THE RAMACARITAMANASA OF TULSI DAS:

A STUDY IN POPULAR RELIGIOUS APPEAL

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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PREFACE

This thesis is the culmination of a year of study under the direction of Richard M. Eaton, Associate Professor of Oriental Studies at The University of Arizona. It grew out of my interest in the Ramayana, the ancient Indian epic, and its modern interpretations which are currently read and enacted throughout South and Southeast Asia. This is hopefully the first of a series of efforts to deal with the Ramayana as a reflection of the social and cultural values of a particular ethnic area.

The system of transliteration which I have utilized for the Hindi and Sanskrit words is a simple one. I have used the short form of the vowels a, i, and u to represent both the long and short forms. For the sibilants, I have used s to represent स and θ to represent श. I have used c for ज and ch for ज्ञ. I have used r to represent र and n to represent न. I feel the rest is self-explanatory.
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ABSTRACT

Tulsi Das was a sixteenth-century Brahmin bhakti poet. His Ramacaritamanasa has become the most important and popular religious work in North India. This thesis wishes to explore the reasons for the tremendous impact of this devotional work within the context of medieval Hinduism in the Hindi-speaking areas of North India. In order to answer this question I have utilized a two-fold approach: I hope to advance the knowledge of South Asia through an in-depth study of the appeal of Tulsi Das and I hope to exercise a methodological view of religious phenomena in applying the theories of modern social science research to explain this appeal.

From my research I found that the appeal of Tulsi Das rests on three major factors: (1) Tulsi Das' use of the vernacular form which enabled all the Hindi speaking people to understand his message of devotion to Rama; (2) Tulsi Das' rationalization of the conception of the god Rama through clarification and specification of his functions; and (3) Tulsi Das' emphasis on the repetition of the Name Rama which gave the Hindi-speaking people of North India a tool with which to contact the divine.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the late sixteenth century in North India, Goswami Tulsi Das, a poet and devotee of Rama, one of the major incarnations of Viṣṇu, wrote a vernacular version of the *Ramayana*, one of the two pan-Indian Sanskritic epics. The *Ramacaritamanasa* of Tulsi Das had tremendous impact on the religious life of the Hindi-speaking people of North India. Why did the literary and philosophical message of Tulsi Das so exactly meet the religious needs of the people of North India? In what ways did Tulsi Das reinterpret the Rama legends and what shifts in emphasis are evident in his recension of the *Ramayana*? Why did Tulsi Das, a Brahmin, choose to write his version of the epic in the common idiom of Hindi?

Previous scholarly study has answered these questions in a variety of ways. The nineteenth century British Orientalists, G. Grierson, J. N. Farquhar and J. E. Carpenter, found in Tulsi Das' religious approach many similarities to Christian theology and saw Tulsi's work as a much-needed alternative to the more erotic Kṛṣṇa cults. More recent translators of Tulsi's work such as F. R. Allchin and W. Douglas P. Hill, have cited his integration of advaita (non-dualistic) philosophy with the epic mythology as the reason for Tulsi's popularity. In my approach to the study of Tulsi Das, I hope to show
that these answers only partly explain the wide appeal of Tulsi's work. For this study, I have gone outside the field of South Asian studies in applying the more general theories of contemporary social science research to the question of Tulsi Das' popularity.

Tulsi Das' appeal is well known. George Grierson, the Orientalist who has given extended study to the life and work of Tulsi Das, tells how the pandits "may talk of the Vedas and of the Upanisads, and a few may even study them, others say they pin their faith on the Puranas: but to the vast majority of the people of Hindustan, learned and unlearned alike, their sole norm of conduct is the so-called Tulsi-krit Ramayan."

As for Tulsi's acceptance in his own day, there is only legend to rely on. In the Bhakta Mala (Garland of Saints) of Nabhaji, a contemporary of Tulsi Das, Nabhaji describes the important saints of his time and he praises Tulsi Das as an incarnation of Valmiki, author of the original Ramayana c. 200 B.C. J. Estlin Carpenter, an Orientalist who deals with Indian theism, mentions

1. Lawrence Babb, in his recent study The Divine Hierarchy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) p. 116, finds that today "the Tulsidas version of the epic is beyond any question the most important religious book in Chattisgarh. It is read by the literate as a form of religious exercise. The repetition of the epic is pleasing to Rama and a source of religious merit. . . . Typically groups of men gather in the evening, often on the veranda of a temple, singing in response to the verses of the text as they are recited by a Pandit. In the immediate vicinity of Sitapur there is usually at least one session of this kind each week, and frequently more than one."

another legend which we can interpret in a similar manner.\textsuperscript{3} The story tells how Kali Yuga, the personified present age of sin, was annoyed at the spread of piety brought about by Tulsi's \textit{Ramacaritamanasa}. As the deity was making the poet's life unbearable, Hanuman, the monkey-god and servant of Rama, advised Tulsi Das to write a petition of complaint to Rama and thus the \textit{Vinaya Pattrika}, one of Tulsi's later works, was written. These legends and others are only clues as to the extent of Tulsi Das' popularity in his own day. Scholars accept that one of the great court poet's of Akbar's day, Abdur Rahim Khan Khana, was a friend of Tulsi Das and corresponded with him.\textsuperscript{4} Thus, although Tulsi Das was not connected with the Mughal court and was not mentioned in any histories of Akbar written by contemporary historians, we can assume that he was known as far as Delhi in his own day.

**Biographical Data**

The biographical data on Tulsi Das is vague and clouded by legends and miracles.\textsuperscript{5} The significance of such legends poses a difficult problem for the researcher into the life of Tulsi Das. The legends, when looked at against the background of available factual data:


\textsuperscript{4} For this data I have relied on the findings of F. R. Allchin, \textit{Kavitavali} (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1964) Ch. 3. Allchin is the most contemporary and thorough researcher of Tulsi Das' life.

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data, may serve to supplement such data for the researcher and may suggest the possibilities of historical trends. Many such legends survive around the name of Tulsi Das and have been collected in various hagiographical accounts of the medieval Vaishnava saints. These accounts include the Bhakta Mala of Nabhaji, a contemporary of Tulsi Das and the later commentaries by Priya Das, the Original Deeds of Gosvami (Mula Gosai Carita), and the text Gautamacandrika which has only recently been published in parts. In this thesis, I have offered the legends whenever pertinent to supplement for the reader the scanty factual information. The most consistent biographical material lies in the poet's own writings.

