In the early stage of Buddhism, the rituals and ceremonies had neither a place of importance nor any one of significance. In fact early Buddhism was a congregation of persons who had renounced all family ties, committed to self-restraint and accumulation of merit, forming a Brotherhood which was free from traditional hierarchy, priestly domination and reflected no single pattern of ceremonial observances. Alike other prevalent religion early Buddhism totally discarded the theory of any divine existence as well as rituals and practices which meant uttering of hymns and offering of sacrifices and yagnic oblations etc.¹

Purification of self is the principal concern, nowhere in his preaching did he put stress on ceremonial ritualism which formed a very common characteristic of Hinduism. Even before his death Buddha being asked by his close disciple, Ananda to appoint his successor gave definite instructions that after his death there would be no successor of him, it was rather his intention that his instructions would serve as guiding principles for his followers in future.²

It is striking to note that during the religious councils which were held after Buddha's death, the teachings were compiled and had been given the shape of canonical texts which, surprisingly enough, contained a number of popular ceremonies and rituals.

In this context it is relevant to make reference to the order of monks (Samgha) which was initially formed by Buddha himself with the help of...

¹ Reference can be made to the compilation of Brahmanagama suite of sutras like Khuddaka Nikaya where Buddha discarded the importance of Vedas and religious rites.
² Mahaparinibbana Suttanta of Dighavakaya.
of his sixty close disciples. But side by side problems cropped up during the admission into the Sangha since no restriction had been imposed regarding the admission and no guidelines of requirements for prospective candidates were set. But unfortunately, the Sangha at that moment was not equipped with proper rules and regulations through which it could impose discipline over a heterogeneous body of disciples.

To put an end to the crisis, Buddha himself set down numbers of certain norms which in the long run got identified with Buddhism itself. These in course of time those disciplinarist methods formulated for keeping the integrity of the Sangha ultimately got access in the Buddhist religious texts in the form of unbreakable rituals and ceremonies.

Buddha also introduced some rules and regulations for the sole purpose of guiding lay-devotees, they were less strict in nature as compared to those for the ordained disciples of the Sangha. The lay-devotees were, in fact, responsible for the introduction of many ceremonies and social practices in Buddhism. Though they, the ordained ones in the Sangha came into contact with different religious manoeuvres of the society hence unpractised and the members of the Sangha and the lay-devotees used to hold religious functions jointly. The ultimate result of such a joint participation in religious festivals thus led to a surreptitious infiltration of popular ritualism in the strict and ascetic monastic life of the Sangha, the process of synthesis remained unnoticed and unhindered until the ceremonies and rituals got identified with Buddhist religion.

Here is given a brief account of the then Buddhist ceremonies and rituals prevalent throughout the country during the regime of the kings as found in the Burmese texts, among them, we may refer to Tissana, Pabbajja and Upasamadā, Upasaṭha, Vassaevase, Pavarana, Kanima and Pantta or Pint ceremony as the principle ecclesiastical ceremonies and rituals. It is to be noted here that not only some rules and
regulations were formulated with a view to regularising the lives of the ordained monks but also some more rules were laid down against the violation of ecclesiastical norms. Methods of punishments and rules and laws were also formulated according to the gravity of the offences committed.

The Ceremonies and rituals:

Tisarana (Three Refuges) was practically a ritual much like the Brahmanical Upasaya ceremony of the Hindus, on the eve of joining the Samgha by a new entrant. As a rule such lay devotees desiring to enter the Samgha had to observe first of all certain formalities as codified by the Samgha. But in the later period the admission was more restricted and gradation of new entrants were strictly maintained. The novices usually were asked to adhere to the first five moral Precepts called Pancasilas and to chant the Mangala Sutta after having the Tisarana completed. These Pancasilas (Five precepts) did not constitute commandments but were rather resolutions in form, composed by individual monks.

In the very beginning, Buddha used to ordain monks with the words "ettha bhikkhave" come follow me. The intending candidates were entitled to the membership of the Samgha by these simple utterance of the Master. Later on, the entry into the Samgha became more rigid and subsequently the ordination was divided in two forms: (i) Pabbaja, Lower ordination and (ii) Upasampada, Higher Ordination.

