

# Role of ‘Tulsidas’ in Ramcharitmanas: A Historical Analysis of Vaishnavite Sect [16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Century]

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## Abstract:

Goswami Tulsidas ‘Ramcharitmanas’ well-crafted saga enjoys distinctive position as a masterpiece among the best epics of world literature. It encapsulates rectitude and virtuousness, the epitome of Vaishnavite ideology. Goswami Tulsidas, an impartial legendary poet revolutionized various other dimensions like literature and religion. The text was penned down in Awadhi with the objective of making beatific tales approachable to the laity of that time. Certain incidents from the text are so engrossing in relation to other Indian holy scriptures. Such motivation makes one’s life at ease. The pertinence of his work exhibits the essence of antiquity which cohere individuals through mutual value and devotionism. After a comprehensive discourse on Tulsidas and his mission of completing Ramcharitmanas this research paper shall dissect extensively historical importance of vernacular text [Awadhi] on Lord Rama as well as accolades and tribute poured to Lord Rama by his ardent devotee. The entire research paper will dissect that how the slogan of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” is so much empirically applicable in the global challenges that all the countries of the world as one family face today.

**Keywords:** Ramcharitmanas, Tulsidas, Vaishnavism, Bhakti, Ramyana

## Introduction:

Bharat Varsha or ‘the land of Bharata’, a mosaic of paraphernalia of ‘Sanatan Dharma’ which encompasses eternal doctrine of ‘Vasudev Kutumba’ had spread its tentacles in the lives of Sanatana’s since time immemorial. Medieval Hindu Devotionalism [Bhakti] texts have deified all cults of Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism.

The spiritual hierarchy in the sect of Lord Rama worship also comes down to Ramanandi Saint ‘Tulsidas’ [1532-1623]- in the Hindi speaking area of present-day Uttar Pradesh. ‘Ramcharitmanas’ an epic work in the vernacular is truly justified by calling it ‘the lake of the story of Rama’. The saint who practically lived Bhakti had received benediction from Lord Hanuman to incarnate as Valmiki, in the Kaliyuga and eulogize the accolades of Lord Rama in Awadhi- his vernacular language. It has also been corroborated by Bhaktamal [the Garland of Bhakt], by Nabhadass. This ‘Rambola’ has alluded at many places in his writings his encounter with Lord Hanuman and Lord Rama. Tulsidas commenced Ramcharitmanas by giving his submission to a particular Preta for showering his blessings as this ‘Preta’ only showed Tulsidas the path to Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple where Lord Hanuman divulged his

true form. The Darshan of Prabhu Ram has been referred in many texts like Priyadas account, a song of the Gitavali, Vinayapatrika etc.

Ramcharitmanas was composed in Ayodhya, on Ramnavami day on Sunday and was culminated in 1577 CE on Vivaha Panchami, which solemnized the wedding day of Rama and Sita. In colloquial conversation, the work is called by many names like Tulsi Ramayana, Tulsi Krit, Ramayani, Tulsidas Ramayana or Manas. In spite of facing strong denunciation from the Brahmin Sanskrit priests and scholars of his time, his unwavering commitment was to streamline the knowledge contained in Shruti and Smriti literature.

Thereafter 'this Bible of North India' made Ramlila a customary prevalent tradition. The eclectic essence of wisdom, insightfulness and optimism and the realistic advice for leading a life which is built on the pillars of transcendental and enlightened consciousness. Lord Shiva had first narrated the story to Uma-his consort and then to divine Kaushbhushun. Later Lord Shiva himself becomes an earnest listener. The city and the hinterland of Ayodhya are pious, blessed with the graciousness of the almighty.

The seven Kandas of such a monumental masterpiece have been made analogous with seven steps that paved the way into the sanctified water of Lake 'Manasarovar' - which purges all the evils from the body and the soul of a man at once. Its multifaceted style of composition known as Chaupai and Doha has made the verses so phenomenal that it can easily become apt to variety of Indian musical tunes and instruments. Ramcharitmanas, a magnum opus of vernacular sacramental literature is immersed in the exquisite Bhakti for 'Maryada Purushottama' who descended from heaven to bestow his blessings on all the living entities of this world and became the best exemplar of uprightness, graciousness and virtuousness. Through the reading of this classical epic, even a soul afflicted with spiritual crisis, would feel communion with that blessedness in the most profound way.

