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Ramakanta Mishra
IIM, Ahmedabad

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Aśokan Rock Edict–I : Understanding Aśoka’s Views on Killing

Ramakanta Mishra *

Abstract:

All the translators of Aśokan Rock Edict–I agree that it carries Aśoka’s message against killing. But when we examine the subject matter of the edict, it appears disjoint. It starts with an injunction against killing of living beings, then jumps to advice against celebrations, and then it reverts back to the original topic and informs that the emperor has taken steps to reduce slaughter of living beings in the royal kitchen. It is difficult to understand why Aśoka had to talk about celebrations in an edict focussed on reducing slaughter of animals. Apparently, we have not understood accurately as to what Aśoka wanted to convey. It is hypothesized in this article that the problem is mainly due to incorrect interpretation of the word *pajohitaviye*. A different meaning of the word is proposed, leading to a revised translation of the edict. It becomes clear from the proposed translation that Aśoka’s advice against celebrations is not a digression from the key topic of the edict; it follows naturally. Moreover, the revised translation agrees with what Aśoka has said elsewhere. This brings about a better understanding of Aśoka’s views on killing.

Key words:

Aśokan inscription, Rock Edict–I, *pajohitaviye*, slaughter, killing of living beings, animal sacrifice.

* Fellow of IIM, Ahmedabad, Email: <mishraramakanta@gmail.com>

It is fascinating to study Aśokan inscriptions. They are important records which give us valuable information about the political, social and religious systems of India during those times. Many of them contain important teachings of Buddha and throw light on the methods used by Aśoka to propagate them. More often they reveal personal views of Aśoka on various matters. These have been studied for more than hundred years and their translations by various authors mostly reflect the correct meaning. A few of the inscriptions, however, could not be interpreted correctly because certain words are problematic. In the case of Rock Edict-I, all the translators essentially agree on its meaning, and the overall spirit of the edict appears to have been understood correctly, but some gaps are apparent.

The Inscription

The following is the Jaugada version of the inscription (Hultzsch 1925: 101), which is taken as a representative of all the versions. There is not much difference between this and other versions of the inscription.

Iyaṃ dhamma-lipī khepiṅgalasi pavatasi Devānaṃpiyena Piyadasinā lājinā likhāpitā. Hida no kichi jīvaṃ ālabhitu, pajohitaviye. No pi ca samāje kaṭaviye. Bahukaṃ hi dosaṃ samājasa drakhati Devānaṃpiye Piyasī lājā. Athi pi cu ekatiyā samājā sādhu matā Devānaṃpiyasa Piyadrasine lājine. Puluvaṃ mahānasasi Devānaṃpiyasa Piyadasine lājine anudivasaṃ bahūni pāna sata-sahasāni ālabhiyisu sūpaṭhāye. Se aja adā iyaṃ dhamma-lipī likhitā tiṃni yeva pānāni ālaṃbhiyaṃti: duve majūlā, eke mige. Se pi cu mige no dhuvaṃ. Etāni pi cu tiṃni pānāni pachā no ālabhiyaṃti.

Present Translation

Hultzsch (1925: 101–102) gives the following translation of the inscription-

This rescript on morality has been caused to be written on the Khepiṅgala Mountain by King Devānaṃpriya Priyadarśin. Here no living being must be killed and sacrificed. And also no festival meeting must be held. For King Devānaṃpriya Priyadarśin sees much evil in festival meetings. But there are also some festival meetings which are considered meritorious by King Devānaṃpriya

Priyadarśin. Formerly in the kitchen of King Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin many hundred thousands of animals were killed daily for the sake of curry. But now, when this rescript on morality is written, only three animals are being killed (daily), (viz.) two peacocks (and) one deer, but even this deer not regularly. But even these three animals shall not be killed in future.

After the preamble, which declares the inscription as a Dharma edict of King Priyadarśī (Aśoka), there is the injunction: *hida no kichi jivaṃ ālabhitu, pajohitaviye*. This is translated above as 'here no living being must be killed and sacrificed'. Other authors too agree on this interpretation¹, except on the exact connotation of 'here'. While some authors take 'here' as the particular places where this rock edict was published, some others take it as the whole dominion (see note 26). Immediately after the injunction, Aśoka advises that no festival meetings or celebrations must be held. This is baffling. There is no apparent connection between the injunction against killing and celebrations. And Aśoka has not made it clear as to why he is against celebrations. After the advice against celebrations, he says that there are some celebrations which are meritorious. This indicates that he is not against celebrations per se, but against certain evils which he generally finds in celebrations. But he has not specified those evils, nor has he described what is special about the meritorious celebrations.

Even before one is able to comprehend why Aśoka changed the topic from killing to celebrations, once again he changes the topic from celebrations to killing. This time he does not advise his subjects to refrain from killing; instead he informs what steps he has taken to reduce slaughter of animals in the royal kitchen.