Pabbaja (Skt. Pravrajya, denotes generally "leaving the world by adoption of ascetic life") means the ritualistic admission of novices

1. Mahavagga.
2. Panca Silas denote: not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to tell lies and not to drink intoxicating liquors.
3. It contains thirty-six auspicious blessings of Buddha.
into the Order and Upasampada (accession) means conferring full membership to those novices or would-be Bhikkhus. Persons admitted to the first degree of monkhood were called Samaneras (Skt. Samanera or novice).

Primarily, no differentiation was made between adults and minors while imparting initiation in Pabbajja and Upasampada. The comfortable way of life led by the monks of the Samgha fascinated so much the minds of the guardians of the boys, that even at the cost of school education of their wards, they preferred to get their boys admitted to the Samgha. But when the behaviour of those boys proved unbecoming and not up to the expectation, the Samgha imposed age restriction for admission. In case of Pabbajja boys below the age of fifteen and in case of Upasampada candidates below the age of twenty were not eligible for admission into the Samgha.

In the modern history of Buddhism, however, the above regulation has been relaxed almost entirely specially in Lower Burma and the boys in the age group of even eleven and twelve are granted admission. The belief that worked behind admission of the tender-aged boys was that until a boy was so admitted, he would be counted as nothing more than an animal.1

One more thing may be mentioned that in later times for doing minor works of the Samgha, such as, driving of crows etc, tender-aged boys were admitted to the Samgha through special system of Pabbajja. These children were fondly called “Kakuttepaka Samaneras.”

During later period in Burma the initiation ceremony on the occasion of first entrance in the Samgha used to be carried out with much pomp and grandeur. When a person settled his mind to get himself admitted in the Buddhist Samgha, he had to comply with some preliminary conditions at once, such as, he had to declare whether he had learnt before hand all the pattharinika of the form of worship and whether he had the knowledge of ordeals he would be required to undergo during his monastic life.

On the auspicious day fixed for holding the ceremony the young convert dressed in his gayest clothes and mounted on a pony had to make through the town or village. As per custom a band of musicians preceded him playing music. All friends of the neophyte having dressed themselves in their best garments used to follow him dancing and singing. The girls also accompanied the jivial crowd smiling and laughing.

Having completed his round of visits the neophyte would then turn back to his parent's abode with the procession. There he would find large congregation and also the Head of the monastery seated on a raised dias along with his brother monks. In front of the Hās were laid offerings consisting of fruit, cooked food, yellow cloth etc. intended to be presented to those monks.

After portions from the Vinaya having been recited the new convert was made to throw off all his fine attire and wind round his loins a fragment of white cloth. Then his head was neatly shaved and once again partially clothed, he was brought before the monks present there. He would then prostrate three times before them and raising his hands as a token of reverence would beseech in Pali language for being admitted to the brotherhood of the Sangha. After the prayer had been granted, the Head of the monastery would take over to the neophyte 'teccivara' or yellow garments which the latter had to put on. The customary mendicant's bowl also was hung round his neck. With a formal announcement to the effect that he had been admitted into the Sangha and had become a member of the monastery, the ceremony came to end.

It will be pertinent to discuss here some of the procedural enactments of the Upasamapada ceremony. Upasamapada was nothing but a higher sanction and a solemnized consecration of Pabbajja which was

1. This celebration virtually was a mimic show of Gautama Buddha's "Mahabhikā-kumāra" or "the great going forth from home" when the Master abandoned his home, his dear and near ones and all worldly ties.
but a formal declaration to cling to the vows. A candidate seeking Upasampada duly equipped with alms-bowl, yellow robes, and had his spiritual guide or ‘Upajjhaya’ chosen already, was to appear before a chapter consisting of at least ten monks.¹ The Leader or President of the chapter examined him and he had to answer a questionnaire, such as his personal name, his spiritual tutor’s name, his eventual shortcomings or disabilities etc. When these things were ascertained, the candidate could pray for ordination. On his request the President formally proposed to the chapter to accord their consent to the candidate’s prayer. The proposal used to be repeated twice by the President. If the Assembly remained silent, it indicated their consent and in that event the President accepted him as newly ordained brother and urged him to stick to the Four Nissayas (Four Nissayas) and to avoid four capital sins throughout his life. It may be stated that all things besides the Four Nissayas were not forbidden in to and those were considered as something redundant.