#### Significance of the study

The study of Ramcharitmanas gives a prologue to the historical study of Vaishnavite sect and all the cantos of this heavenly literature. The religious discourse is all so well framed in our scriptural literature. Certain philosophical discussion leaves deep imprint on the intellectual mind of the reader.

All the characters and episodes are the connoisseur that instruct the readers to be resilient whenever we are afflicted with any unpropitious situation in life. This legendary tale inspires the readers even in contemporary times also how to traverse in the most arduous times also.

#### Objectives of the Study

1. To specify how in its entirety Tulsidas Ramcharitmanas is an exceptional work that has given us an impassioned perception about the nexus between human and spiritual dimension.
2. The study focuses on how the stature of this literature has acquired immense prominence especially among the region of North India.
3. The way a distinctive sense of aspiration and sturdiness has come into life by promising the end of Sanatanis despondency of past, present and future.
4. To reflect that during Bhakti tradition no conciliator was required between God and his bhakt. Each and every juncture in the entire episodes of the book will manifest that how truly the path to redemption and salvation is Bhakti which beyond doubt is superior to all other kinds of sacrificial and polytheistic practices.
5. To comprehend an in-depth and analytical study of all the kandas of this holy text which are a source of inspiration **for not only Indians but also the western readers.**

## Review of Literature

The segment of people in modern and contemporary times feel that supremacy of Brahmanical section of society was established and Dalits and women were demeaned. However, while dissecting the entire discourse, I realized that this statement was taken out of context. The time and circumstances of that time were spiritually and traditionally disparate. No doubt this holy literature is open to decipherment. It is important to read it in between lines keeping in consideration the deep-rooted problems like caste system of that time. Each reader will find his own methodology of interpretation.

## Discussion

### 1.1 History of Vaishnavism

Impetus to the ideology of Vaishnavism has been given in texts like Mahabharata and Ramayana but its earliest reference has also come down in our Vedas. The Sangam literature have mentioned about the Pallava dynasty whose rulers like Mahendra Varman built temples and sanctuaries of Lord Vishnu. Vishnuvardhana who was previously called as Bittideva was converted to Vaishnavism from Jainism by the holy patronage given to him by Sri Vaishnava Acharya Ramanuja. The influence and the holy sponsorship of Vaishnavite denomination also revived the regional atmosphere of worship of philosophy of Bhakti. The true revelation of the supreme in all the aspects for Vaishnavite is Lord Vishnu and all his avatars. The sacred chanting in praise of Lord Vishnu and all his incarnations in different yugas enhanced the popularity of Altars. For them moksha is Lord Vishnu. Some of the unadulterated study of the Vedas will bring to light that Vaishnavism is not explicitly related to Rudra or Vishnu of the Vedic scriptures. This religious coterie in contemporary times is still part of the faraway parts of north and South parts of our country. North India also saw the dawn of Vaishnavism cult through its numerous cults under the aegis of revered panjandrums like Namdev and Tukaram who worshipped Vishnu as Vithoba of Pandharpur. Although Vaishnavites are theistic in their approach, they do not have approach of exclusiveness. The germination of Vaishnavite cult from the medieval period had been spectacular. In the beginning it organised itself around Vasudeva, an extolled leader of the clan of Vrishnis, who are somewhat related to Bhagavata culture of Sanatan. The amalgamation of it with the cult of Krishna of cowherd band seemed to be developed as an independent sect. The Sangam age also eulogize Vishnu in the form of poetry which also alludes to Krishna and Balrama. Thus the dynastic history of Tamilakam tells us that Pallava, Chalukya dynasty patronized Vaishnavite ideology. The Alvars in the beginning acknowledged Shiva and Vishnu as one form. But they still recognized their single unified form as Lord Vishnu. In the early medieval period Vaishnavism grew into various cults and sects, whose underlying focus was always Bhakti, which was determined by South Indian Godliness. The twelve Alvar saints spread this cult to the common masses through their hymns collectively called as Divya Prabandham. Vaishnavite theology promotes the theory of cosmos equilibrium which can be cyclically only restored through the reincarnations of Lord Vishnu. Vaishnavite pantheon of Bhakti depicts fusion of Samkhya, Advaita Vedanta and Yoga views.

