

Who was Vallabha, the Invader of North Ceylon?

ACCORDING to the *Cūlavamsa*¹ the invasion of North Ceylon by Vallabha took place during the reign of Mahinda IV (956-972 A.C.). Mahinda IV² was the last notable ruler in the long line of Anurādhapura kings. The *Cūlavamsa* has devoted one whole chapter (Chap. IV) to Mahinda, and many of his achievements described there find confirmation in his inscriptions.³ Mahinda is also the first king on record to have married a Kalinga princess.⁴ L. S. Perera has suggested that this marriage alliance was perhaps meant as a safe-guard against foreign enemies, and that it would have been concluded sometime before the invasion of Vallabha, referred to in the *Cūlavamsa*.⁵

To begin with Mahinda had to face a threat of rebellion, which however did not assume serious proportions. The next important political development was the arrival of a force in Nāga-dīpa, in the north of Ceylon. This army had been sent by a Vallabha (king). Mahinda was not slow in meeting this challenge and sent his commander Sena to fight the Vallabha army. Sena defeated the foreigners, and remained master of the battlefield. Then, "as the kings with Vallabha at their head, were unable to vanquish our king (i.e., Mahinda), they made a friendly treaty with the ruler of Lañkā".⁶

The identity of this Vallabha (king) has been a matter which has received considerable attention.⁷ The most obvious solution seems to be that he was the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa III, who after his decisive victory at Tak-

1. *Cūlavamsa*, (Cv), LIV. 12-16.

2. In the Sinhalese chronicles Sena IV is succeeded by another Sena, and Mahinda IV appears to be the successor of the latter. His name and the length of his reign seem to be confused with those of Sena III.

3. *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (E.Z.) Vol. I, no. 2iiiA, 19 and 20.

4. Cv., LIV. 9-10. His inscriptions make frequent references to officials of the Kilingu (Kalinga) families, E.Z., I, no. 2iiiA; II, no. 10.

5. *History of Ceylon*, (Ceylon University) Vol. I. pt. I, pp. 339-340.

6. Cv., LIV. 12-16.

7. *Ceylon Historical Journal*, IV, pp. 13-14; *History of Ceylon*, I, pt. I, pp. 340, 347; *Travancore Archaeological Series*, III, pp. 113-4; *South Indian Inscriptions* (S.I.I.), Intro. pp. 14-5; K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, Madras, 1955, pp. 154-5. A. S. Altekar, *The Rāṣṭrakūṭas and Their Times*, Poona, 1934, pp. 118-9; E.Z., V, pp. 107-8.

kolam in 949 A.C., led a triumphant march to Rāmēśvaram.⁸ According to the Karhād plates⁹ he was already encamped at Mēlpādi (in North Arcot) in Śaka 880 (c. 958 A.C.) after the conclusion of his southern campaign. Here he claims to have received envoys and gifts from his vassals, such as the king of Ceylon. Another inscription¹⁰ belonging to his reign includes the Sinhalese king among those who bowed down at the feet of Kṛṣṇa. His claim to have subdued South Indians and the Sinhalese is also mentioned in a contemporary work, the *Yaśastilakā* of Somadevasūri.¹¹ These claims seem less definite than one would expect of such an achievement, and may be considered as only a part of the stereotyped claims of some of the Indian rulers. The *Cūlavamsa* also does not categorically speak of the defeat of Vallabha himself. Therefore it cannot be construed as a defeat of Kṛṣṇa himself. Perhaps it is more likely that it was a raid made by some of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa forces who had come as far as Rāmēśvaram.

The Sinhalese sources¹² are also unanimous in their attribution to Mahinda (Kuḍā Midel) of a brilliant victory, but the enemies are referred to as Tamils who had come from the Cōḷa country. It is said that a Tamil king came with a large force to Ūrātoṭa (Kayts). These two different traditions can be reconciled because it is possible that at the time when the Sinhalese works were written the authors may have tried to make it look more intelligible by identifying Vallabha with the Cōḷas, who were uppermost in their minds as the frequent invaders of Ceylon. And the statement that the king himself led the invasion may be an exaggeration.

