

## Tulsidas

Tulsidas is one of the most famous and prominent poets of Hindi literature. He wrote 12 books, but is most famous for writing *Ramcaritmanas* and *Vinaya Patrika*, both of which are very popular, influential, and significant writings in Hinduism literature. *Ramcaritmanas* is a recollection of the epic of *Ramayana* and *Vinaya Patrika* is an account of a sinner begging for mercy. Tulsidas is thought to be the incarnation of Valmiki and is often compared to him. [Valmiki is a sage and is accredited with writing the famous *Ramayana*]. Although he was born underprivileged, Tulsidas is considered to be a great sage and is responsible for a wide variety of different miracle actions. He is hugely influential throughout Hinduism and still worshiped and celebrated today.

Although the records of Tulsidas' life are not completely uniform throughout Hinduism, there are a few versions of his early childhood that were generally accepted to be true. Tulsidas was born in a small village called Rajapur, in the district of Banda in 1532 CE. In his writings, Tulsidas often mentions or implies that he was born into poverty and that his parents did not want him. One variation of his birth account says that Tulsidas was in his mother's womb for twelve months and that once he was born the elders told his father to get rid of him because his birth was inauspicious (Chaturvedi 21-23). Another version says that after birth his parents were distressed having to feed another mouth and tossed him into the street for him to feed with the dogs (Hawley 145). On all accounts, however, Tulsidas is specifically mentioned to not have cried during his birth and to have been born with 32 teeth intact in his mouth. During his childhood and young adulthood, Tulsidas was known as Ram-Bola. Accounts of his older childhood vary too much to have a singular recollection.

According to legends, once Tulsidas became a renowned Brahmin he was getting endless offers of marriage. He chose to marry a woman named Buddhimati (or Ratnavali) and fell desperately in love with her. It is mentioned in all records that Tulsidas could not bear to be apart from his new wife. Through custom, however, Buddhimati was obligated to go visit her mother's place as a newly married woman. Ram-Bola, as he was known then, could not tolerate to be away from his wife for even one night and followed her to her mother's house. When Buddhimati discovered Ram-Bola at her mother's house she learnt of his obsession with her. She told him that if he worshiped Rama half as much as he worships her body then he would be redeemed for all of his offences. After being hurt so badly by the woman he loved so dearly, Ram-Bola finally opened his mind. He realized that he was a man of God and thanked Buddhimati for showing him his rightful path. From then on he was no longer known as Ram-Bola, but Tulsidas instead. Now he no longer desired the sight of his wife, but instead the sight of Rama (Chaturvedi 29-38).

After seeing the light, Tulsidas wandered all over in search of holiness. He roamed searching for Rama for years and decided that his long life should end in Varanasi. He left his mortal body and entered the Abode of Immortality and Eternal Bliss in 1623 CE, at the age of 91 (Chaturvedi 68).

In one excerpt from legends about his wanderings, Tulsidas runs into a ghost in the place where he washes himself in the mornings. At first this ghost is a monstrous creature, but in time it becomes purified and clean by the left over bathing water that Tulsidas does not use. The spirit begins to speak to Tulsidas, and knowing his devotion to Lord Rama, he tells him where to look for Rama's follower Hanuman. The ghost tells Tulsidas that Hanuman will be the first to arrive and the last to leave at the readings of

*Ramcaritmanas*. The next time that Tulsidas recites his songs of the *Ramcaritmanas* he notices an old man that comes early and leaves late. When he approaches this man and asks him who he is the man takes his original form as a monkey and reveals himself as Hanuman. Hanuman tells Tulsidas that he can have anything he wishes. Tulsidas says that the only thing he wants is to see Rama. Hanuman then tells Tulsidas when Rama and his riders will be coming through and Tulsidas waits for him. When the riders come through, however, Tulsidas does not know which one Rama is (Hawley 149-150). This instance in Tulsidas' travels gives a great view of his devotion to Lord Rama and his passion for finding him.