¹ No burnt offerings of living beings should be made by putting them to death (Indraji 1881: 107). No animal may be slaughtered and offered here as a burnt-sacrifice (Bühler 1970: 466). No animal may be slaughtered for sacrifice (Smith 1920: 158). No animal should be immolated and offered as a sacrifice (Bhandarkar 1925: 273). Not a single living creature should be slaughtered and sacrificed (Mookerji 1928: 128–129). No living beings are to be killed and offered in sacrifice (Sen 1956: 64). No living being should be slaughtered for sacrifice (Sarkar 1957: 39). Not a single animal should be sacrificed by slaughtering the same (Basak 1959: 4). No living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice (Thapar 1961: 70). No living thing having been killed, is to be sacrificed (Thapar 1961: 250). No living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice (Dhammika 1994).

Abrupt change in topic from killing to celebrations and back from celebrations to killing is inexplicable. Such changes make the inscription look as if it is a collection of excerpts from his talks on disjoint topics. But there is no reason why the inscription has to be so. Aśoka would have wanted to convey a coherent message to his subjects. It would rather suggest that the present understanding of the inscription is not accurate.

In view of the above, the aim of the article is to arrive at the correct interpretation of the edict. The needle of suspicion points towards the word, *pajohitaviye*, which is the only difficult word in the inscription. The rest of the inscription is simple and the meaning is clear. It is therefore hypothesized that *pajohitaviye* has not been interpreted correctly. In this article, an alternative meaning of the word will be considered. Another word, *ālabhitu*, too will be reinterpreted. Based on these, a revised translation of this injunction will be proposed, bringing in better clarity regarding what Aśoka intended to say.

Ālabhitu

Sen translates the first part of the injunction as ‘here no living beings are to be killed’, based on its rendering into Sanskrit as *iha na kaśchit jīvaḥ ālabhya*². However, there can be certain objections to such a rendering. First of all, there is no necessity to change the active voice to passive. Clearly the matter relates to the killing of living beings and *jīva* (living being) is the object of the verb ‘killing’. Therefore, *jīvaṃ* is the right word in active voice and there is no need to change it to *jīvaḥ* and change the voice to passive. Secondly, rendering of *ālabhitu* into Sanskrit as *ālabhya* is problematic. The conversion of *ālabhya* into Prākṛit would then require an additional consonant, *t*.

In view of the above, it is proposed that *hida no kichi jīvaṃ ālabhitu* be rendered into Sanskrit as *iha na kaśchit jīvaṃ ālabhatu* (see note 17). The meaning would then be ‘here no one must kill living beings’. This is essentially the same as the present

² Sen (1956: 65). Basak (1959: 3) and Indrajī (1881: 107) too agree on this. *Ālabhitu* = Skt. *ālabhya* (absolute participle, gerundial sense) = ‘by slaughtering’ (Basak: 4).

translation as far as the meaning is concerned, but this one is better because there is not much change to the words *jīvaṃ* and *ālabhitu* on rendering into Sanskrit; there is neither any addition nor any loss of consonants. Moreover, the active voice of the original text is retained in this rendering.

Hultzsch renders *ālabhitu* as *ālabhitvā* (Hultzsch 1925: cxi, lxxxiv). Although the problem of additional consonant, *t*, does not arise in this case, it would involve loss of the semivowel 'v' on conversion of the word *ālabhitvā* to *ālabhitu* in Prākṛit. He assumes the next word *pajohitaviye* as a gerundive (Hultzsch 1925: lxxxii), and therefore needs to treat *ālabhitu* as an absolutive³. It will be shortly shown that *pajohitaviye* should rather be treated as an adverb; in which case, treatment of *ālabhitu* as an imperative, as in the proposed translation, would be appropriate.

Pajohitaviye

Present translation of the word *pajohitaviye* as 'to be sacrificed'/'to offer in sacrifice' comes from its rendering into Sanskrit as *prahotavyah!* *prahotavyam*⁴ (Indraji 1881: 108 note 5; Sen 1956: 65; Basak 1959: 3). However, certain problems arise from such an interpretation.

First of all, 'to be sacrificed' does not add much value to the first part of the injunction: 'here no one must kill living beings', which categorically prohibits all killings of animals. This means that killings for sacrifice too has been prohibited. In the situation, there is no need for the king to specify 'killing for animal sacrifice' separately. In other words, interpreting *pajohitaviye* as 'to be sacrificed' makes the word superfluous.

³ Although Hultzsch has taken it as an absolutive (*-tu* = Skt. *-tvā*) (Hultzsch 1925: cxi, lxxxiv), elsewhere he has taken *-tu* as an imperative (example: *locetu* = Skt. *rocayantu*) (Hultzsch 1925: lxxxii), as an accusative (Hultzsch 1925: lxix) and as a subjunctive (Hultzsch 1925: lxxxii). That *ālabhitu* (= Skt. *ālabhatu*) has been taken as an imperative in the proposed translation, therefore, agrees with the treatment of *locetu* (= Skt. *rocayantu*) by Hultzsch.