Tulsi Das was born in A.D. 1543 in Rajapur, Banda district or Ayodhya, Faizabad district. Most sources agree that Tulsi Das was born in a Brahmin family, although the subcaste and gotra (lineage) are uncertain. From the poet's own writings it appears that his parents abandoned him at birth due to his having been born in abhukta mula, the ill-omened conjunction of two stars, which recommended to

6. Ibid., p. 32.


8. In his article on Tulsi Das, Benjamin Walker, The Hindu World, Vol. II (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968) questions Tulsi Das's Brahmin status. This is the only source I encountered which expressed this opinion. The sources from which Tulsi Das drew ideas in composing his Ramacaritamanasa, indicate acquaintance with a wide range of Sanskrit literature. See F. F. Allchin, "The Place of Tulsi Das in the North Indian Devotional Tradition," JRAS, Parts 3 and 4 (1966) pp. 124-25.
parents to separate themselves from such a child in order to avoid further misfortune. Tulsi Das then lived the life of a beggar until some holy men, probably Ramaite sadhus, adopted him. There is little further information on his childhood or education but one may infer that devotion to Rama was introduced early in Tulsi Das's life for he states in the Ramacaritamanasa that when he first heard the story of Rama he was too young to understand it. There is a legend that Tulsi Das married, had a son who died at an early age and that Tulsi was very attached to his wife. One day she went to visit her family. When Tulsi Das realized that she was gone, he followed her, fording a river in the middle of the night. When he arrived at her father's house, she told him that her physical body was only flesh and bones and he would do better to turn his affections toward Rama. The legend cites this incident as the beginning of Tulsi's career as an ascetic.

Tulsi Das came to Benares in his twenty-first year, already an expert singer and poet. He began to earn his living by 'selling Rama's Name' as he deprecatingly recalled it in later years. He probably was a leader or at least an ideal member of a satsanga or religious group which included individuals from all castes and walks of life. In his thirty-first year he began to write his Ramacaritamanasa in Ayodhya, where Rama supposedly lived and ruled, and popular legend holds that

it took him two years and seven months to complete it. It is also possible that Tulsi Das took extended pilgrimages at this time which may have inspired many of the famous descriptions of nature in his work. His contemporaries considered him an incarnation of Valmiki, author of the original Ramayana c. 200 B.C., after the production of his Ramacaritamanasa and his reputation was secure. Pilgrims came from all over India to hear his work. Tulsi's later years were filled with sickness and pain which might account for the greater introspection and depth of his later works, in particular the Vinaya-pattrika or Petition to Rama, in which Tulsi begs Rama to deliver him from the sorrows of existence. Tulsi Das died on the Asi Ghat in Benares in 1623 at the age of eighty.

Source Material and Translations

The translation of the Ramacaritamanasa which I have used for this paper and which is recommended by Allchin, was originally published anonymously in 1949 in three consecutive issues of the Kalyanakalpataru, a popular English-language monthly in India. By popular demand it was published as a book in 1968 by the Gita Press of Gorakhpur and includes the Hindi verse with English translation. The previous translations by F. S. Growse" and W. Douglas P. Hill" seem incomplete in comparison with the Gorakhpur text. I believe the Gorakhpur translation most closely carries the original flavor of the


work and not to have pandered to Western sensibilities. I will be using direct quotations wherever possible in this paper to facilitate an understanding of Tulsi Das through his own words.

For the Valmiki Ramayana, I have relied on a translation by Hari Prasad Shastri,12 published in three volumes. This translation avoids the use of rhymed couplets and closely follows the original text of Valmiki. I have also used a translation of Valmiki by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and first Indian Governor-General of India. Rajagopalachari compares the regional recensions of the Ramayana and gives insight into the various interpretations and regional characteristics.

The quality of the source material dealing with Tulsi Das is richer than might have been expected. Along with the late nineteenth century British Orientalists J. Estlin Carpenter, J. N. Farquhar, Sir George Grierson, F. S. Growse, E. Washburn Hopkins and Nicol MacNicol and complementing their work are the recent scholarly studies by F. R. Allchin, a reader in Indian Studies at Cambridge University. Allchin has made valuable translations of two of Tulsi Das' later works, the Vinaya-pattirika and the Kavitavali, which deals with the childhood of Rama. Allchin has greatly simplified the work of placing Tulsi Das in the context of the Hindu devotional tradition in his introductions to these two works. Other fortunate contributions to the study of Tulsi Das include doctoral dissertations from the University

of Chicago. William Charles MacDougall, writing in 1926, discusses the way of salvation in the Ramacaritamanasa and his in-depth study stimulated many of the key ideas and themes of this paper. The second study by Charles White discusses bhakti (devotional religion) as a structure in the context of medieval Hinduism. White had access to a great deal of primary source material and has produced original translations of various Indian medieval devotional poems. Another recent work put out by Edward C. Dimock, Jr., Edwin Gerow, C. M. Naim, A. K. Ramanujan, Gordon Roadarmel and J. A. B. Van Buitenen of the University of Chicago, The Literatures of India, has included an extended section on the Ramayana. Although mainly literary in emphasis, this work does incorporate a historical approach and is one of the first by Western scholars to compare the various regional recensions of the Ramayana. This work was essential in gaining an understanding of the Ramaite oral tradition.

Turning to native Indian scholars, the classical works of S. N. Dasgupta, R. G. Bhandarkar, and S. Radhakrishnan have been helpful in clarifying the development of Indian philosophy. Another scholar, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi has written the only definitive work in English

13. Bhakti as a Religious Structure in the Context of Medieval Hinduism in the Hindi Speaking Area of North India (Dissertation, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1964). Although White's emphasis is primarily a literary one, his work was valuable in summarizing the work done on Tulsi Das by Charlotte Vaudeville, Etude sur les Sources et la Composition du Ramayana de Tulsi-Das (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1955), which was unavailable. She is one of the most noted contemporary scholars of the medieval bhakti poets.
on the *Adhyatama Ramayana*, one of the main influences on Tulsi Das' *Ramacaritamanasa*. Other works by more recent scholars Kshitimohan Sen, Indu Prakash Pandey, R. A. Dwivedi and J. Gonda have also provided supplementary material for this study.

**Methodology**

In my methodological approach to the study of Tulsi Das, I have relied on the theories of several social scientists. Although Max Weber wrote in the first decades of this century, his work remains pertinent in the field. Most modern scholarship in comparative religion is indebted to the work of Weber and I hope to show in this paper that his ideas are still crucial in gaining an understanding of the development of religious phenomena. Talcott Parsons and Clifford Geertz have greatly facilitated the study of Weber's thought and have helped to synthesize his main ideas. In addition to the theories of Max Weber, the ideas of David Mandelbaum, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, are helpful in defining the connections between the transcendental and pragmatic religious complexes. The use of anthropological models, although sometimes limited in the abstract, can facilitate understanding when applied to specific religious forms and developments. It is in this sense, and in providing a common vocabulary, that the work of modern social science can most successfully aid in the understanding of religious phenomena and change. In this paper, I have used the ideas of Weber, Geertz and Mandelbaum as analytical tools to help clarify the processes at work in explaining the appeal of Tulsi Das' *Ramacaritamanasa*. 
In his approach to the sociology of religion, Max Weber\textsuperscript{14} identifies his concept of rationalization as the single most crucial factor in the process of religious change. Rationalization comprises specification, systematization and the intellectual clarification of ideas. The main agent in this process of breakthrough to a higher and more systematized cultural order is usually the prophet. The essential criterion for prophecy is whether the individual takes responsibility for announcing a break in the established normative order. Weber also emphasizes the importance of the development of a written sacred tradition within the process of rationalization and he believes that whichever direction the process takes, it eventually leads to a more monotheistic conception of the deity with other deities becoming subordinate to the supreme one.\textsuperscript{15}

According to Clifford Geertz,\textsuperscript{16} who has dealt extensively with the concept of rationalization in explaining religious change: "The world was, in Weber's famous phrase, disenchanted: the locus of sacredness was removed from the roof-trees, graveyards and road-crossings of everyday life and put, in some sense, into another realm where dwelt Jahweh, Logos, Tao or Brahman." Geertz also defines the problem of 'distance.' Weber found that in the rationalization process, increased separation of man from the sacred occurs. Geertz

\textsuperscript{14} The Sociology of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

\textsuperscript{15} This discussion was drawn from Talcott Parsons' introduction to Weber, The Sociology of Religion, pp. xxxii-xlvi.

articulates the two answers which Weber offered to this problem: (1) construction of a legal-moral code consisting of ethical commands conceived to have been given supernaturally to man; and (2) direct experiential contact with the divine through mysticism.