### 1.2 Vaishnavite Bhakti

A vast country like India has been the nucleus of cultural edification since yesteryear. Hinduism, a religion like a pelagic has so many adherents of Vaishnavism. Lord Vishnu, the upholder and maintainer of universe is glorified both in India and abroad. During medieval period when we were at the stage of acculturation flux, the zeal of Vaishnavite Bhakti became popular among the masses. Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of ancient India and Holy Scriptures like Bhagvat Gita have in their texts the ideals

of Vaishnavism. But South India [7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>] century was the well spring of the beliefs and traditions of masses who had completely indoctrinated the conceptual framework of 'Bhakti' in their lives. 10<sup>th</sup> century was the apogee of Bhakti movement. Bhakti movements came to rallying stage after the continuation of the ancient Bhakti movement of South India. But the state of affairs and historical climate dependent on the circumstances of that particular period. Bhagavata Vaishnavites was one of the core pillars of religious patronage associated with the ruler ship of Gupta kings, which primarily began with the advent of Chandragupta-II.

### 1.3 Vaishnavism: Pillar of faith

According to the narrative, Bhakti movement scaled its heights during the Sultanate period. Fascinating and numinous saints like Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Tulsidas expressed their profound love through the unswerving connection between the master and his slave. Solely the love for the divine cultivated a nexus of spiritual and cultural extensiveness. This creed is the perfect epitome of resilience whose legacy has the generative power in eradicating all the social obstacles. Thus, it keeps the exuberant spirit lively which is the true essence of Vaishnavite path. This incredible and overwhelming path embrace Lord Vishnu as the ultimate personification of moksha or the spiritual divine realm. For them Lord Vishnu is the ultimate Brahman from whom the worldly life and soul of an individual can never go apart.

### 1.4 Accolades of Shri Ram

Lord Rama, seventh incarnation of one of our holy Trimurti Lord Vishnu. Anecdotes and life narratives are treasured in Vaishnavism especially Ramanand Sampradaya. Lord Rama is venerated as manifestation of ethical uprightness, and is considered to be an exemplary man with impeccable character. His exceptional character shows how to enact dharma in the most arduous situations. His discourse on this subject is revolutionary in itself.

Vaishnavism roots are quite vibrant and diversified and according to some researchers its roots can be found in Vedic traditions.

It opens by asking for solicitations to Maa Saraswati and Lord Ganesha and then goes on invoking various deities within Hindu pantheon who all are part of preternatural world. Tulsidas Baal Kaanda has invoked the dust of the feet of his Guru which has embellished the body of Lord Shiva, bestowing for its blessings. Tulsidas has also entreated for blessings of malicious forces too as their inherent instincts cannot defame the divinity of Gods and Goddesses. He has explicitly stated that his intellect is not so broad but his yearning to write about his Lord is like a vast ocean vast ocean. The divine magnificence of Lord Ram and Sita ji shall usher the auspiciousness of boundless love and devotion. Tribute has been poured down to the sages, comrades bowed in humbleness to the family of Lord Rama and Sita. Tulsidas has invoked both the beneficent and diabolic forces of nature. Raghunath, the story of the fifth Kaliyuga was terminated by Hari, the acclaimed name of Raghupati. Tulsidas in his Bal Kand canto has drawn equivalence between exalted glory of his Hari and by calling his poetry uncoordinated. Salutations to Awadh and its citizens by Tulsidas. The name of Hari is an illumination that awaken the yogis.

Tulsidas acharya Sukarhet narrated the story to him many times. It is like a lake beyond the river of Kaliyug existence. This great epic is the culmination of love and devotion to Raghubar.

Innumerable times the story of Ram has been translated in myriad of languages. North Indians have lived through it countless times. Ramayana, the original Sanskrit epic has been accredited to the poet Valmiki. Tamil Iramavataram of the eleventh century also known as 'The Incarnation of Ram' by Kamban is also a part of this legendary tradition.