⁴ *Prahotavya* (*pra* + *hotavya*). *Hotavya*: 'to be offered' or 'sacrificed' (Monier Williams 2002: 1301).

To get around this, some suggest that the edict is not a general ban on killing; it imposes a ban only on sacrificial killing⁵. But there is problem with that too. If that was the case, then there would be no need for the word *ālabhitu* (= kill) in the edict, since ‘animal sacrifice’ itself denotes the act of killing. Aśoka could as well have written *hida no kichi jivaṃ pajohitaviye*, which would mean ‘no one should offer animals in sacrifice’, if *pajohitaviye* meant ‘offer in sacrifice’. And that would have given a clear message against sacrifice. The fact that he has mentioned both, *ālabhitu* and *pajohitaviye*, indicates that he wanted to convey something else.

Secondly, *prahotavyaḥ* is not a common word, it is a technical word. It is not suitable for use here because the edict is meant for common people. Had Aśoka intended to convey the meaning of ‘animal sacrifice’, he would have rather used the word *bali*⁶, which is the common word for the same.

Thirdly, *prahotavyaḥ* cannot be converted into *pajohitaviye* in Prākṛit. While it is possible for *hotavyaḥ* of *prahotavyaḥ* to become *hitaviye* in Prākṛit, conversion of *pra* to *pajo* is not possible, since it would involve an additional consonant, ‘j’. Moreover, the prefix *pajo* is not used in Prākṛit elsewhere, unlike the prefix *pra* which is used frequently in Sanskrit. Had *pajo* been the Prākṛit equivalent of *pra* then it would have been found at many other places. Hultsch treats *pajohitaviye* as a future passive participle, derived from **johati/ *jūhati* (Pali *juhvati/ juvhati* = sacrifice) similar to the way in which *kartavya* is derived (Hultsch 1925: cxi, lxvi, lxix, lxxxi). That might explain presence of ‘j’ in *pajohitaviye*. However, he has not suggested the exact Sanskrit word for *pajohitaviye*.

⁵ Thapar argues that the inscription could be interpreted in two ways: here no living thing is to be killed and sacrificed or, here no animal having been killed is to be sacrificed. This would mean that more emphasis is laid on the sacrificing of animals rather than their killing. If there was a general ban on the killing of animals for food, then surely the king would be the first to discontinue the practice himself (Thapar 1961: 150–151).

⁶ *Bali* is mentioned in *Harivaṃśa* in connection with a *samāja* arranged by Kāṃsa (Bhandarkar 1913: 255).

Fourthly, the words, *johati/ jūhati/ hotavyah*, are technical words derived from **hu* (Monier Williams 2002: 1301). The sacrificial ceremony to which **hu* is applicable is known as *juhōti*, which is different from another type of sacrificial ceremony known as *yajati*, to which **yaj* is applied (Monier Williams 2002: 424, 839). The interpretation of *pajohitaviye* by Hultsch would therefore imply that the ban was imposed only on sacrifices which are of the type '*juhōti*', and not on sacrifices which are of the type '*yajati*'. But this sounds absurd. It is highly unlikely that Aśoka would prohibit only one type of animal sacrifice and allow the other.

Fifthly, shortly after the injunction against killing, Aśoka proceeds to inform the public about slaughter of animals in the royal kitchen. Certainly, that cannot be treated as sacrificial killing. If the injunction was only against 'sacrificial killing' and not against killing for food, then he would not have talked about slaughter in the royal kitchen, which would then be out of context. The king would rather have informed about measures he had taken to reduce incidence of animal sacrifice in his kingdom. Clearly, the reason why he talks about the slaughter in the royal kitchen cannot be explained, if the present interpretation is accepted.

That a major part of the inscription is devoted to the slaughter in the royal kitchen indicates that *pajohitaviye* should have something to do with such killing too. Aśoka informs the public that the number of animals slaughtered in the royal kitchen has been reduced from thousands earlier to just three now. The purpose of mentioning about this reduction should be to show that the king is taking a lead in implementing his own injunction and to motivate his subjects to follow this example. But this does not appear to be the case, if we go by the present interpretation.

Sixthly, the interpretation of *pajohitaviye* as 'to offer in sacrifice' makes the next sentence abrupt. In the next sentence, he advises that no festivals/ celebrations (*samāje*⁷) should be held. It is difficult to explain why Aśoka would talk about celebrations immediately after an injunction against animal sacrifice.

⁷ *Samāje* (Skt. *samājah*): certain type of celebration. *Samāja*: convivial meeting, party, assembly, congress, conclave, congregation (Monier Williams 2002: 1153).

The word *samāja* denotes what could be termed as public feast or merry making or festival or fair (Bhandarkar 1913: 255; Thomas 1914: 392; Smith 1920: 159). Thomas remarks, ‘the difficulty is to explain why the thing denoted [by *samāja*] should be condemned in an edict directed against the slaughter of animals’ (Thomas 1914: 392). Mookerji notes that in those days, various actors used to exhibit their arts during such festivals held at the villages, towns and capital cities. Unable to conceive why Aśoka could be against such festivals and merry making, he makes the sarcastic remark, ‘this joy of popular life was now being restricted by a puritanical emperor!’ (Mookerji 1928: 129 note 2).