In this context I will address myself to the question of whether an analysis of the Ramacaritamanasa and its popular appeal can illustrate the Weberian concept of rationalization. In the concluding section of this paper, I hope to answer this and other questions. Did Tulsi Das merely stabilize the Ramaite oral traditions or did he reformulate the growth of the Rama legends? Did Tulsi Das rationalize the worship of Rama in North India and, if so, how did he deal with the Weberian problems of distance? In dealing with these questions, I hope to offer in the study of this popular religious work, answers to some of the more general problems in the study of religious phenomena. As the essential requirements of such a study are bound by the limitations of the given text, the ahistorical approach of the comparative religionists can offer broader insight into the work. Thus this paper has a two-fold purpose: it hopes to advance the knowledge of South Asia through an in-depth study of the appeal of Tulsi Das, and it hopes to exercise a methodological view of religious phenomena in applying the theories of Weber and Mandelbaum to explain this appeal. I believe this paper will facilitate an understanding of the position of the Ramacaritamanasa within the context of popular Hinduism and offer insight into the process of religious change.
CHAPTER 2

THE EPIC TRADITION

In this section, I hope to evaluate the epic as a source of historical information, discuss the role of Tulsi Das in freezing the oral epic into a single form, examine the influence of the Adhyatma Ramayana on the evolution of the epic as Tulsi Das received it and compare the recension of Tulsi Das with the original work of Valmiki. For my discussion of the more generalized aspects of the epic, I have relied on the section on the epics by Dimock and Van Buitenen in their recent work.¹ This section has given form to many ideas which grew out of my consideration of the epic as a source of historical evidence. It reinforces my conclusion that the historian of India must look to the epic and Puranic literature to ascertain the development of social values and attitudes. A new appreciation must arise for the different approach to history in the Indic culture. This approach traces the development of bardic legends to discern the way in which religion and culture grew out of the older existing forms and continues with the use of modern oral traditions to see the continuity and change.

Dimock and Van Buitenen have used this approach in their recent work on the literatures of India. Van Buitenen's discussion of

¹ Dimock et al., The Literatures of India (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
itihasapuranam ('that is how it was' in 'the ancient lore') concerns the growth of popular literature for the masses as opposed to the more exclusive Vedas. He goes on to say that in the Veda itself, 

... are mentioned 'praises of heroes'; in these, perhaps, there are the beginnings of an epic. They would not have constituted a coherent, edited, and polished account, but they would have been the ballads and tales, describing individual heroic achievement, out of which epics are built. And different professional reciters would have had different repertoires of these... History would be edited into legend, and legend into history, the stories of 'how it was' would be passed on to son and to son's son, by the clan or tribe to further generation, until a desultory repertory had grown that waited only to be woven together.2

Thus in or around Ayodhya in the centuries before Christ, Valmiki probably worked into a homogeneous whole the various legends and tales current among the court bards about the life of the Ikṣvaku hero, Rama. The poem would then have been learnt by wandering minstrels who could have brought it to different parts of the country.3

The epic literature represents the heart of the Indian narrative tradition. Dimock defines the epic as in part, what a culture thinks of itself.4 This varies with time and place and thus arises the reformulations and reinterpretations of the epic. The three most popular vernacular recensions of the Ramayana include the Tamil version of Kamban of the twelfth century, the sixteenth century work of Tulsi Das and the Bengali version of Krittivasa, which is placed

2. Ibid., pp. 48-49.

3. Parts of this analysis were drawn from A. A. MacDonell, "Ramayana," in James Hastings, ed., ERE, p. 575.

4. Dimock, Edward C., Jr. et al., The Literatures of India, p. 79.
somewhere between the fourteenth and late sixteenth centuries. These regional variations reflect the ways of their times. These writers of the later versions "added to their model lines or even full stories that changed the interpretation of the whole to one congenial to the dominant sectarian, moral, or social climate of a particular part of the subcontinent." In the work of Tulsi Das one can find the basic assumptions of Indic civilization modified by the influences of his area of North India and thus intertwining the development of the devotional tradition with his interpretation of the pan-Indian epic.

The significant point which arises here is that Tulsi Das did not create the version of the Ramayana which he wrote. Rather he put into the vernacular the version of the epic which was accepted by the religious teachers of his day. The main contribution of Tulsi Das lay in his ability to freeze the oral epic into a single form, harmonize it with his conception of devotional religion and popularize both over the Hindi-speaking areas of North India. Tulsi Das is recording the development of the epic as it was handed down from guru to disciple over the centuries.

What was the epic tradition centered around the worship of Rama and how did it develop? Although the origins of both epics date back to the centuries before Christ, Farquhar believes that the didactic epics were complete by A.D. 200. These didactic forms of the epics

5. Ibid., p. 78.

refer to the inclusion of the worship of Kṛṣṇa and Rama as incarnations of Viṣṇu. Thus already in A.D. 200 these folk deities, perhaps in the case of Kṛṣṇa of Dravidian origin, had been incorporated into the Aryan tradition, conceptualized as the one eternal god identical with the Upaniṣadic Brahman and their stories elevated to the status of smṛti (that which has been remembered).

The didactic epic also includes the interpolations of Valmiki's Ramayana which Farquhar believes date back to the second century before Christ. In the original Ramayana of Valmiki, Rama was a man unaware of any connection with divinity. This original version refers to Books II–VI of the Valmiki recension. Books I and VII and a passage interpolated into the Sixth Book of Valmiki show that the theology applied to Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgīta is now also applied to Rama. Although this elevation of Rama to divine status took place at such an early date, there is little evidence of any actual cult before the eleventh century. As this date coincides with that of Ramanuja, the South Indian Brahman philosopher, and as the development of bhakti is accepted by most scholars as originating in the South, the merging of

9. Bhakti is defined by Charlotte Vaudeville, Kabir I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) p. 97 as "a religious attitude which implies a 'participation' in the deity and a love-relationship between the individual human soul, the jīva, and the Supreme Lord, Bhagavan, 'the Adorable One.'"
the Ramaite epic and devotional traditions seems to be happening at around this time. This connection can be supported by the significant fact that the first vernacular Ramayana appeared in Tamil in the late twelfth century. The next significant development of the Ramaite epic tradition concerns the Adhyatma Ramayana.