What complicates matters, however, is the notice of Cōḷa activities themselves in Ceylon about this time. A number of scholars, among whom specially Nilakanta Sastri, have persistently expressed the view that the Vallabha (i.e., Valavan for Cōḷa) in the *Cūlavamsa* was no other than Sundara Cōḷa Parāntaka II (c. 956-973 A.C.).¹³ One of the Tamil inscriptions from South India refers to the death of a Śiṛiyavēḷār on a battle-field in Ceylon, in the ninth year of Parāntaka II (c. 964).¹⁴ Another inscription

8. *Rāṣṭrakūṭas and Their Times*, pp. 118-9; G. Yazdani, *Early History of the Deccan*, London, 1960. pt. VI, pp. 294-5; *History of Ceylon*, I, pt. I, p. 340.

9. *Epigraphia Indica*, IV, pp. 278-290.

10. *E.I.*, XXXII, pt. II, p. 56.

11. *Yaśastilakā*, ed. Sivadatta, pt. I, iii, 246-7, p. 439.

12. *Pūjāvāliya*, chapters 33-34, ed. Suraweera, p. 104; *Rājaratnākara*, ed. Simon de Silva, p. 33; *Rājāvāliya*, ed. Gunasekara, p. 42.

13. *The Cōḷas*, pp. 154-5; *History of Ceylon*, I, pt. I, p. 347; *Ceylon Historical Journal*, IV, pp. 21-2, S. Pandarathar, *History of the Later Cōḷas Annamalainagar*, 1949, pt. I, p. 72.

14. *Annual Reports on Epigraphy (A.R.E.)*, 1896, no. 116; *S.I.I.*, III, p. 255; *E.I.*, XII, pp. 124-6.

refers to a Bāna (Baḷi) chief who along with others also seem to have fallen in battle in Ceylon.¹⁵ Śiṛiyavēḷār was a Koḍumbāḷūr chief and appears to be a son-in-law of Parāntaka II, and was also a commander (*senāpati*) of the Cōḷa army. The Bāna chief, on the other hand, was a brother-in-law of the Cōḷa monarch. Nilakanta Sastri assumes that Śiṛiyavēḷār had conducted a successful invasion of the Pāṇḍya country and followed it up with an invasion of the north of Ceylon.¹⁶ S. Pandarathar also takes a similar line in contending that this was a resumption of the old struggle between the Cōḷas and the Pāṇḍyas and the Sinhalese, with Mahinda IV sending aid to his ally Vira Pāṇḍya.¹⁷ There seems to be no evidence, however, for the assumption that Śiṛiyavēḷār led an expedition to the Pāṇḍya country, though it is possible that he may have had to pass through Pāṇḍya territory if he had undertaken an expedition to Ceylon. The fact that he was a Cōḷa *senāpati* would however suggest that he was engaged in some hostile activities in Ceylon against the local ruler. But the place in Ceylon where he met his death or the exact circumstances under which he and the others came to grief in Ceylon remain unknown. It is, however, possible that he made an abortive invasion into Ceylon. It may be noted, however, that Parāntaka II, unlike his great predecessor or equally great successors, makes no claim to any success in Ceylon. His only conquest appears to be that of Pāṇḍya. If his attempt to invade Ceylon was such a dismal failure that too would have militated against any such claim.

The date of the invasion of Vallabha is not mentioned in the *Cūlavamsa*, but according to the inscriptions of Mahinda, the defeat of his Indian foes by his commander Sena is for the first time mentioned in his eighth year,¹⁸ which also corresponds to the ninth year of Parāntaka II. It may be noted however that the exact year in which this event occurred is not revealed by this inscription, but if it is assumed to be the eighth year of Mahinda (c. 965) it would provide an interesting synchronism between the events in South India and Ceylon. However the Jetavanārāma (Abhayagiri) slab-inscription of Mahinda¹⁹ which is assumed to belong to the eighth year makes particular mention of the fact that he removed the darkness caused by the Tamil (Demel) foes, while the Vessagiriya inscription of the same ruler which is dated in the ninth year also refers to the wealth of the whole of India (*mulu-Daṅbdiv*) which was brought (to Ceylon) by the valour of his

15. *S.I.I.*, XIII, no. 197, Intro., pp. iv-vii.