Aśoka’s wrath against celebrations could have been justified on the ground that a large number of creatures used to be slaughtered to serve non-vegetarian dishes during those celebrations⁸. But this does not become evident, since the king has already imposed a ban on the slaughter of animals at the beginning of this edict by decreeing, ‘here no one must kill living beings’. Only vegetarian dishes would therefore be served in any future celebration and Aśoka should not have any objection to that. On the other hand, if the inscription is only about animal sacrifice, as some authors argue, then there was no need for the king to talk against celebrations even if a large number of creatures were slaughtered in them for serving non-vegetarian dishes. Therefore, it is difficult to find a link between ‘celebrations’ and ‘slaughter of animals’.

Some authors speculate that there must be something wrong with *samāja*, for which it attracted the wrath of the emperor. Bühler suggests that there might be certain amount of riotness in *samājas* (Thomas 1914: 392); Thomas conjectures that the culprit could be the animal fights which were usually organised during the

⁸ In *Harivaṃśa* and *Mahābhārata*, there are descriptions of *samāja*, which involved wrestling and other martial competitions organised in auditoriums and animal sacrifices were made during those events. The meals served had varieties of meat and curry, diverse kinds of food and condiments. In *Vinaya*, there is description of certain *bhikkhus* attending a *samāja* organised at a hill near Rājagriha and the food included meat. *Samāja* can therefore be regarded as a convivial gathering or a public feast, where meat formed one of the principal articles of food served (Bhandarkar 1904: 392, 395 note 3; Bhandarkar 1913: 255–257).

samājas (Thomas 1914: 392–393); and Sen remarks that the gatherings in *samāja* used to last for weeks, during which gambling, drinking and other laxities were indulged in (Sen 1956: 64). These revolting activities could certainly have hurt the morality of Aśoka, and such activities might be in his mind when he describes that many vices (*dosam*⁹) are found in the festivals/celebrations; but certainly, occurrence of these vices cannot be the reason why he spoke against celebrations in this edict. These vices are no way related to killing of animals, which is the main theme of the inscription and therefore, referring to these vices would be out of context¹⁰. If he wanted to speak against celebrations on account of such vices, then he would have made it explicit. Despite merits in objecting to the above abhorrent activities, abrupt switch of the topic from slaughter of animals to *samāja* is inexplicable.

Seventhly, the interpretation that the injunction primarily implies a ban on sacrificial killings rather than a general ban on killing (See note 5), is incongruous with Aśoka's subsequent pronouncements. Pillar Edict–V, which was published subsequent to this edict¹¹, imposes a general ban on killing of fish and other animals only on certain days of the month. This would indicate that the injunction under consideration cannot exactly mean 'a ban on sacrificial killing only'.

If the word *pajohitaviye* is ignored, then the rest of the injunction would mean a blanket ban on killing. Although such a ban might be viewed as a meritorious act, it would not be compatible with three creatures being killed daily in the royal

⁹ *Dosam* (Skt. **doṣa*): fault, vice, badness, wickedness, sinfulness (Monier Williams 2002: 498).

¹⁰ Senart argues that *samāja* cannot mean something so vague as 'festival' or 'rejoicing', when the previous sentence imposes an unambiguous injunction against killing of animals and the main theme of the edict is protection of animal life. Therefore, *samāja* must involve some activity which might put life of animals in jeopardy (Senart 1891: 245 note 46).

¹¹ Rock Edict-I was engraved before Pillar Edict-V. Rock Edicts were published between the twelfth and fourteenth year of Aśoka's coronation (Barua 1926: 17, 62; Mookerji 1928: 18, 37; Sen 1956: 22; Smith 1920: 145), whereas Pillar Edicts were published between the twenty-sixth and the twenty-seventh year (Barua 1926: 18, 64; Mookerji 1928: 36, 37; Sen 1956: 22; Smith 1920: 146).

kitchen. It would not be compatible with Pillar Edict-V either, where Aśoka proclaims only specific creatures as protected, and prohibits killing of fish and other animals only on certain days of the month (Hultsch 1925: 127–128; Basak 1959: 103). This means that killing of creatures other than those specified, and killing on other days of the month, was permissible. That would appear to be a retrograde step, if the edict under consideration meant imposition of a complete ban on killing of living beings irrespective of type, occasion or purpose. When viewed from the other position, this edict appears to be far too sweeping in its scope¹². There is therefore incongruity between the two edicts whether the edict is interpreted as a general ban on slaughter or a ban only on animal sacrifice.