**The Adhyatma Ramayana**

What is the Adhyatma Ramayana and what significance does it have for the work of Tulsi Das? Allchin, who speaks of the Adhyatma Ramayana as a possible appendage to the Brahmanda Purana, is certain that this text was the one which was accepted and taught by the guru of Tulsi Das.\(^{10}\) This Sanskrit work which translates as the 'Spiritual Ramayana' seems to have brought together various elements of the advaita (non-dualist), śakta\(^ {11}\) and bhakti schools. Farquhar suggests that members of the Ramaite sect found it hard to account for the human actions of Rama in Books II-VI of the Valmiki epic.\(^ {12}\) In light of the general acceptance of the Advaita Vedanta of Śankara at this time, Rama was connected with the eternal Self and through śakta or Tantric influence, Sita was elevated to a position beside the eternal Rama. This text was also probably responsible for transforming the worship of Rama from the nirguna (without attributes) to the saguna (with attributes) form.

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11. Śakta and Tantric systems elevated the female principle and incorporated magical elements into devotional practices. The Tantric influences on Tulsi Das will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.  
Bagchi (1935, p. 7) dates this work in the fifteenth century, a little earlier than the time of Tulsi Das. He disagrees with Farquhar who suggests that the *Adhyatma Ramayana* was brought to North India from the South by Ramananda, who is credited with founding the North Indian Ramaite sect. Bagchi suggests that sections of the work might have predated the compilation of the complete form and perhaps existed separately at an earlier date. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* includes many references to the *Agastya-Sutikshna Samvada*, also a Ramaite work of perhaps the tenth century which incorporated mystic diagrams and alphabetical secrets associated with the Tantric school. Bhandarkar describes the *Adhyatma Ramayana* in detail.

The first book of it comprises what is called *Ramahrdaya*, which was narrated to Hanumant by Sita, who says that as the original Prakṛti, she does everything and did all the deeds mentioned in the *Ramayana*, while Rama as the only existing soul is inactive, unchangeable and blessed, and is a mere witness of her deeds. After she has concluded, Rama explains the threefold nature of the knowing spirit, viz. (1) the original, (2) that conditioned by Buddhi or finite intelligence, and (3) the appearances, the last two of which are fictitious. The fifth canto of the last book is styled *Ramagita*, which is meant to correspond to the *Bhagavadgita* of Vasudeva and which is narrated by Rama to Lakgmana, who takes the place of Arjuna. The doctrine is thoroughly adualistic as that of the previous portion. The world and the individual soul are illusory, and one spirit alone exists.

14. Ibid., p. 75.
This work, scholars agree, is the chief source of the ideas found in the *Ramacaritamanasa* of Tulsi Das. This was the popular version of the *Ramayana* in Tulsi Das' day and it was this version which Tulsi Das recorded and stabilized in his recension. Those who cite the differences between the Valmiki epic and the work of Tulsi Das often fail to appreciate this point. In the following discussion of the differences between the work of Valmiki and Tulsi Das, the fact that Tulsi was mainly restating the epic as it had been handed down from guru to disciple over the centuries must be kept in mind.

**Differences between Valmiki and Tulsi Das**

The sage Valmiki was supposedly a highwayman until converted to the worship of Rama by two ascetics who had been his intended victims. Valmiki then meditated on Rama and was given divine insight into the past, present and future so that he might record the story of Rama for all the world. It is interesting that Valmiki figures as an important character in all the recensions of the *Ramayana*, and he is depicted as having lived near Ayodhya, as Rama's contemporary. The Indian people hail Valmiki as the *adikavi* or first poet because he was the first writer of *adikavya*, an ornate, high-style of Sanskrit.

The main difference in the works of Valmiki and Tulsi Das which immediately strikes the reader is the contrasting portrayal of the character of Rama. While Valmiki sees Rama as a human being who, although an avatar of Viṣṇu, is unaware of his divine status, Tulsi Das portrays Rama as the Divine Incarnate with supreme knowledge of past, present and future and whose very presence transports one over the sea
of mundane existence. As Valmiki's Rama mourns over the loss of his wife, Sita, he is mortal and capable of intense suffering and needing consolation. In Tulsi Das, Rama suffers but as he already knows the reasons for all actions, his suffering is alleviated. In the words of C. Rajagopalachari,

All Valmiki's characters are human beings with heightened human qualities. It is only under great stress or in exceptional circumstances that divinity shines faintly through the human nature. In the time of Tulasidas, bhakti had reached its noon-day height. It shone dispelling every shade. 17

Another point which accentuates this difference lies in the color of Rama's skin. While Valmiki's Rama is white, indicating the victory of the Aryan tribes over the darker peoples of South India, the Rama of Tulsi Das is blue indicating his divine status as an avatar of Viṣṇu.

If bhakti supplies the integrating principle of Tulsi Das' work, the concept of dharma fulfills a similar purpose for Valmiki. Van Buitenen defines dharma as "both the whole system of Law, moral and legal, that has its foundation in the transcendant order, and the specific system of rules and regulations under which a given individual lives." 18 Dharma is equal to moral law and in the epic of Valmiki, Rama, by insisting that his father Dasaratha remain true to his word by exiling his favorite son to the forest for fourteen years, symbolizes this dharma. In Tulsi Das, Rama is representative of the Upaniṣadic Brahman and thus he has risen above the moral order. This

18. Dimock et al., Literatures, p. 83.
conception of Rama as the epitome of dharma in the work of Valmiki also led to the idea of the Ramarajya, the mirror of the ideal society. While Tulsi Das used his version of the epic to glorify the efficacy of devotion, the didactic purpose of Valmiki lay in the realm of political science and he had his Rama expounding the virtues of good government.

Tulsi Das attributes the inspiration of his work to the god Śiva and he uses the occasion of Śiva’s narration of the glory of Rama to his wife, Parvati, to introduce his story. Tulsi Das also weaves in the instructions of the sage Yajnavalkya to his disciple Bharadwaja on the exploits of Rama as another reason for the recitation of his tale. Through his use of the appearance of Śiva throughout the work, Tulsi Das perhaps was trying to reconcile the two major Hindu sects of Saivites and Vaiṣṇavites and is incorporating the style of the Tantras in which Śiva always narrates the story.

Tulsi Das uses the symbolism of water to integrate his work while Valmiki, in the traditional manner of the Indian epics, strings numerous diverse episodes together. The very title Ramacaritamanasa translates as the Manasa lake, an actual lake located in Tibet, of Rama’s exploits. Tulsi Das describes the secondary dialogues mentioned above, as the ghats (steps) leading into the lake and goes on with his metaphor.

The seven Books are the seven beautiful flights of steps which the soul delights to look upon with the eyes of wisdom; the unqualified and unbound greatness of Śri Rama,
which will be presently discussed, represents the unfathomable depth of this holy water.19

In all philosophy and literature water is usually equated with the emotions and as bhakti emphasizes the emotional aspect of religion through love, water is a fitting vehicle for Tulsi's purpose, although the theme is absent in the work of Valmiki.