16. *The Cōḷas*, pp. 154-5.

17. *The Later Cōḷas*, I, p. 72.

18. *History of Ceylon*, I, pt. I, p. 340; *E.Z.*, I, pp. 30-1.

19. *E.Z.*, I, p. 221. "...Lak-amburen Demel-rupu-andur hārā...."

commander Sena.²⁰ We may also venture to suggest here that the latter claim would even imply that (as S. Pandarathar also assumes) Mahinda may have despatched Sinhalese forces to South India to help Vīra Pāṇḍya against Sundara Cōḷa Parāntaka II.

All these rather inconsistent dates and references to events suggest that the identification of Vallabha, or the events themselves, are not as obvious as generally assumed. It is inconceivable, no doubt, that the author of the *Cūlavamsa* would refer to a Cōḷa ruler by the name or epithet "Vallabha". Nor could one understand how the *Cūlavamsa* could have missed such an event as a defeat of the Cōḷas by Mahinda IV, as it could be inferred from the Cōḷa and Sinhalese epigraphical and literary sources. "Vallabha" however, was not an exclusive *biruda*, but was one which was frequently used by rulers of Western India, such as the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the Cālukyas. It was used by kings in other parts of India and Ceylon too. The *Cūlavamsa* author also uses this title in all probability with reference to a Cālukya ruler.²¹ The Rāṣṭrakūṭa inscriptions²² themselves use this title with reference to Kṛṣṇa and many others of the same dynasty. The Cōḷas also used it to denote the Cālukyas and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.²³ The statement in the *Cūlavamsa* that the Vallabha king was at the head of a number of other rulers is however significant, because as said in the Karhād plates, Kṛṣṇa invaded the Cōḷa country at the head of many feudatories and allied princes.²⁴ According to the date of the same plates (Śaka 880) we may have to date any Rāṣṭrakūṭa interference in Ceylon to some time before 958-9 A.C. (i.e., Śaka 880). But this date may not agree with the events in the reign of Mahinda referred to in his inscriptions unless we also assume that those events in the latter's reign took place not immediately before the first mention of it in his inscriptions (i.e., 8th year-965 A.C. as we have assumed above) but in the first few years of his reign (i.e., c. 956-9 A.C.). Thus the available evidence only lends itself to a number of assumptions and not to any definite conclusions. The Vallabha king in the *Cūlavamsa* in all probability is a ruler other than a Cōḷa, and probably Kṛṣṇa III himself, in whose time there may have been some hostile demonstration against Ceylon, or with whom Mahinda may have exchanged envoys and gifts, which may have been asserted by both rulers in turn as

20. *E.Z.*, I, pp. 30-5.

21. *Cv.*, XLVII. 15.

22. *E.I.*, IV, p. 289; VII, p. 194; *A.R.E.*, 1902, no. 428; 1913, no. 236; *E.I.*, XXVI, p. 231; XXV, p. 234; *S.I.I.*, IX, no. 59, etc.

23. *S.I.I.*, III, pp. 55-6, no. 28.

24. *E.Z.*, I, pp. 29-38, 238.

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an acknowledgement of one by the other. Thus we have, like the claims of Kṛṣṇa III, which we have already seen, the claims of Mahinda to the fabulous presents offered to him by various kings of Jaṃbudīpa (India).²⁵ On the other hand it can be assumed, as the Cōḷa inscriptions indicate that there was a Cōḷa invasion too. This seems to have escaped the notice of the *Cūlavamsa*, but has been noticed by the Sinhalese epigraphical and literary sources. It is possible that the repeated foreign invasions at this time may have led to much of this confusion, and resulted in its omission in the *Cūlavamsa* or in the records from which the latter derived its material. And if one considers the disabilities under which the monks had to exist from about the time of the death of Mahinda IV it is not difficult to understand such lapses in the monastic records.

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25. *E.Z.*, I, p. 225, see also pp. 34-5 for a reference to the riches of the whole of Daṃbādiva which were brought to his feet by means of the valour of his Commander Sena.