Ram, a terrestrial prince was favoured with great courage, endurance and sympathy. All his manoeuvres are those of a human being. Bhakti undertook a binary position between the ardent devotee and God. Bhakti marg, a subtler means of attaining redemption to everyone. Ram's transformation from God like raja to God reached its peak with Bhakti tradition when Tulsi wrote Ramcharitamanas. Telugu Ramayana of Buddharaja of thirteenth century and the fifteenth century Bengali Sriram Panchali by Krittibas are notable works in this field. It is a part of our oral tradition as Tulsi's poem permeated before the emergence of printing in India. The holiness associated with Ram's birth have been revealed by array of virtues contained in Vedas and Puranas. Tulsidas hence encouraged the devotees to sing Ram Stuti which will pave the path for them to attain the dwelling of Lord Vishnu and will never be trapped in monotonous lifestyle. The episode of manumission of Ahalya, the consort of Rishi Gautam who scoured the feet of Lord Rama with her tears. This powerful spiritual transcendentalism occasion in empyrean life of Hari is the testimony to an endless ocean of divinity in the Tulsi's Ramcharitamanas. The yearning of Lord Rama brought an incessant feeling of serene synchronization in the religious milieu of Bhakti period. Tulsidas has delineated Lord Ram as Para Brahman. The principles of uninhibited Bhakti and Spartan technique of Advaita form of worship of both Saguna and Nirguna aspects of Lord Rama have been symbolized in all the seven books of Ramcharitamanas.

### **1.5 Lord Rama in Vaishnavism**

In Vaishnavite sect Lord Rama is ideally personified as the Ramaism [the supreme being]. Symbolically ethical dilemmas and canvass of information were well demonstrated through exemplary characters of Lord Rama and his entire Raghuvansh. South Asia and South-east Asian countries are the hub of Vaishnavism traditions and cultures. A theological disquisition like Adhyatma Ramayana is considered rudimentary by Ramanandi cloistered areas and Ramlila fiesta performances take place during fall of every year in India. Rama as described in Indian texts is a gem as he is Maryada Purushottam. He is the supreme light, the Ramabhadra, the bliss of salvation. A benign student with yogic caliber. Complete engrossment in devotional hymns and mantras of Hari opened the doors for invocation of Lord Rama. Tulsidas theological doctrine bridged the gap among Vaishnavas, Shaivism and Shaktism. Through the commencement of Bhakti movement, the adulation and loyalty to various avatars of Vishnu as Supreme Being began. The largest cloistral assemblage of Lord Rama movement is in Asia. Whenever the celestial system is in chaos the outright Dharma is reinstituted by embodied form of incarnation of Vishnu. The trope of Vaishnavite sect are linked with religious life, community life accentuating the persisting effect of Vaishnavite ideology.

### **1.6 Values in Ramcharitamanas**

Togetherness even in human differences help us find a way finds a way to reach towards holiness. It calls for sea change because of its universal and pragmatic appeal. Prescient approach of Tulsidas made the entire Ramcharitamanas a boon for humanity. World as a whole family can understand a lot through values of unification given in Ramcharitamanas. It teaches us that a man should not be indecisive. A man should weigh the pros and cons of the whole situation before arriving at any rational conclusion. A man can elevate his status by widening his perspective by enlightening and understanding his purpose in life. No one is detached from God. In fact, one can best get enlightened about Bhagavat Geeta if they have read Ramcharitmanas in advance. Holding on to the teachings of Ramcharitamanas will improve our temperament and each devotee of Lord Rama will lead a congenial life. Bhagwan Ram is crystal clear on one aspect of life i.e. family should be the top most priority in comparison to personal gains. The cardinal virtue of Commiseration which Lord Rama has for the people especially to the people who are



treated in an unfair way symbolizes the upstanding character of the 'Bhagwan'. The everlasting sagacity of Ramcharitamanas gives all of us a moral lesson to always remain composed in the face of sufferings. Various khandas of Ramcharitamanas give us lifelong inspirational lessons and good will always be triumphant over evilness. It inspires us to believe in Karmayoga, no matter one wins or loses. Bhagwan taught us to be so humble that even this lesson of distinguished morality and humility motivates us to be ready to face all the challenges of life with composure. Lord's Ram 14- year-exile period gives us a message that complying to the orders of the elders of the family is equivalent to serving the family and the one who utilizes this opportunity in the most faithful way is divinely graced by the almighty. In modern times these timeless and enlightening lessons, if practised sincerely will spiritually elevate oneself.