In order to support his theme of Rama's divinity, Tulsi Das employs the other gods of the Hindu pantheon as his tools to direct the fate of his characters who, though aware of Rama's divinity, must act and react within the great drama. Tulsi Das attributes the poisoning of Kaikeyi's (Bharata's mother and Dasaratha's third and youngest wife) mind to the intervention of the goddess Sarada, at the request of the selfish gods who do not want to see Rama crowned but rather want him to fulfill his fate and exterminate the demons. Tulsi Das uses the gods throughout his work to account for the unexplicable actions of his characters and to assert the divinity of Rama.

Another difference between the works of Valmiki and Tulsi Das lies in their treatment and characterization of women. In general, Valmiki draws a noble picture of women, emphasizing their loyalty and purity. Tulsi Das, however, believes "A young woman is the root of all evil, a source of torment and a mine of all woes."21 A brief comparison of the two poets' characterization of Sita, the wife of Rama, will more fully explicate this point.

19. Tulasidas', Sri Ramacaritamanasa, trans. (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1968) i, p. 54 (one word spelling used for citations; two word spelling used for text discussion).

20. Ibid., ii, p. 288.
The picture of Sita which Valmiki draws is that of a spirited, intelligent, well-educated young woman who is subject to her emotions in a human way. The Sita of Tulsi Das, possibly due to her elevation to divine status through the Tantric influence of the Adhyatma Ramayana, becomes somewhat lifeless and helpless. This tendency to dehumanize Sita reaches its peak in Tulsi's treatment of Sita's abduction by Ravana, through a device taken from the Adhyatma Ramayana. As Tulsi Das portrays Rama and Sita as divine, he cannot allow the real Sita to undergo the infamy and hardships of the abduction. Therefore he has Rama say to Sita: "'Listen, my darling, who have been staunch in the holy vow of fidelity to me and are so virtuous in conduct: I am going to act a lovely human part. Abide in the fire until I have completed the destruction of the demons.'"21 Sita leaves her shadow with Rama and does not reappear until the ordeal by fire, when she emerges from the fire after the defeat of Ravana. Thus the Sita of Tulsi Das suffers no real degradation and Tulsi can then feel free to dispense with the interpolated Seventh Book of Valmiki in which Sita is banished by Rama after their return to Ayodhya, due to rumours circulating among the people questioning Sita's virtue. Tulsi Das ends his work with the divine couple living happily ever after in Ayodhya while the Sita of Valmiki has again to suffer separation from Rama even while pregnant with his twin sons.

Another episode which highlights the poets' contrasting portrayals of Sita concerns Rama's attempt to leave Sita in Ayodhya and

21. Ibid., ii, p. 268.
fulfill his father's request by entering the forest alone. In Tulsi's work, Sita's main argument in trying to convince Rama to take her with him centers around the fact that she would pine away with grief if separated from him. This argument convinces Rama who believes that she probably would expire without him. Valmiki's Sita argues with Rama with assurance and pride and through her wit and verbal dexterity convinces him to let her accompany him into the forest. "Sita, with fixed resolve, trembling with fear yet urged by love and pride, spoke as in jest: 'O Rama, if my father the Lord of Mithila, had known thee as a man in form only, but a woman at heart, he would never have united me to thee.'" Sita here is countering Rama's argument that the forest life is dangerous by insinuating he is not strong enough to protect her. The psychological insight which Sita displays through attacking Rama's virility is convincing and Rama answers, 'but now seeing thy fixed resolve I desire to take thee with me.'

Perhaps Tulsi Das' attitude towards women was colored by his own personal experiences or is reflecting the prevalent attitudes of his day. Tulsi Das offers some hope to women though and his final judgment can be summed up by his own words. "A woman is impure by her very birth; but she attains a happy state (hereafter) by serving her lord." Thus their final liberation is possible if, like Sita, they

23. Ibid., p. 227.
devote themselves to Rama as bhaktins and fulfill their function as faithful wives.

As a final example of the differences in the two works, the fault of Ravana in the eyes of the two poets is worthy of consideration. According to Valmiki Rama committed a sin in his abduction of the wife of another man. Ravana could not control his passion and thus he violated the basic Indian discipline of controlling the senses. In the work of Tulsi Das, the philosophy of bhakti is again brought to light. Ravana's sin was that he failed to recognize Rama as the godhead and thus followed his defeat. In the words of Ravana's wives at the time of his death: "'You took for a mere man Sri Hari Himself, a veritable fire to consume the forest of the demon race, and did not adore the Allmerciful, to whom, my beloved spouse, Lord Siva, Brahma (the Creator) and other gods do homage.'" To Tulsi Das even Ravana is seen as a devotee and on the occasion of Ravana's death his soul enters Rama's mouth in the form of effulgence.

The above mentioned episodes have only briefly touched on the differences between the two works, written perhaps fifteen hundred years apart and representing two different stages of Indian thought which, taken together, can help one to understand the modern day mixture of philosophies called Hinduismo. While Valmiki touched upon the power of love, Tulsi Das raised it to the supreme virtue. While Valmiki mentions the intention of Viṣṇu to incarnate in the four sons of King Daśaratha, Tulsi Das elevates Rama to the supreme godhead.

Both authors must be taken within the context of their own time in order to appreciate fully the message and content of their work.

While Valmiki was perhaps drawing together the threads of stories long existent in India and reshaping them in order to glorify the golden age of the Kosalas of Oudh, Tulsi Das was distilling the essences of many philosophies in his advocacy of devotion to Rama as the path to liberation in the present Kali Age. In their works, Valmiki and Tulsi Das concretized the version of the epic that was popular in their day.
The sage instructed me in various ways; but the truth that the individual soul is identical with the attributeless Brahma did not appeal to my heart. Bowing my head at his feet I submitted again, 'Kindly tell me how to worship the embodied Brahma, O lord of the sages.'  

In these words Tulsi Das captured the religious dilemma of the masses of India. For the sixteenth century Indian, the popular advaita philosophy of Śankara (ninth century), which accepted no reality for the individual soul outside of Brahman (the ultimate principle), was illusive and had little personal meaning. The people desired a more concrete form of divinity and Tulsi Das, while incorporating the non-dualistic position of Śankara, was able to advocate the worship of Rama in answer to their need. In his Ramacaritamanasa, Tulsi Das effected a three-fold synthesis: he reconciled the advaita of Śankara with the visiṣṭadvaita (qualified non-dualism) of Ramanuja, he reconciled the worship of Rama with that of Śiva, and he reconciled domesticity with the spiritual life. In the following pages, I will attempt to present the rationalization of the conception of the divine from the monistic universe of Śankara, through the qualified monism of Ramanuja, who separated man from the divine, to the theology of Tulsi Das.

1. Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, iii, p. 263.
Das who clarified the divine through identifying it with Rama, son of Daśaratha.