When a person was admitted into the Samgha after the initiation through the formal Kannamovaka (ritual formula) he was considered as a well-fledged member of the Samgha and all rights and privileges enjoyed by a member were vested in him. "Henaca-forward he usually lived under the Nissayas or spiritual tutelages of an Upajjhaya or an Acañña having at least ten years’ standing. The Upajjhaya acted as the spiritual guide (Dikkhaguru) while the Acañña was in actual charge of his training (Sikkhaguru).

For persons coming from other religious sects seeking initiation in Pabbajja and Upasampada, a ceremony called ‘Pavisa’ used to be held. The willing convert previously holding different religious leanings (annatitiyaputtha) had to undergo a probation period of four months² for getting disciplined. But this rule was not strictly adhered to always.

¹. The number of monks sometimes varied and, under certain circumstances it was only five e.g. Sakkāthakissa of Āvaggelekabham.
². Mahavagga.
³. Mahavagga. ‘It was a sort of personality test to find out whether the disrobed person was keen enough to accept the Dhamma and the Vinaya of the Buddha’. C. S. Upasak. Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic terms’, P. 144.
The Uposatha ceremony was one of the most sacred and significant ceremonies of the Buddhists. According to the tradition of the Buddhists Uposatha was introduced at the instance of King Bimbisara. It is setting up of fortnightly religious Assembly, later came to be known as Uposatha. The purpose was to strengthen the bond of union inside the Sangha and to purge it from impurities by uplifting the moral standard of an individual monk.

The term Uposatha is allied to the word ‘posatha’ which literary means ‘fasting’ but the Buddhist Uposatha conveys a denotation, meaning a fortnightly ceremony or sitting of monks either on the 8th, 14th or 16th day of month to discuss matters concerning the Dhamma and Vinaya and to recite the rules of Patisamkhita Sutta (the disciplinary and penal code of the Sangha) containing 227 rules arranged according to gravity of offences.

For holding the Uposatha ceremony the ‘Sima’ or boundary could be demarcated by a mountain, a rock, a wood, a path, an ant-hill, a river etc. In case, there were difficulties to fix up a boundary, the village or Nigama boundary proximate to the residence of the Bhikkhus was accepted as the ‘Sima’ for holding the Uposatha celebration. All the existing numbers of an avasa (abode), were required to be present in the Uposatha. Participation by members belonging to other avasses was welcomed. On certain occasions when the members of other avasses happened to be present in Uposatha in large numbers and as per rule the Assembly had to be prorogued for a fresh session.

The quorum of the Assembly constituted the physical presence of four members, while for declaration of Parinibbana, the presence of two Bhikkhus at the minimum was necessary. Whatever might be the

1. Mahavagga
2. The perinibbana was considered as an act having high moral value. Before the recitation of Patisamkhita, each member of the Assembly had to offer a declaration of Parinibbana to the effect that he had not committed any breach of the Patisamkhita rules during the preceding fortnight.
purpose of organising the Uposatha assembly, it was beyond doubt that subsequently the institution degenerated into mere ritualistic form. It attracted monks of mediocre calibre who cared more for observance of Patimokkha rules and formalities than seeking inner spiritual realisation and self-development. But inspite of all the later shortcomings and outward religious festivities which had little to do with the real spiritual attainments, Uposatha had a great moral impact on the monks.

