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MAHĪPĀLA OF THE CAṆḌAKAUŚIKAM.

BY

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The *Caṇḍakauśikam* is a Sanskrit drama of five acts by Kṣemīśvara. Poor in its plot and execution, and mediocre in its poetry, the play lacks all title to distinction. The story of Hariścandra in itself lacks dramatic quality, and Kṣemīśvara's handling of it has not made it more attractive. Our concern however is not with the literary art of Kṣemīśvara or his lack of it. Our aim is to discuss the identity of King Mahīpāla whom he mentions in the following verse in the prelude to the *Caṇḍakauśikam* :

Yañ sam-śritya prakṛti-gahanām-ārya-Cāṇakya-nītim
Jitvā Nandān kusuma-nagarān Candragupto jigāya |
Karnāṭatvam dhruvam-upa-gatān-adya tāneva hantum
Dor-darpādhyah sa punar-abhava-chhri-mahīpāladevaḥ||

We are thus told by the poet that his patron was a Mahīpāla-deva born to chastise the Karnāṭas : and by a curious conceit, Mahīpāla is said to be a re-incarnation of the Mauryan emperor Candragupta, and the Karnāṭas of the Nandas who were overthrown by Candragupta following the lead of Cāṇakya.

Mahīpāla, the patron of Kṣemīśvara, is generally identified with the Gurjara-Pratīhāra ruler of Kanauj, who was also the patron of Rājaśekhara, and whose reign extended roughly from A. D. 914 to 945.¹ Professor Sten Konow observes : "Pischell has rightly identified this Mahīpāladeva with Mahīpāla, the lord of Pratīhāra, for whom the *Bālabhārata* of Rājaśekhara was intended. We know also from *Bālabhārata* I, 7 that Rājaśekhara's protector led extensive campaigns in the south."

The identity of Mahīpāla, the patron of Kṣemīśvara, with the Gurjara ruler of Kanauj has, however, sometimes been called

1. J. R. A. S. 1904, p. 655.

into question. The editors of the *Bālabhārata* of Rājaśekhara in the *Kāvya-mālā* add a note to the *Bālabhārata* verse I, 7, in which they quote the verse of Kṣemiśvara on Mahīpāla and observe : *sa evāyamapi Mahīpāladeva iti tu na niścayaḥ*. Mr. R. D. Banerji has made a sustained effort in recent years to uphold the conjecture of Mr. Haraprasad Sastri that the famous Pāla ruler, Mahīpāla I of Bengal A. D. 974-1026, was the patron of Kṣemiśvara. Mr. R. D. Banerji also seeks to explain the allusion in Kṣemiśvara's verse to the Karṇāṭas as a reference to the celebrated expedition sent by Rājendra I Gaṅgai-koṇḍa-cōḷa. This expedition was charged with the task of bringing the sacred water of the Ganges for the purification of the Cōḷa country, and its commander was instructed to fight and overcome any opposition to the enterprise from the foreign kings through whose territory the Cōḷa army had to march to and fro.¹ Banerji holds that this expedition was repulsed by Mahīpāla I of Bengal about A. D. 1024.²

These views of Banerji were examined at some length by Dr. S. K. Aiyangar in his essay on Gaṅgai-koṇḍa-Cōḷa.³ Dr. Aiyangar showed that the Karṇāṭas of the *Caṇḍakaśika*, the opponents of Mahīpāla, could not have been the Cōḷa forces who were mostly Tamils, and that Kṣemiśvara must have referred to the wars of the Gurjara Mahīpāla I with the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. He also pointed out that there was no evidence either in Pāla or in Cōḷa inscriptions in favour of Banerji's theory of a victory gained against the Cōḷa forces by the Pāla ruler of Bengal. Influenced rather unduly by a somewhat forced interpretation he put upon the verse from the *Caṇḍakaśikam*, Dr. Aiyangar adumbrated a theory that the Rāṣṭrakūṭa power overthrown by Gurjara Mahīpāla I had its location in Magadha. Because Mahīpāla and his Karṇāṭaka foes are compared to Candragupta and the Nandas respectively in the verse of Kṣemiśvara, Dr. Aiyangar has argued that the scene of Mahīpāla's victory must have also been in Magadha. Accordingly he supposes that a branch of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, who had for sometime held a principality in Central India, were compelled after the rise of the Caṇḍela power in the tenth century to move into Magadha, where they created for themselves

1. *Tiruvālaṅkādu plates* vv. 109, 110.

2. *The Palas of Bengal*, p. 73.