The feeling of 'I' and 'mine' and 'you' and 'yours' is Maya (Illusion), which holds sway over all created beings. Whatever is perceived by the senses and that which lies within reach of the mind, know it all to be Maya.

And that which melts my heart quickly, dear brother, is Devotion, which is the delight of My devotees. It stands by itself and requires no other prop; whereas Jñāna (knowledge of God in his absolute formless aspect) and Viśīṣṭa-Jñāna (knowledge of the qualified aspect of God, both with and without form) depend on it. Devotion, dear brother, is incomparable and the very root of bliss; it can be acquired only by the favor of a saint. 2

Here within one speech which Rama gives to his brother Laksmana, are presented the two doctrines of the advaita of Śankara and the viśīṣṭadvaita of Ramanuja. In the first quotation, in referring to maya (illusion), Rama is incorporating the advaitist position that all is illusion except Brahman (the ultimate principle or reality) and that everything in the world has reality only as part of Brahman. In the second quotation Rama is presenting the qualified advaitist position which admits the duality of the Adorable One and the devotee. While Allchin and others believe that the advaita of Śankara was the philosophy that Tulsi Das most respected, 3 Tulsi Das treats Rama as of two aspects, nirguna (without attributes) and saguna (with attributes). In his nirguna aspect Rama is identified with the Upanisadic Brahman, the sole reality in the universe. In his saguna form, Rama is Viṣṇu in his many incarnations and, in particular, he is Rama, son of

2. Ibid. ii, pp. 257-258.
Dasaratha. There is no difference between the nirguna and saguna forms but the former becomes modified into the latter through the devotee's love. Tulsi Das does not stress the aspect of Rama as Brahman, rather he is advocating bhakti as a means of salvation and the personified deity, Rama, as the easiest way.

In admitting the duality of the lord and the devotee, Tulsi Das is following in the tradition of Ramanuja, the eleventh century South Indian Brahmin philosopher who believed that individuals are qualified forms of Brahman, not identical with it as in Sankara's advaita. Divine assent is needed to carry out personal resolve and to those that are devoted, god will give grace. Grace is the result of a long preparation of outward conduct and inward affection done in the spirit of renunciation which culminates in a resulting purity of heart and mind. To Ramanuja, liberation did not mean absorption but conscious joy in eternity with the lord and it was only available to the twice-born castes, not to Sudras in this life. Ramanuja rejected maya as taught by the advaitins and held that the individual soul found true being in fellowship with the personal god. Brahman can be known through revelation only and this can be obtained by concentrated meditation or Yogic disciplines.

The thought of Ramanuja was a revolt against the cold intellectual monism of Sankara and the brahminical ritual which had become

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Ramanuja wanted to reconcile the Upanisads, the Vedanta Sutras and the Bhagavadgita, Sanskritic texts, with the songs of the Vaiṣṇava (followers of Viṣṇu in his incarnations of Kṛṣṇa and Rama) saints. Ramanuja stays strictly within the brahminical traditions and even the idea of grace can be traced back to the Katha and Munḍaka Upanisads.

Although Ramanuja worshipped all the Vaiṣṇava avatars (incarnations of Viṣṇu), Ramananda, fifth in spiritual succession from Ramanuja, devoted himself to Rama alone. Farquhar believes that Ramananda was born in South India among the Śri Vaiṣṇavas and that he later migrated to North India bringing the ideas and philosophical works of the Southern School, including the precursors of the Adhyatma Ramayana, with him. Although Ramananda taught a strong faith in the reality of one personal god, whom he called Rama, he made no break with idolatry, caste, the Hindu pantheon or the old mythology. Farquhar also argues with the idea that Ramananda taught the viṣṇīṣṭadvaita of Ramanuja. He finds in Ramananda's movement a constant use of advaita concepts and phrases while holding on to the personality of Rama. Thus Ramananda worshipped the nirguna aspect of Rama rather than Rama’s saguna form as the son of Daśaratha. Ramananda did not give up

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7. E. Washburn Hopkins, The Great Epic of India (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1969) p. 188.


Hindu worship. He effected a compromise between a living theism and an idolatrous polytheism.

At this point, we can see a general development of thought which might be defined as religious rationalization by Weber. In the universe of Śankara, everything was a part of Brahman or god. Ramanuja rejected this position and laid the guidelines for the bhakti or devotional school. Ramanuja clarified the divine by separating it from man. Ramananda further clarified the divine by associating it with the nirguna aspect of Rama. Then Tulsi Das systemitized and directed the nebulous teachings of Ramananda into a well-defined channel. While Ramananda had stressed the nirguna form, Tulsi Das made the further transition to the saguna form and incorporated the story of Rama as the son of Daśaratha into the ritual of devotion. Tulsi Das accepted the major intellectual trends of his day and found he could harmonize them in the personality of Rama, using the popular mythology when convenient and the advaita philosophy also.

Other contributing factors to Tulsi Das' appeal were his reconciliations of the worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu in the form of Rama, and the spiritual life with domesticity. Tulsi Das was not attempting to form a new sect. Rather he wished to change the quality of the religious life of the average Hindu by advocating devotion to Rama as the most effective path of worship in the Kali age.

Those who love not Śiva's lotus feet cannot even dream of pleasing Rama. A guileless love for Śiva's feet is the surest sign of a devotee of Rama... Brother, whom does Rama hold so dear as Śiva?10

10. Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, i, p. 103.
Tulsi Das' biographers usually describe him as a **smarta** Vaiṣṇava. What this actually means aside from the fact that it indicates acceptance of both Viṣṇu and Śiva, is hard to ascertain. **Smarta** is derived from **smṛti** and thus indicates those who follow the epic and Puranic literature. **Farquhar** describes **smartas** as followers of Śāṅkara's **advaita Vedanta** while accepting also the many gods of Hinduism. **Smartas** are sometimes said to worship five major deities: Śiva, Durga, Ganeśa, Surya and Viṣṇu. Thus Tulsi Das with this **smarta** background would naturally worship Śiva as well as Rama and Śiva does figure prominently in the **Ramacaritamānasā**. Tulsi has organized his work around the recitation of the virtues of Rama by Śiva, to his second wife, Parvati. As this technique has been adopted from the Adhyatma Ramayana, Bagchi believes it indicates Tantric association as Śiva generally is the narrator of the **Tantra-śastras**. Throughout the **Ramacaritamānasā**, Tulsi Das constantly stresses the necessity or worshipping Śiva in order to gain Rama's grace.

The significance of this dual worship is difficult to assess. Legends suggest it served to alienate the Vaiṣṇava community in Ayodhya where Tulsi Das was living and forced him to move to Benares in the middle of the composition of his **Ramacaritamānasā**. Whether it actually pacified any of the Śaivites of Tulsi's own day is doubtful but over the years, for the masses, this combination of reverence for the two deities might have had a harmonizing effect.