The above demonstrates that the injunction could not mean a ban only on animal sacrifice. If it did, then the king would not have talked about slaughter in the royal kitchen. The injunction could not mean a general ban on slaughter for food either. If it did, then the king would be the first to discontinue the practice himself (Thapar 1961: 150–151). Clearly, *pajohitaviye* was intended to put restrictions on the blanket ban implied by the words: ‘here no one must kill living beings’, but it certainly did not limit the application of the ban only to sacrificial killings. Moreover, the inscription appears to be a collection of disjoint topics, if the present interpretation of *pajohitaviye* is accepted. These suggest that there is a gap in our understanding of the true meaning of the word. This article aims to fill this gap.

Prajñī Hitvāya

From the above difficulties associated with the present interpretation of the injunction, it is clear that the word *pajohitaviye* needs to be reinterpreted. It is proposed that this word

¹² Mookerji remarks that this ordinance is not only against the religious usage of the majority of his subjects (i.e. against the custom of animal sacrifice practiced by Hindus during those times) but also against Aśoka’s own ordinance as published in his Pillar Edict-V, which protects from slaughter only a few specified ‘living beings’ (Mookerji 1928: 128 note 4).

be split into two words, *pajo* and *hitaviye*, and rendered into Sanskrit as '*prajrī hitvāya*', which means 'except for food'¹³.

First of all, *prajrī* is pronounced as *prajrī* in certain parts of the country and as *prajrū* in other parts, such as in Odisha (called Kalinga in the olden days), which indicates that both are valid pronunciations. It is phonetically possible for *prajrū*, the alternative pronunciation of *prajrī*, to become *paju* in Prākṛit, which can then become *pajo* at certain places due to the prevailing local custom. That *prajrī* (*prajrū*) should be the Sanskrit rendering for *pajo* becomes evident from the Girnar version of the edict, in which the corresponding word for *pajo* is *prajū* (Hultsch 1925: 1). *Prajū* has clearly come from *prajrū*; the conversion involves only replacement of the long *rū* with long *ū*, which is usual¹⁴. The conversion of *hitvāya* to *hitaviye* too is predictable. In Aśokan inscriptions, similar conversion involving simplification of a complex letter is usual¹⁵. It is therefore phonetically possible for *prajrī hitvāya* to become *pajo hitaviye* in Prākṛit.

Secondly, *prajrī hitvāya* is congruous with the context. *Hida no kichi jīvaṃ ālabhitu pajo hitaviye* would then mean 'here no one must kill living beings, except for food'. Consumption of non-vegetarian food is allowed in the Buddhist religion. There is therefore no compulsion for Aśoka to ban slaughter for consumption of the meat. Since the first part of the injunction would imply a complete ban on slaughter, it is necessary to add the exception clause, 'except for food', in order to allow consumption of meat by common people without violating the king's order.

¹³ *Pajohitaviye* (Skt. *prajrī hitvāya*): excluding/ leaving aside/ excepting (those killings) which are meant for consumption. *Prajrī*: to be digested (Monier Williams 2002: 659). *Hitvāya*: to leave, to lay aside, to disregard, to be excluded from (Monier Williams 2002: 1296, 1298).

¹⁴ The vowel *ri* is lost during conversion of words from Sanskrit to Prākṛit. Sometimes it becomes 'u', for example, *vṛiddhesu* becomes *vudhesu* as in Rock Edict-V; sometimes it becomes 'i', for example, *driḍha* becomes *diḍha* as in Rock Edict-VII; and sometimes it becomes 'a'; for example *grihastha* becomes *gahatha* as in Rock Edict-XII (Hultsch 1925: lxx).

¹⁵ For example, from *kartavya* to *kaṭaviye* in the inscription under consideration; from *vyāpatā* to *viyāpaṭā* in Rock Edict-V (Hultsch 1925: lxxv).

Thirdly, the exception clause is the precise reason why Aśoka talks about celebrations immediately after the injunction. It is possible for common people to interpret the exemption given to ‘killing for food’ as a licence to kill any number of animals during celebrations. There is therefore a need to discourage lavish parties. Clearly, the topic of celebration follows *pajo hitaviye* in natural course; it does not come as an abrupt announcement, which is apparent from the present interpretation.

Fourthly, this explains why Aśoka has no problem in mentioning about three creatures being killed in the royal kitchen. While the old practice of killing thousands of animals in the royal kitchen would indicate partying in the palace, killing of just three creatures indicates the bare minimum need for meat. This is in agreement with his permission to kill if it was for human consumption of the meat, as well as his advice against large parties. This was therefore an ideal example, which the general public could follow without bothering about the exact interpretation of the inscription.

Fifthly, the proposed meaning is fully compatible with the Pillar Edict–V, which bans killing of only certain categories of living beings. In that edict, at the end of the list of those protected from killing, appear ‘all four-footed creatures which are neither useful nor edible’ (Dhammika 1994; Basak 1959: 103). This implies that edible creatures were allowed to be killed.