3. *Sir Asutosh Silver Jubilee volumes Orientalia*, Part 2, pp. 559 ff.

a kingdom 'which bore the name Daṇḍabhukti as forming either a part or the whole of their former fief.'¹ Not only is this history of Rāṣṭrakūṭa migration into Magadha unsupported by any tangible evidence, but the hypothesis is really unnecessary. The need for it arises from pursuing the analogy between Mahīpāla and Candragupta to lengths to which it was not meant to be pursued by Kṣemīśvara. The whole point of a comparison is, and here it is a similarity underlying the *utprekṣā* of the verse, that there is some *sādrśya* in the midst of many differences between the two objects of comparison, and we shall see presently that the *sādrśya* in this comparison is really to be sought in the exile of the king from his country by the success of his enemies, and his regaining possession of it by diplomacy and foreign aid. The clause "*yaḥ saṁśritya-prakṛti-gahanām ārya-cāṇakya nītim*"—seems to furnish the real clue to the point of comparison; the statement that Candragupta captured Kusumanagaram from his enemies should not be taken to imply that Mahīpāla did the same thing over again.²

There is also another difficulty in the position of Dr. Aiyangar. If Daṇḍabhukti was in its origin a military fief in Magadha in the occupation of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, one may ask how it passed into the hands of Dharmapāla who is said to have ruled it at the time of the Ganges expedition of Rājendra Cōla's troops? In seeking to answer this question, Dr. Aiyangar admits the possibility that the Karṇāṭas (Rāṣṭrakūṭas) of Magadha may have been conquered by Mahīpāla I of Bengal, who may have employed Dharmapāla, one of his relatives, in a subordinate capacity in the newly conquered territory. He says:³ "The defeat of the Karṇāṭas by Mahīpāla, the Pāla king, and his conquest of the territory in consequence, are just possible on this basis, but it would, in the circumstances in which the fact is mentioned, be better to refer the defeat of the Karṇāṭakas to Mahīpāla, the Gurjara." One more extract will place Dr. Aiyangar's contention in a clearer light: "It seems a provable hypothesis that the Karṇāṭas of Magadha that figure in the records of the Pāla kings of Bengal were the Rāṣṭrakūṭas who settled themselves in Central India, and cutting off political relationship with the mother dynasty

1. *op cit*, pp. 557-8.

2. *Contra* Dr. Aiyangar, *op cit*, p. 560.

3. *op. cit*, pp. 558-9.

made for themselves a kingdom first in Central India and subsequently in Magadha. It is the ascent to power of Mahīpāla, the Gurjara, that brought them under a political eclipse so effectively that we lose sight of them altogether all through the tenth century. It is this fact that seems to be preserved in the *gāthā* of the *Caṇḍakauśika*. There is no need, therefore to postulate a Kaṇṇāṭaka contingent in Rājendra Cōḷa's army, and of its being left behind to hold the territory of Magadha in behalf of Rājendra Cōḷa."¹

In a paper on Pāla chronology, Mr. Banerji returned to the charge in 1928, and traversed the opinions of Dr. S. K. Aiyangar cited above.² He pointed out that there is no proof of the existence of an independent Rāṣṭrakūṭa or Kaṇṇāṭaka power in Bihar in the 10th century A. D., or indeed in any part of northern India. In this Mr. Banerji seems to be right, as also in rejecting the identification of Daṇḍabhukti with Bihar. The Cōḷa inscriptions and the *Rāmacarita* and its commentary alike support Mr. Banerji's identification of Daṇḍabhukti with a part of the modern district of Midnapore.

But then, he betrays his unfamiliarity with the details of the evidence of the Cōḷa inscriptions, and draws rather freely on his imagination when he says of the Cōḷa invaders: "Though the Bhāgīrathī was reached, the Cōḷa general actually refrained from capturing and plundering Gauḍa, the ancient capital of the Pālas, which lay a few miles across the Ganges. We have no reason to believe that a roving band of South Indian marauders, like the Cōḷa army, was composed of devout ascetics who religiously refrained from rapine and plunder, filled their vessels with the holy water of the Ganges and retraced their way home with their eyes shut as soon as their objective was gained. The Tirumalai inscription says that the Cōḷa army reached Uttara Rāḍhā after putting Mahīpāla to flight. The inscription ends abruptly and therefore there is no reason to doubt the evidence of the *Caṇḍakauśikam* that a king named Mahīpāla had defeated an army of Kaṇṇāṭakas." The argument in this passage is simply this: the Cōḷa army was composed not of ascetics but marauders; they would have plundered Gauḍa if they could; but they did not do so, hence they must have sustained a defeat. This inference is supported by the

1. *op. cit.* p. 562.