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Tell Me what pains are involved in treading the path of Devo­tion: it requires neither yoga (mind-control), nor sacri­fices, nor Japa (muttering of prayers), nor penance, nor fasting. Aqueileless disposition, a mind free from perversity and absolute contentment with whatever may be got—this is all that is needed.¹³

The reconciliation of the paths of the ascetic and the house­holder, in the tradition of the Bhagavadgita, a main Sanskrit­ic treatise on devotion to Kṛṣṇa, is perhaps a more significant point in explaining the wide appeal of Tulsi's work. The devotee does not have to show the outward forms of devotion as long as he carries Rama in his heart. Tulsi Das realized that the devotee must carry on with his livlihood. Tulsi Das does not stress celibacy either or mention it as a prerequisite of the religious life.

**Literature Known to Tulsi Das and Tantric Influences**

Tulsi Das' work is not unique and its strength lies rather in its ability to draw together the existing threads of earlier philoso­phies. Because of the eclectic nature of Tulsi's theology, he was able to appeal to all the different sects which called themselves Hindus — Gorakhpanthis, Kabirpanthis, Śaivites, Śaktas, Tantrics and orthodox Vaiṣṇavas.¹⁴ What were the major works on which Tulsi Das relied? Scholars agree that the most instrumental work in Tulsi's formulation of his version of the Ramayana was the Adhyatma Ramayana which has already been discussed. Other works which Tulsi Das supposedly relied on include the Bhagavata Purana, Hanuman-nataka and the Prasannaraghava

¹³ Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, iii, p. 210

¹⁴ Jindal, A History, p. 57.
by Jayadeva. All of these Sanskritic works are distinctly within the devotional tradition. Allchin also mentions the *Yoga Vasistha*, a Sanskrit text of the twelfth or thirteenth century, perhaps from Kashmir, which possibly gave rise to the sectarian Ramayanas in that it was a didactic dialogue between Rama and his guru. Grierson mentions the *Bhusundī Ramayana* and Tulsi Das' inclusion of a dialogue between the crow Bhusundī and Garuda, the eagle-like vehicle of Viṣṇu, in the closing section of his work might have been drawn from this source. As we have already discussed the influences of Śankara and Ramanuja, and made the comparison with Valmiki, we can see that Tulsi Das was really presenting ideas from many previous philosophies and literatures in his *Ramacaritamanasa*.

In addition to these earlier Sanskritic works, certain cultural influences helped to shape Tulsi's version of the *Ramayana*. The main such influence was the development of the Tantric school which paralleled the development of sectarian bhakti. In his study, *Buddhism, Its Essence and Development*, E. Conze defines Tantra.

The Tantra combines the devotional needs of the masses with the meditational practices of the Yogacara school and with the metaphysics of the Madhyamikas. In other words, the Tantra took over the vast pantheon of popular mythology, with its bewildering variety of deities, fairies, witches, etc.

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Macdougall, drawing also on the earlier ideas of Farquhar, sees many Tantric influences in the work of Tulsi Das. Thus Tulsi's emphasis on the power of the Name (Rama), and the elevation of the Name above the deity himself, was probably drawn from Tantric practices.

Charlotte Vaudeville further defines Tantric religious practice by the importance given to the Name or Sound (Śabda) and to the magic formulas and diagrams known respectively as mantra and yantra. It is in his elevation of the Name and in his incorporation of the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Parvati as the organizer of his work that Tulsi Das most clearly shows evidence of Tantric influence.

In the opening section of the Ramacaritamanasa, Tulsi Das invokes the "name 'Rama' of the Chief of Raghus, which is composed of seed letters representing the fire-god, the sun-god and the moon-god (viz. Ra, A and Ma respectively)." This probably reflects use of the sandha bhasa (oblique language), which the Tantric sects used to keep the esoteric teachings from vulgar eyes. In Tantric terminology, Tulsi Das could be referring to the channels (nadis) Ida and Pingala, through which the two main breaths (pranas) move and which are also


20. Vaudeville, Kabir I, p. 141 states: "The belief in the divine nature of the Name and in its infinite potency as a means of salvation is common to the Sant and medieval Vaishnava traditions: it is evidently a Tantric concept inherited by both."

21. Ibid., p. 128.

22. Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, i, p. 38.
identified with the 'sun' and the 'moon'. Here Tulsi Das is probably incorporating Tantric practices in his devotional approach. Tulsi also sees the Name as the intermediary between the nirguna and saguna forms.

The mystery of name and form is a tale which cannot be told; though delightful to comprehend, it cannot be described in words. Between the unqualified Absolute and the qualified Divinity, the Name is a good intermediary; it is a clever interpreter revealing the truth of both.23

In his soteriology, Tulsi Das stresses the importance of the repetition of the Name as the basic and easiest requirement of the path of devotion to Rama.

This approach to divinity through emphasis on the efficacy of the Name places Tulsi Das in direct relation to the Sant tradition. The Sants included the poet-singers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who were mostly low-born and who expressed themselves in the common idiom. They adhered to a strict monotheism, were opposed to Brahminical ritualism and on the social plane, to caste distinctions. Their conception of the deity, whom they often called Rama, was nirguna, the unborn, formless, all-pervading godhead.24 The Sants included Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Tukaram and other medieval poets. It is in his deemphasis on the outer aspects of devotion that Tulsi Das follows most closely in the Sant tradition. Tulsi also shares with the Sants the elevation of the dasya rasa or servile sentiment of devotion as as contrasted with the orientation towards the sexual aspect of love.

23. Ibid., i, p. 40.

which the Kṛṣṇa sects followed. Also in his inclination towards the advaita philosophy of Śankara, Tulsi Das follows the Sants. The main element which separates Tulsi from the Sants is Tulsi's elevation of the Rama-katha or the telling of the story of Rama, son of Daśaratha. In his later works even a greater connection with the Sants is evident as perhaps in his later life, the mystical experience which Kabir and Nanak found unexpressible, became more realized in the life of Tulsi Das. Thus Allchin relates that in the Vinayapatrika, Tulsi Das hints at another story, "... the story of the inner mystical experience which cannot be told, but which cannot remain untold, and yet being told loses all its savour. This is the mystery or way (gati) of the Name and the form, which in Ramacaritamanasa he calls also an untold story. Here it seems to us Tulsi is speaking the same language as Kabir and Nanak." In his emphasis on the company of the holy, the role of the guru, the singing of divine praises and the importance of discriminating knowledge and ethical teaching, Tulsi Das again follows the poet-singers of the Sant tradition.

As Charlotte Vaudeville has emphasized the important Tantric influence on the Sants, this influence must also be recognized on the work of Tulsi Das. Tulsi Das is often regarded as representing one pole of orthodox Vaiṣṇava devotionalism, and the Sants, the other pole of unorthodox thinkers. The above discussion shows that Tulsi Das was closer to the spirit of the Sants than he is usually portrayed. The discussion also points out that the work of Tulsi Das, particularly in

its emphasis on the efficacy of the Name, shared the Tantric influences of the day.26 The negative connotations of the Tantric school in its associations with sexual abuse and obscene ritual, have blinded many scholars to the more benign Tantric practices. These elements must not be overlooked in assessing medieval devotionalism and its influence on many of the modern day practices of popular Hinduism.