The first part of the injunction: *hida no kichi jīvaṃ ālabhitu* (here no one must kill living beings), implies a complete ban on killing, which goes against Pillar Edict–V. Even otherwise, a ban on consumption of meat is neither practicable nor mandated by Dharma. The basic concern of Aśoka is that there should be no unnecessary killing, whether for entertainment or for sacrifice and that there should be no excessive killing, even when permitted. That is why he introduces the exemption clause (*pajo hitaviye*) to suitably modify the comprehensive ban on killing implied by the first part of the injunction, so that slaughter could be permitted for consumption of the meat. And then he advises restraint in organising *samājas* (*no pi ca samāje kaṭaviye*) in the very next sentence, with an intention to moderate slaughter in them even though it is permitted. Protecting certain categories of creatures

and prohibiting killing on certain days of the month, as mandated in Pillar Edict-V, can be seen as formalisation of the voluntary restraint he proposes in this inscription.

The proposed interpretation of *pajohitaviye* does not invalidate the present understanding that the inscription banned animal sacrifice. By introducing the exception only for food, the edict makes it clear that there is blanket ban on killing for all other purposes, be it for entertainment or for sacrifice.

The above demonstrate that rendering of the word *pajohitaviye* into Sanskrit as *prajrī hitvāya* removes all the problems associated with the present interpretation of the word and leads to a logical and coherent meaning of the inscription. It can therefore be argued that the proposed rendering is superior. An amended translation of the edict based on this rendering would be as follows.

Proposed Sanskrit Rendering of the Edict

Iyaṃ dharmalipiḥ Khepiṅgalaparvate¹⁶ Devānāmpriyeṇa Priyadarśinā rājñā lekhitā. Iha na kaśchit jīvaṃ ālabhatu (ālabhatām¹⁷) prajrī hitvāya. No api ca samājaḥ kartavyaḥ. Bahu

¹⁶ *Khepiṅgalasi pavatasi* (reduced form of *khepiṅgalasmin parvatasmin*) (Skt. *Khepiṅgalaparvate*): at *Khepiṅgala* Hill. Bühler read *khepiṅgalasi* as *khapiṅgalasi* (Hultzsch 1925: 101). In that case, the name of the hill would be *Khapiṅgala*.

¹⁷ The verb *ālabh* is *atmanepadī* and therefore *ālabhatām* is the correct form in Sanskrit (in *lot* form, third person singular). But in this inscription it has been taken as *parasmaipadī* and therefore *ālabhitu* (*ālabhatu* in *parasmaipadī lot* form in Sanskrit) has been arrived at. In other inscriptions too such substitution of *atmanepadī* form of a word by its *parasmaipadī* form is noticed. For example, in the separate Rock Edict-II, *Khamisati*, converted from *kṣamiṣyati* – a *parasmaipadī* Sanskrit form, is found instead of its correct Sanskrit form *kṣamiṣyate*, which is *atmanepadī* (See Basak 1959: 123, 125). In the causative, *ālabh* becomes *parasmaipadī* and takes the form *ālabhayati* (Monier Williams 2002: 153). In this inscription all the subsequent use of this verb is in causative and therefore, *parasmaipadī*. This could be a reason why *ālabh* has been taken as *parasmaipadī* in the above case instead of *atmanepadī*. Compare with subsequent forms of *alabha* in causative and hence *parasmaipadī*: 1. *ālabhiyisu* = Skt. *ālabhayeyuḥ sma* (*vidhi līn* form, third person plural). Hultzsch has taken *ālabhiyisu* as aorist. In the proposed translation, the past tense has been

*kam*¹⁸ *hi doṣaṃ samāje/ samājasya*¹⁹ *Devānāmpriyaḥ Priyadarśī rājā paśyati. Asti*²⁰ *api ca ekatarāḥ*²¹ *samājāḥ sādhu (iti) mataḥ Devānāmpriyasya Priyadarśinaḥ rājñāḥ. Pūrvaṃ mahānase*²² *Devānāmpriyasya Priyadarśinaḥ rājñāḥ anudivasam bahūni prāñīni, śatasahasrāṇi (vā), ālambhayeyuḥ sma supathyāya*²³. *Tad*

taken care by *sma*. 2. *ālambhiyamti* = Skt. *ālambhayanti* (*laṭ* form, third person plural). 3. *ālambhiyisamti* Skt. *ālambhayisyanti* (*lriṭ* form, third person plural).