Vassavesa or ‘Vas’ meaning retreat during the monsoons had a great significance among the Buddhist monks. During the rainy season when usual travelling was difficult, monks used to take shelter in a fixed abode in a particular area and this observance was called Vassavesa (‘Rain-Retreat’). Actually, the purport of Vassavesa was mainly twofold, viz.,

(i) to avoid inconvenience of travelling in the rains; (ii) to avoid injuring sprouts and insects and germs which grow abundantly during the rainy season. For observance of Vassavasa, generally two periods were earmarked, one commencing from the day after the full-moon of Asalha (June-July) and the other a month later-both were to conclude with the full-moon of Kettika. The narration goes that at the very early stage, the monks had no fixed abodes (avasa) to reside in and they used as their dwelling, woods, foot of a tree, rocks, grotto, mountain cave, cemetery, forest, open air, heap of straw etc. Later on, five kinds of abodes (Avata) were built for the purpose of Vassavasa or rain-retreat with the sanction of Buddha, viz.,

i) Viharas (monastery);
ii) Anidhayoga (dwellingss with sloping roofs without walls);
iii) Patakas;
iv) Hammiyas (stone-houses with flat roof);
v) Bhumiiguha (crypts).

It was obligatory on the part of the monks to observe Vassavasa and non-compliance of the same was liable to punishment. During this period the monks had to depend on the alms from the laity living

1. Metivagga.
nearby the avasa for livelihood, but sometimes high personages used to invita other monks to spend the Vaasa in their company in lana (abode) specially prepared for the purpose.

It may be said that Vassavasa, in fact, aimed at offering relief to the monks from their tedious jobs of preaching and talking. Buddha, in fact, prescribed a code for meditation that was to be practised by the monks to make these reces hours fruitful through spiritual attainments.

Pavaraa is a ceremony which is held at the end of Vassavasa. Usually, Pavaraa was held on the fourteenth or the fifteenth day of the month of Kattika (Oct.—Nov.). The purpose for holding this ceremony was to exonerate the monks from their acts of omission and commission done during Vassavasa period through confession, and the formalities observed were almost identical to those laid down for Upasatha ceremony.

The festival of Pavaraa was also held in high esteem in Burma. The procedural paraphernalia followed for observance of Pavaraa, in short, was like this—on the suspicious day fixed for observance of Pavaraa, the monks had to assemble in the evening at a particular spot for confession of their erroneous acts, if any, committed during the term of Vassavasa. The erring monks received punishment according to the gravity of the acts. There were two kinds of Pavaraa:

i) Mahapavaraa or the Great Pavaraa—this was a lengthy process and was executed in details;

ii) Sambah Pavaraa or the shortened Pavaraa—this was less time consuming and was executed in abridged form.

The Pavaraa ceremony could be postponed till the next ‘Komudi Caturmasini’ day, in case, the bhikkhus staying at an avasa expressed their desire to prolong the period of Vassavasa. In celebra-

1. ‘Komudi’ literally means ‘moonlight’ and the whole word is usually a phrase (Vilneva 1, 155, 176), meaning the fullmoon day in the month of Kattika’.
ting the festival, presents were given to the monks who were also invited to the dinner and for taking out processions. Pavarana, undoubtedly had an effective influence on the Bhikkhus who resided from the confining state of Vassavasa emerged with fresh energy and vigour to take up their mission of deliverance supported and encouraged by the laity.¹

Kathina ceremony implied offering of special robe to the monks by the laity on the occasion of Pavarana, as such, it constituted a part of Pavarana. On the scheduled date during the Kathina Pavarana ceremony the laity used to offer unsown clothes to the monks. The burnt of the task had to be borne by a band of monks who were entrusted with the cutting, sewing and dying the Kathina cloth-gift in course of a day.

As a rule, a chapter of at least five monks used to receive the raw cotton cloth or Kathina from the dons, and nobody other than the selected persons of the chapter was authorised to receive the gift. The chapter having had the gifts, decided which of the monks stood in dire necessity of garments and then the cloths were sewn into robes by the monks assisted by the laity² and distributed to the eligible candidates. The team of monks who performed this special work, were allowed certain privileges in respect of their food, dress, etc. which were usually not provided to other monks.