2. J. B. O. R. S. Vol. XIV, 512 ff.

abrupt end of the Tirumalai rock inscription and the verse from the *Caṇḍakauśikam*.

The Tiruvālaṅgāḍu plates¹ of Rājendra make it very clear that the king enjoined on the commander of the expedition that he was to concentrate on his objective, the fetching of Ganges water, and fight only with those who opposed the enterprise and to the extent necessary to clear the way for the fulfilment of his object. In other words, the holy waters of the Ganges, not fighting, nor plunder, formed the motive of the expedition. Once this is grasped, there would be no surprise that the army which reached the Ganges, did not cross the stream to plunder Gauḍa, and the need for postulating a defeat of the Cōḷa army by the Pāla ruler would disappear, together with the search for the evidence in favour of such a hypothesis. No Tamil scholar will agree with Mr. Banerji that the Tirumalai rock inscription ends abruptly. In fact this *praśasti* of Rājendra I (*tiru-manni vaḷara* etc.) is a fine composition with a clear plan of its own and of much value to the historian on account of the additions made to it from time to time to bring its narration of the leading events of the reign up to date. This inscription of the thirteenth year² closes the narrative of events on the word *Kaṅgaiyum* (1. 11), which, with the participle *koṇḍa* in the next line, is intended to suggest the chief *biruda* of the king, *Gaṅgai-koṇḍa*. Far from being abrupt, the end seems to have been carefully planned by the composer. The truth is that, if we put on one side the verse from the *Caṇḍakauśikam*, there is no evidence whatever to support the view that Mahīpāla of Bengal defeated an army from South India.

The verse from the *Caṇḍakauśikam*, as we have seen, speaks of Mahīpāla defeating the *Karṇāṭakas*. There is a real difficulty in connecting this statement with the northern expedition of Rājendra Cōḷa, and Mr. Banerji recognises this. He says:³ "The only valid objection which may be raised is the term *Karṇāṭaka*. It may be said that the term *Karṇāṭaka* must refer to a Kanarese power. But no invasion of Bengal from the Kanarese country during the reign of Mahīpāla I is known, and in those days the people of Bengal could not distinguish between Kannāḍas and Tamils. Even in the 19th century the East India Company's

1. vv. 109, 110.

2. E. I. IX, p. 232.

3. J. B. O. R. S. XIV, p. 518.

Hindustani sepoy were generally known as Telingas." This argument would perhaps be valid if it were established that the *Caṇḍakauśikam* was a play produced in Bengal under the Pāla ruler Mahīpāla I. If, on the other hand, it is possible to point to another Mahīpāla in whose reign a Karnatic war did take place and who may have been the patron of Kṣemīśvara, we should then find it more easy to assign the play to his time, than to follow Mr. Banerji in believing that a Bengali author of the eleventh century A. D. committed the same sort of error about the nationality of South Indians as Muhammadan chroniclers and Anglo-Indian writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Gurjara ruler Mahīpāla I in fact satisfies all the conditions of the case.

Mr. Banerji does not, however, think that this is so. In discussing Dr. S. K. Aiyangar's view quoted above,¹ he says: "Professor Aiyangar has perhaps forgotten the existence of the Cambay plates of Gōvinda IV. Mahīpāla I, a younger son of Mahēndrapāla I, succeeded to the throne by removing his elder brother Bhōja II with the help of the Caṇḍella chief Harṣa. Very shortly afterwards the Gurjara-Pratihāra empire was shattered by the onslaught of the great Rāṣṭrakūṭa conqueror Indra III. In fact this young prince dealt the death blow to Gurjara-Pratihāra supremacy in India. He invaded Mālava, captured Ujjain, crossed the Jumna near Kalpi, devastated Kanauj and compelled Mahīpāla I to flee before his general, the Cālukya chief, Narasimha, to Allahabad. Mahīpāla I returned to Kanauj after the retirement of Rāṣṭrakūṭa army to find that the provinces were fast becoming independent under the feudatories and governors. No Mahīpāla of the Gurjara-Pratihāra dynasty ever defeated any Karṇāṭaka army or chief, and therefore it is cruel of Professor Aiyangar to attribute the production of the drama *Caṇḍakauśikam* before this unfortunate king."²