- ¹⁸ *Kam* is a particle placed after the word to which it belongs, with an affirmative sense, ‘yes’, ‘well’ (Monier Williams 2002: 251). Basak renders *bahukam* into Sanskrit as *bahukān* (**bahuka*) and translates it as ‘many’ (Basak 1959: 3), but **bahuka* means ‘bought at a high price’ (Monier Williams 2002: 726) and not ‘many’. Alternatively, *bahukam* might have been formed in Prākṛit from *bahu* similar to the manner in which *dvikam* (two, consisting of two, two-fold, see Monier Williams 2002: 506), *trikam* (triple, threefold, see Monier Williams 2002: 461) and *śatakam* (a hundred, a century, see Monier Williams 2002: 1051) are formed in Sanskrit from *dvi*, *tri* and *śata*. But in that case, *bahukam* would mean ‘many’/ ‘manifold’ and therefore **doṣa* would have taken the plural form and had become *doṣān* (for example, we find *pānāni*, plural form of *pāna*, in a later sentence in this inscription), instead of *doṣam* (*dosam*).
- ¹⁹ In certain versions of the edict, the word is *samājasi* and in some other versions, it is *samājasa* (Basak 1959: 2). *Samāje* would be the Sanskrit rendering of *samājasi* (reduced form of *samājasmīn*) and *samājasya* would be the rendering of *samājasa*.
- ²⁰ Basak renders it as *santi* (Basak 1959: 3). Normally, it should be *santi/ samti* in Sanskrit, since subsequent words are in plural. But when it is taken as an *avyaya*, it does not change to plural, i.e. it does not change from *asti* to *samti* (Indraji 1881: 107 note 2).
- ²¹ *Ekatiyā* (Skt. *ekatarāḥ*): others. *Ekatarāḥ*: other (Monier Williams 2002: 228).
- ²² *Mahānasasi* (reduced form of *mahānasasmīn*): (Skt. *mahānase*): in the kitchen. *Mahānasa*: a kitchen (Monier Williams 2002: 796).
- ²³ *Sūpathāye* (Skt. *supathyāya*): for proper/ wholesome diet (for the sick). *Su*: good, excellent, right (Monier Williams 2002: 1219); *Pathya*: suitable, proper, wholesome (said of a diet in a medical sense) (Monier Williams 2002: 582). Presently *sūpathāye* is considered to be derived from *sūpārthāya* (Indraji 1881: 108; Basak 1959: 4), which means ‘for the sake of soup/ curry’. The meaning of this word has generally been taken as ‘for curry’ (Bhandarkar 1904: 392; Sen 1956: 64; Sircar 1957: 40; Mookerji 1928: 130; Hultzsich 1925: 102; Dhammika 1994). However, Thapar interprets it as ‘for meat’ (Thapar 1961: 250). *Supathyāya* appears to be more suitable than *sūpārthāya*, since meat may not always be consumed in the form of soup or curry.

*adya*²⁴ *yadā iyaṃ dharmalipiḥ likhitā, (tadā) trīṇi eva prāṇīni ālambhayanti: dvau mayūrau ekaḥ mṛigaḥ. Tad api ca mṛigaḥ na dhruvaṃ (ālambhayati). Etāni api ca trīṇi prāṇīni paścāt no ālambhayiṣyanti.*

Proposed Translation

This Dharma edict has been issued by the Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Priyadarśi, from the Khepiṅgala Hills. Here no one must kill living beings, except for food (consumption of the meat). Nor should any celebration (festival/ party) be held. (Because) the Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Priyadarśi surely finds many a vice in (such) celebrations. However, ‘there do exist certain other celebrations which are commendable,’ believes the Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Priyadarśi. In the past, a large number of creatures, (perhaps) a hundred thousand, were required to be killed every day in the royal kitchen of the Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Priyadarśi, for preparation of wholesome diet. But today, at the time of writing this Dharma edict, only three creatures are killed (every day for the same purpose): two peacocks and one deer (antelope). Even then, (the killing of) the deer (antelope) is not a must²⁵. And even these three creatures will not be killed in future.

Discussion

Mention about Khepiṅgala hill is found only in Dhauli and Jaugada versions of the inscription. Since both these places were situated in Kalinga, and other versions are silent about this hill, it can be construed that the Khepiṅgala hill was situated in Kalinga. From the way it is mentioned in the inscription, without any reference to its location, it is clear that this hill was well known in Kalinga. In other words, this hill must have been one of the most important centres of power in Kalinga before it was annexed by Aśoka. This explains why the name of the hill was mentioned in

²⁴ *Aja* (Skt. *adya*): this day, today, now-a-days, now (Monier Williams 2002: 19).

²⁵ ‘Even that deer not regularly’ (Bhandarkar 1904: 392); ‘and the deer not always’ (Dhammika 1994).

the edict: it was to add weight to the edict. Since the people of Kalinga would not know who the King Piyadasi was, it would have been necessary to mention about the hill to make it clear that he was the new king of Kalinga.

This inscription therefore indicates that Aśoka must have camped at the old seat of power of Kalinga, Khepingala Hill, at the time when this edict was issued. It is plausible that something happened at this hill, during Aśoka's stay here and just before the issue of this edict, which acted as the immediate provocation for him to issue the edict. It was probably a lavish party (*samāja*) that was arranged in the honour of the victorious king. Thousands of creatures would have been slaughtered to serve meat in that party, to make the occasion very special, befitting the new king. The horrible sight of that would have moved Aśoka, who was already repentant at the loss of lives in the Kalinga war, to issue this edict.