The general rule as regards the distribution of the robes is that all the monks of the avasa (residence) are to get a share of the robes, excepting on eight grounds when they were debared from having their due shares. Under certain circumstances, the Kathina ceremony could be set back or abandoned altogether.

Apart from those ceremonies and rituals discussed above, there was one more important ceremony called “Pirith or Peritta ceremony” which has practically gained greater importance in Burma in modern times. The word “Pirith” is a corrupt form of

¹. Maharagga.

(15)
Pali ‘Paritta’ and the name ‘Paritta’ is supposed to be derived from Sanskrit ‘Paritis’ or ‘Paritrana’ meaning “Protection”.

Paritta was a small collection of texts gathered from Pali Sutta-pitaka, and contained various charms, spells and exorcisms. Much like the Tantric cut, the Paritta was learnt by memory and recited by the monks on appropriate occasions to ward off various physical ailments and mental disbalances. It was also practised to keep off harm from the beasts of prey and vengeance of reptiles etc. No social or religious festival is considered as complete and promotive without the chanting of Paritta. According to the occasion, it would be a concise ritual ( Khanda Paritta ) or an elaborate ceremony.

Possibly, the Paritta had the sanction of Buddha as a substitute for Rakshanamantras (protective incantations) prevalent in the contemporary Brahmanic religion with some modifications having more of religious value and ethical fervour.

Among the Paritta Suttas the three are most commonly recited:—
1) the Mangali Sutta, 2) the Ratana Sutta and 3) the Karaviyametta Sutta. The procedural follow up for reciting the Paritta was like this—the monks used to hold in their hands a long thread technically called Pirnt Nula. This thread was wound round the neck of a new clay jar filled to the brim (Purna Kumbha) with consecrated water. The other end of the thread was held by the assembled monks squatting on the floor. After the final incantations, the sanctified thread used to be broken in such lengths as to tie the same round the wrist and neck of the persons initiating the ritual and then the sanctified water contained in the Pot (Purna Kumbha) was sprinkled on all persons assembled there, which can be compared to the sprinkling of ‘Shanti bivi’ by the Brahmins in the present days as a token of blessings.

1. This derivation has been given by Childers. Sometimes it is suggested that the term may have some connections with Pita (ghost). M. M. Williams, Buddhist, p. 37, f.n. 1.
2. Containing thirty-six auspicious blessings of Buddha.
3. Uttered by Buddha when the people of Vesali were afflicted with sickness, pestilence, drought, famine caused by malignant spirits.
4. Recited by Buddha to calm and pacify a tormenting evil spirit.
The site for holding the ritual (Piti) could be a temple, a house, a temporary recitation hall, or a pavilion (Paritta Mandap) specially constructed for the purpose. There was no limited period for chanting, the duration of which could last from one hour to one day and on some occasions for weeks. It may be performed any time throughout the year even during the days of Vesakas.

When the Piti ceremony extended for a longer period, it was known as Maha Paritta or the Great Paritta. For a Paritta lasting for an hour or so, the required number of monks conducting the ritual was not less than three and if the participating monks exceeded in number then that group should consist of odd numbers. In case of Maha-paritta ritual, lasting over a day, the operating monks should have consisted of even number, such as, eight, ten, twelve and so on. A Maha Paritta had to be started on an evening and ended on a morning. The recitation might continue day and night at a stretch for a week without interruption. In a Maha Paritta, big in dimensity, even twenty-four monk-priests happened to be engaged, two of whom were constantly seated on the raised dias to recite. When the recitation of all the Suttas of the Paritta were charted to the last, it was repeated again and again from the beginning. After utterance of a benediction the Paritta recital came to an end and robes etc., were offered to the monk-reciters.

These ceremonies and rituals apart, there were lots of festivals in Burma which were domestic in nature, performed with the assistance or guidance of the monks. As well-wisher, adviser and religious guide of a family, the Bhikkhus actually maintained a close relation with the laymen and they used to participate in various domestic functions from birth to death and even thereafter.