1. **Bal Kand:** All the rudimentary events of the ancestry of Lord Rama who belonged to Ikshvaku dynasty start exactly from here. It educates us that how an individual can mould his personality through the moral standards of thankfulness and assistance. The ensuing times shall depend on the strength and unity in a family. For example, the parturition of Shri Ram, his journey in Gurukul and with Rishi Vishwamitra and also the wedding with Mata Sita.
2. **Ayodhya Kand:** Values like surrendering for the cause of Dharma, ruining the evil minded plans of Queen Kaikeyi and Manthara and standing up to them through the lesson of sacrifice gives us knowledge of family values and its integration. A deeper level of perception makes it a prized source of perception that helps us in realizing the duty and significance of ethics and morality in one's life.
3. **Aranya Kand:** Lord Ram teaches us to make all his nemesis work for his own welfare and the welfare of mankind too. One of the striking examples of duty and devotion was when Shri Ram was the guest of great Rishis and his holy darshan led to vanquishing of Rakshas in Dandak Forest. Assiduous perseverance in goodness and giving nirvana to Shabari explain to us the transcendental nature of Lord's Ram divine character.
4. **Kiskindha Kand:** Companionship is a treasure of human nature. Shri Ram and Sugriv brotherhood clearly proves that in true comradeship one forgets his own miseries. Perpetual friendship lasts forever. It tells us to not be susceptible to defeat whenever one faces a gloomy situation.
5. **Sundar Kand:** Angad and Lord Hanuman role are the attestation to the fact that vigourness and coordination in pursuit of one's aim are vital. All kinds of impediments can be reconciled if strong conviction and trust is imbued in the spiritual nature of human being.
6. **Yuddh Kandh :** Shri Ram defeats great combatants of Lanka only with the virtue of firm determination. Lord Ram was an inspiration and prompted his army at every stage to defy the odds despite huge challenges. Dharma is synonymous with Lord Rama.
7. **Lanka Kand:** Upstanding conduct of Lord Rama underscored the divine fairness that is ultimately triumphed. Finally, vanity of Ravana brings his downfall which is a lesson in itself for all of us that too much haughtiness leads to one's doom.
8. **Uttar Kand.** Periodic nature of one's life, death and rebirth are hinged on the ramifications of deeds done in one's life. Various characters in the literature are a source of inspiration that one can associate with divine which can be an impetus in building an egalitarian and thriving society.

### 1.7 Doctrine of Tulsidas

Various precepts and philosophical outlook are found in this literature. The dialogues and various principles in Ramcharitamanas talk about social betterment inclusive of all the principles of Hinduism.

Although Tulsidas in his work has favoured both Nirguna and Saguna Bhakti but, in the latter, he is more inclined as he had deeply immersed himself to reside in his transcendental mind. For Tulsidas Saguna aspect of Bhakti dwells in the eyes and the name of Shri Ram is continuously chanted by his lips. For him Lord Rama is above all the other names of God. In many aspects of his work Lord Rama has a more elevated place than the universal Brahman. The earthly abode is the Leela of Tulsidas 'Ram'. All his views are corresponding with views of Vedantic teachers of Vaishnavite sect. He believed in obliteration of one's self-conceit and encouraged people to not be stupefied by the materialistic and fake allurements of the world. Tulsidas was an embodiment of soberness and holiness who taught us how to encounter distress and misfortune in life. Fervent loyalty towards Lord Rama is must for divine advancement. Shravan, Seva and Bhakti are indispensable for moral enhancement. The proud Indian of 21<sup>st</sup> century can never forget our Air Marshall Bharti quoted the divine lines of Ramcharitmanas that without fear, love does not arise in the heart of the warriors in the light of 'Operation Sindoor'. This is a boon to all the Bharatvasis who are born on this holy land of 'Aryavrat'. Ramcharitmanas is one of the indispensable text of the entire Sanatan timeless literature.

### Conclusion

Tulsidas Rama has left a distinctive mark on the entire Hindu Pantheon. His works have been classified into Awadhi and Braja works. He was one of the most influential disseminators of Indian tradition. According to him kindness in a human being can traverse him across the ocean of agony and sufferings. The roots of Vaishnavite ideology spread from India and in so many places around the world like North America, Africa, Russia, Europe as such that it is preached and practised even today. It is of great importance to reiterate the words of Mahatma Gandhi here "Anyone interested in the religion and interested in the religion and culture of Northern India sooner or later encounters a reference to the epic poem Ramcharitmanas and its remarkable popularity. This sixteenth-century retelling of the legend of Ram by the poet Tulsidas has been hailed not merely as the greatest modern Indian epic, but as something like a living sum of Indian culture, singled out as the tallest tree in the magic garden of medieval Hindu poetry sixteenth-century retelling of the legend of Ram by the poet Tulsidas has been hailed not merely as the greatest modern Indian epic, but as something like a living sum of Indian culture, singled out as the tallest tree in the magic garden of medieval Hindu poetry."

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