The word '*hida*' (= here) has been variously interpreted by different authors, such as 'whole dominion'/ 'capital city of Pāṭaliputra'/ 'particular places where the edict was published'²⁶. The issue has not been settled. Thapar points out that there is uncertainty about the interpretation of the word '*hida*' (Thapar 1961: 150). Clearly, common people would interpret '*hida*' as the place where they read it, which may be the particular district or even as narrow as the particular village. But Aśoka probably meant 'whole

²⁶ *Hida/ Idha* (= Skt. *ihā/ atra*): here. It may refer to the whole dominion, or the capital Pāṭaliputra, or the particular places of rock edicts (Basak 1959: 4). While Senart has taken it to be the site of the edict (Smith 1920: 159), Dhammika and Sen have interpreted it as 'in my dominion' (Dhammika 1994; Sen 1956: 64) and Bhandarkar interprets it as 'on earth' (Bhandarkar 1904: 392). On the other hand, Mookerji argues that *hida* should mean Pāṭaliputra, in which sense it has been used in Rock Edict-V, Girnar version (Mookerji 1928: 128 note 4). Although it has been used in the sense of 'in my dominion' in Rock Edict-XII and in Minor Rock Edict of Rupnath, a similar meaning would imply that this ordinance would be applicable throughout the empire against the religious practice of the majority subjects (Mookerji 1928: 128). Thapar says that the interpretation of this word '*hida*' is not absolutely certain. It might refer to Pāṭaliputra or to the local site where the edict was inscribed. But it cannot refer to Pāṭaliputra city or to the royal palace, because in the same edict Aśoka acknowledges that two peacocks and a deer are still being killed daily in the royal kitchen (Thapar 1961: 150).

dominion' by this word, since he published the edict at various places of his dominion.

Bhandarkar notes that Aśoka condemned some *samājas*, in which he saw nothing but evil, whereas there were some which he approved of. Since this edict is devoted to preservation of animal life, there can be no doubt that the tabooed *samājas* were those where animals were slain to serve meat and the other type possibly involved no slaughter. But in that case, the latter ones should have been designated as 'unobjectionable' by Aśoka, whereas he actually calls them praiseworthy, which is inexplicable. To reconcile this, Bhandarkar suggests that the praiseworthy *samājas* were probably those where *vimānas*, *hastins* and *agniskandhas*, which are referred to in Rock Edict-IV, were exhibited to increase the righteousness of people (Bhandarkar 1913: 256-257). Senart argues that this part of the inscription cannot mean 'Piyadasi approves of certain *samājas*'. Had this been the case, Aśoka would have specified the characteristics of the praiseworthy *samājas* he referred to, or at least proposed those *samājas* in the form of an antithesis, as he has done elsewhere, by describing them as *dhammasamāja* or something similar (Senart 1891: 245 note 46). These are very valid objections. *Samājas* with no slaughter would have been simply 'unobjectionable' and not 'commendable'. And if such *samājas* were of some special type, such as ones involving exhibition of *vimānas* etc., then he would have described them explicitly in order to distinguish them from the tabooed *samājas*. Therefore, it is clear that the two types of *samājas* did not have distinct characteristics. Most probably, their distinction was based on the purpose of the *samāja*. For example, a praiseworthy *samāja* could be one which was arranged to entertain a group of *śramaṇas* (vegetarian or otherwise).

The inscription says that a hundred thousand creatures were killed every day in the royal kitchen of King Aśoka. Although it might seem otherwise, the number 'hundred thousand' may not be just a fiction. The Royal kitchen would be cooking for a large number of people and the number of creatures killed could easily approach a very large number, if lunch, dinner and snacks are considered together, and if each small fish is counted as one 'life'. The figure 'hundred thousand' is, however, symbolic and not exact.

Conclusion

The proposed translation is free from various problems which are associated with the present interpretation of the edict. It removes the apparent contradiction between this edict and Pillar Edict-V. It also removes the misunderstanding about Aśoka's wrath against *samāja*. It is not correct that he was against the merrymaking of common men or display of arts by the actors, as is presently believed; he was against excessive slaughter of creatures associated with lavish dining and wastage, which normally happens during such celebrations. The mistaken portrayal of Aśoka as 'a puritanical emperor wanting to restrict the joy of popular life' now stands corrected. The proposed translation, based on a different meaning of the word *pajohitaviye*, thus enhances our understanding of the intention of Aśoka behind this edict. The hypothesis that this word was not interpreted accurately, therefore, stands validated.

With the proposed translation, the edict turns out to be a consistent piece of writing, there being no abrupt starting or ending of a topic. It starts with the injunction, 'no killing except for food' and then tries to limit even this 'permitted killing' by advising against lavish parties, which generally involve slaughter of a large number of animals. The example of the royal kitchen is given to elucidate what the common people are expected to do for complying with the injunction and to motivate them to comply voluntarily. The design of the communication is to state the injunction first and then encourage voluntary compliance of the same through King Aśoka's personal example. This is the general pattern found in many Aśokan edicts.

As per the present interpretation, the aim of the inscription is to stop animal sacrifice. The proposed interpretation is not very different in this respect. *Pajohitaviye* exempts only 'killing for food' from the general ban on killing. The edict therefore prohibits any killing other than that. The edict certainly prohibits animal sacrifice, but it also prohibits other unnecessary killings, such as hunting.

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