṭṭhadhammiko vā attho samparāyiko vā attho. . .*” In order to achieve the benefit, husband and wife should follow these

doctrines. As a conclusion, the following conceptual model will clearly depict the outlook of “Buddhist approach to sustain a marriage life based on Tipiṭaka”.



From the model, the two benefits located right at the center of the model, *dīṭṭhadhammikattha* and *samparāyikattha*, which are the target of this research. Surrounded by the four factors contributing to a sustained marriage life is *samajīvīdham*, Matched in faith, virtue, generosity, and wisdom. Then the necessary practices are *gharāvāsadhamma* and *disā* to support those doctrines. *Gharāvāsadhamma* is virtues for a good household life. *Disā* is the responsive duties. And last, *pañca sīla* and *pañca dhamma* are the root or fundamental rules in everyday life. They work as a frame in maintaining a couple in this track towards the target, and protecting a couple from being divorced. A luminous name “protective barrier” is used in explaining the functions of them. Seeing from the widest angle, factors contributing to a sustained marriage life, necessary practices, and fundamental rules are

related to each other. If a couple does not bring these doctrines to their life the problem will occur and lead to the states of divorcement.

Conclusion

Problematic issues on a marriage life are based on the infringement of the five precepts. They are family violence, stealing behavior, extramarital affair, deception between family members, and substance abuse. The marriage life problems which are divided in two classes: ground problem and core problem have shortened the life span of couples. They finally turn marriage life to unsustainable state called divorce. The findings not only serves as a guiding manual for those who have been suffering from latent internal problems in family but also make contribute to the world of Buddhist integrative method particularly the couples who seek for a happy marriage life sustainably.

As a result, the Buddhist way in sustaining a marriage life in which the five precepts (*pañca-sīla*) and practice the ennobling virtues (*pañca-dhamma*) are involved as fundamental rules for laypeople. As well as a set of specific doctrines must also be practiced promptly as supporting virtues. They are virtues for laity (*gharāvāsa-dhamma*), the two directions (*disā*), well matched (*samajīvidhamma*), and virtues conducive to benefits in the future (*sampadā*). They benefit members of a marriage couple both this life and the life-to-come.

References

- Miller, G. E., & Moncher, F. J. (1988). Critical issues in the assessment of childhood stealing behavior. *Advances in behavioral assessment of children and families*, 4:73-96
- Sanders, M. R., & Markie-Dadds, C. (1992). Toward a technology of prevention of disruptive behaviour disorders: The role of behavioural family intervention. *Behaviour Change*, 9(3), 186-200.
- Smith, C., Hall, R., & Daigle, J. (2010). Monotony in monogamy: a study of married individuals seeking to have an extramarital. *American Journal of Psychological Research*, 6(1), 97-102.

- Cole, T. (2001). Lying to the one you love: The use of deception in romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18(1), 107-129.
- Volkow, N. D. (2011). *Principles of drug addiction treatment: A research-based guide*. DIANE Publishing.
- Woodward, F. L. (tr.), 1933: *The Book of the Gradual Sayings II*, Pali Text Society, London.
- Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. (2011). *Dhamma in English*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.
- Walshe, M. O. C. (2012). *The long discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*.
- Hare, E. M. (1961). *The book of the gradual sayings: (Anguttara-nikāya) or more-numbered suttas*. London: for the Pali text soc. by Luzac.
- Payutto, P. A. (2000). Dictionary of Buddhism. *Bangkok: Suetawan Co., BE, 2545*.
- Bodhi, ., & Fischer, Z. N. (2005). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*. New York: Wisdom Publications.
- Walshe, M. O. C. (2012). *The long discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*.
- Walmoruwe Piyaratana.(2015). *Sīgālovādasutta: How to Strike a Perfect Balance in Society* (2nd ed.). Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre.
- Woodward, F. L. (1962). *The book of the gradual sayings: (Anguttara-nikāya) or more-numbered suttas*. London: for the Pali text soc. by Luzac.
- Walshe, M. (1995). *Dighanikaya: The long discourses of the Buddha : a translation of the Digha Nikaya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.