The relevant verse in the Cambay plates runs as follows:³

Yan-mādyad-dvipa-danta-ghāta-viṣamaṁ Kālapriya-prāṅga-
ṇam
 Tirṇā yat turagair-agādha-yamunā-sindhu-prati-spardhinī |
 Yenedam hi mahodayāri-nagaraṁ nirmūlam-unmūlitam
 Nāmnā-dyā-pi janaiḥ kuśasthalam-iti khyātim parāṁ nīyate||

1. See *ante* p. 192.

2. J. B. O. R. S. XIV, p. 519.

3. E. I. VII, p. 38, v. 19.

On this verse Prof. D. R. Bhandarkar remarks with justice:¹ "But the complete devastation of Mahodaya, which Indra III is spoken of as having brought about, is merely poetical. For, the poet's object appears to be to introduce a play on the words *mahodaya* and *kuśasthala* which in their conventional sense mean Kanauj, and in their etymological one, 'full of high prosperity' and 'a spot of *kuśa* grass' respectively : 'Mahodaya' *i.e.*, Kanauj ceased to be Mahodaya, *i.e.*, highly prosperous, and became Kuśasthala, *i.e.*, a mere spot of *Kuśa* grass. Hence, the complete annihilation of the city of Mahodaya or Kanauj alluded to in this stanza cannot be reasonably assumed to be a historical fact. This is also seen from the consideration that, as a matter of fact, for long after the event recorded in this verse took place, Kanauj continued to be the capital of several princes, ruling over Northern India." Prof. Bhandarkar has also shown that after a short exile from his kingdom, Mahīpāla I was restored to it by the joint efforts of the Caṇḍela king Harṣadeva and the Pāla ruler Dharmapāla.²

Likewise, Prof. Sten Konow, following Pischell's identification of Kṣemiśvara's patron with the Gurjara-Pratīhāra ruler Mahīpāla I, writes :³ "India III, the king of Rāṣṭrakūṭa, of whom we possess inscriptions of years 914 and 916, and who accordingly was a contemporary of Pratīhāra Mahīpāla of Kānyakubja, at all events says of himself that he conquered Mahodaya (Kānyakubja). Since, however, Mahīpāla's successors continued their dominion over Kānyakubja, we cannot judge this statement in any other way than similar statements found in inscriptions, in which each of the parties to a battle claims to be the victor. Mahīpāla's victory over the Karṇāṭas, and Indra's victory over Mahodaya probably relate to the same occurrence which was differently interpreted by the participants."

One final consideration may be urged before concluding. Why should Kṣemiśvara drag in the analogy of an ancient half-forgotten king, not altogether of good repute in Hindu tradition, when the author's aim is obviously to praise his patron monarch ? The answer may be made that after the *Mudrārākṣasa* of Viśākhadatta, the history of Candragupta's exile and return to Magadha

1. E. I. VII, p. 30.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 30-3.

3. I. D. Sec. 98,

with Cāṇakya's aid became common property of the *literati*, and consequently, it was by no means out of the way for Kṣemīśvara to bring in this story. But may there not be something more in it? Considering that Mahīpāla owed his restoration in part to a Caṇḍela, and that Kṣemīśvara is also known as Ārya-Kṣemīśvara,¹ one is led to suspect that in the phrases *Candragupto jigāya*² and *ārya-Cāṇakya-nītim samśritya*, the poet may be hinting at the help Mahīpāla got from the Caṇḍela king, and, possibly also, at his own part in securing the aid of this prince, or of others, who assisted in the return of Mahīpāla to his kingdom. Kṣemīśvara had no lack of purāṇic stories of celebrated kings exiled for a time and restored to their throne, and the employment of any of these stories might have served, if his object was only to praise his patron. It seems possible therefore, that in the actual phrases he has chosen to employ, the poet is hinting (by *dhvani*) at the actual course of contemporary history and his own part in it. If there is any truth in this surmise, the identity of Kṣemīśvara's patron with the Gurjara Mahīpāla becomes most securely established.³

There is thus no reason to doubt the correctness of the view expressed many years ago by Pischell and generally accepted by students of Sanskrit literature and epigraphy that the *Caṇḍakauśikam* was a play produced in the early years of the tenth century A. D. in the court of the Gurjara-Pratīhāra ruler Mahīpāla I.

1. See Prastāvanā.

2. Perhaps the name Candragupta is also intended to refer to the idea expressed by the phrase "Candreṇa (Caṇḍella-harṣeṇa) guptaḥ".

3. The suggestions put forward in this paragraph are based on a conversation with Prof. S. Kuppusvami Sastrigal.

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