Tulsidas is often related to and called a great sage. He is even thought to be the incarnation of Valmiki himself. There is an account of Tulsidas that many people refer to when they compare him to a sage. One of his famous books *Vinaya Patrika* tells the tale of a murderer who went in search of Rama to give him alms for his wrongful actions. When Tulsidas heard these cries his heart felt warm. He offered the murderer *prasad* and then sang him clean. [*Prasad* is food that is blessed by first being offered to God]. The Brahmins demanded that Tulsidas explain to them how he could absolve the sins of a murderer and then share food with him. Tulsidas told the Brahmins that although they have read the sacred books, they have not let any of the scriptures touch their hearts. The Brahmins were still apprehensive and insisted that the murderer take a test. The test was to see if Siva's bull Nandi would eat food offered to him from the criminal's hands. Tulsidas prayed to Nandi for the murderer, and the bull ate the food from his hands (Hawley 147). This passage is an example of what influence Tulsidas had and how he used that influence.

Another episode that describes Tulsidas' power and his unending compassion is when he was out one day and ran into a Brahmin woman that he knew. He greeted her by saying *suhagavati*. [This greeting carries the connotation of "may your husband have a long life"]. The woman became deeply upset being as she was attending her husband's funeral just then. She explained to him that her husband just passed away and she was going to perform her *sati*. [*Sati* is a ritual death of the wife after her husband dies]. However, because she announced that she was going to perform this ritual before actually doing it the ritual was guaranteed not to work and she would not reconnect with her husband on the other side. She was very upset and Tulsidas could not help but feel guilty. He was a firm believer of demonstrating Brahmin beliefs, such as *sati*, so he took control of the situation. He stated that if the woman truly embraced Rama, her dead husband would rise. She did so and her husband rose (Hawley 147-148).

Tulsidas is seen as a worshiper of Rama, and also as a beneficiary of that worship. Through his worship to Rama he receives many great gifts and aids. In one account of his life, Tulsidas is said to be called on by a great emperor after he heard of Tulsidas raising the dead. Once Tulsidas was in front of the emperor, the emperor demanded that Tulsidas show him a miracle. Tulsidas replied by saying that he had no superhuman power, he just knew Rama's name. The emperor was infuriated and placed Tulsidas in prison, saying that he will release him only if Tulsidas shows him a miracle. Tulsidas then prayed to Hanuman, a monkey warrior and follower of Rama. When he did this, masses of monkey soldiers burst into the royal court. The emperor became frightened and released Tulsidas from jail. The emperor then understood Tulsidas' importance (Chaturvedi 58-60).

Although Tulsidas left the mortal world almost 400 years ago, he is still worshiped and given great attention every day. There are several places that one can go to and witness the numerous devotions dedicated to Tulsidas. There is his house in Varanasi where the neighbourhood is now called *Tulsi Ghat* which means “Tulsi’s Landing”. [Tulsidas is often referred to as Tulsi]. In this house there is a specific spot of worship where it is thought that Tulsidas composed the *Ramcaritmanas*, which are recited everyday at his house. Another spot of reverence is just down the street from Tulsidas’ house: a temple which more directly celebrates his faith. It is a magnificent marble building called the *Tulsi Manas Mandir* which means “the temple to Tulsi’s *Manas*” [The *Ramcaritmanas* are often referred to as the *Manas*]. Every year on Tulsidas’ birthday there is a great procession with floats and many followers, all chanting from the *Manas* (Hawley 155-158). Tulsidas was a very influential poet, sage, and Brahmin whose works are still prominent in modern Hinduism today.

## References

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## Related Topics

- Hanuman
- Buddhimati (Ratnavali)
- Valmiki

- Vinaya Patrika
- Ramcaritmanas
- suttee
- prasad
- Nandi
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[http://www.siddhayoga.org/community/families/tales\\_2000/tulsidas/](http://www.siddhayoga.org/community/families/tales_2000/tulsidas/)

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