26. Thomas Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the Bhagavata Purana," in Milton Singer, ed., Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes (Honolulu: East-West Press Center, 1966) p. 19, mentions how the devotees use Tantric as well as Vedic ceremonies in their worship. Thus these Tantric practices have penetrated deeply into devotional religion.
CHAPTER 4

THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE MESSAGE OF TULSI DAS AND HIS APPEAL TO THE VARIOUS STRATA OF HINDU SOCIETY

In this chapter, I will first deal with the more general aspects of Tulsi's appeal and discuss the nine limbs of bhakti. Tulsi Das' work as an ethical system and his appeal as a poet. I will then specify Tulsi's appeal to the various strata of Hindu society and discuss the ways in which Tulsi Das rationalized the worship of Rama. In the concluding section of this chapter, I will evaluate Tulsi Das as a Weberian prophet and examine the ways in which Tulsi Das broke with the established normative order.

General Appeal

The Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan accounts for the appeal of theistic systems in that they have implicit in them a social hope. Everyone is on the same footing and equally close to the parental heart. Tulsi Das was offering a complete theistic system and yet, as mentioned previously, for the advaitist, equal elements of that philosophy could be found in Tulsi's work. The elements of Tulsi's actual teaching were simple. He emphasized the company of saints (others on the spiritual path) as the first limb of devotion and as the most important. As for the other eight limbs, there was the

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necessity of hearing the story of Rama, devotion to the guru, singing the praises of the Lord, repetition of the Name, and self-control and detachment. The last three limbs concern ethical action. Seeing the world as full of Rama (seeing the divine in everyone), contentment or not finding fault in others, and abandoning duplicity while having absolute faith in the lord. These were the actual steps on the path of devotion and they were broadly construed to mean that a person could concentrate on one limb only and find salvation also. The limbs require no outward effort and rather deal with an inner spiritual discipline which could be practiced by all. These nine limbs are not unique to the work of Tulsi Das and similar statements can be found in the Bhagavata Purana and the Adhyatma Ramayana.

This leads into the idea of Tulsi's work as an ethical system which was perhaps more appealing to the people of Hindustan than the more erotic Kṛṣṇa cults. Mushin Fani, supposed author of the Dabistan, who traveled extensively throughout India in the seventeenth century observed: "The reputation of continence and purity prevails in favor of those who are called after Rama; while those who take their title from Krishna are ill-famed for sensuality and libidinousness." Weber speaks of the danger of a mystical form of salvation falling into pure ritualism or leading away from rational activity. He goes on to say that a sacrament, or for the purpose of this discussion an inward ethical path, "might have a very different effect if its distribution

and administration were linked to the presupposition that the sacrament could bring salvation only to those who have become ethically purified in the sight of god. 

"Tulsi Das' emphasis on ethical behavior seems to save his form of devotion from the pitfalls which Weber mentions. Tulsi Das throughout his work, stresses the necessity of good conduct as a main requirement on the path of devotion. Tulsi tells those who would wish for stimulation "here there are no varied talks of pleasures of sense" and he warns those who seek such devotions that they will not be found in his story.

The emphasis of Tulsi's devotion is the dasya rasa or servile sentiment, represented by the devotion of Hanuman, the monkey-god, for Rama. Within the devotional tradition, there are five types (rasa) of devotion. The first is pacific (śanta) and was least important to most devotees as it called for a passive absorbed state. The second was servile (dasya); the third, friendly (sakhyā); the fourth, parental (vatsalya); and the fifth, erotic (srngara). As mentioned above, Tulsi's elevation of the servile sentiment had its antecedents in the teachings of Ramananda and Kabir. Tulsi Das, though, offers ethical models along the lines of all the rasa except the erotic. The sages in the forest quietly contemplating the divinity of Rama (as Brahman) represent the first type of devotion. Hanuman is the perfect servant. Rama's relationship with his brother Laksmana typifies the friendly

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5. Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, i, p. 56.
6. Allchin, Petition to Ram, p. 57.
sentiment and Rama's interaction with his father Daśaratha represents the fourth or parental sentiment, for it must be remembered that the whole action of the Ramayana takes place because Rama is totally obedient to his father's will. In regard to the erotic sentiment which could have been personified by Rama's relation to Sita, a substitution is evident. Sita's relation to Rama falls into the servile class and the erotic element is considered inimical to ethical behavior.

It seems evident to Grierson that Tulsi Das was trying to present an alternative to the emphasis of the Kṛṣṇa bhaktas (devotees) on the srngara rasa or the relation of Kṛṣṇa to the gopis (wives of the shepherds). Whether or not this is true, it might suggest that for the masses of peoples of Hindustan, the Ramaite ethical models were more appealing than the intoxicated bhakti of the devotees of Kṛṣṇa. If Rama himself seems too distant or abstract as a model of behavior, those who surround Rama provide alternate models in their relation to him. Tulsi Das offers everyone a way to relate to Rama. His emphasis on purity and ethical behavior may be a factor contributing to the appeal of Tulsi Das and his work.

Another point to mention is the appeal of Tulsi Das as a poet. Grierson compares Tulsi's descriptions of nature to those of Shakespeare and this aspect of Tulsi's work also contributes to his popularity. Legends say that Tulsi Das went on a two-year pilgrimage before

beginning to write his recension of the epic. As he supposedly traveled far up into the Himalayas, some of his literary descriptions might have been formulated at this time. Although many of the poetic devices and emotional descriptions might seem overdone to the Western reader, the people of Hindustan love the poetry of Tulsi Das. His ability to take the elements of nature and interweave them with religious symbolism is illustrated in this description of a thunderstorm.

The water becomes turbid the moment it descends on earth, even as the Jiva (embodied soul) is enveloped in Maya as soon as born. The water coming from various directions gathers into a pool even as commendable virtues find their way into the heart of a noble soul. The water of the streams becomes still once it pours into the ocean, just as the ego finds eternal rest on obtaining union with Sri Hari.  

Appeal to the Upper Classes of Indian Society

There is only one meritorious act in this world and no other—to adore the feet of the Brahmans by thought word and deed. The sages and gods are propitious to him who guilelessly serves the twice-born (the Brahmans).

In numerous places in his Ramacaritamanasa, Tulsi Das praises the Brahmans in the above manner and reinforces the boundaries of caste. This message must have been appealing to the Brahmans of Tulsi’s day who had lost much in the wake of the Islamic rise to power in North India. This message must also have served to counter the

12. Macdougall suggests that Tulsi Das' constant emphasis on respect for the Brahmans shows that in his day many were not respecting them. See The Way of Salvation, p. 182.
criticism which Tulsi Das received from many Brahmins for choosing to write his work in the crude vernacular of Hindi. Another possible explanation for Tulsi's stress on respect for the Brahmins might arise if we turn to look at the teachings of the Bhagavata Purana. Thomas J. Hopkins, in his article, "The Social Teachings of the Bhagavata Purana," discusses the message of this work. He finds that "praise of poverty and compassion for the distressed characterize the social teachings of the Bhagavata." In this Purana, probably composed between the ninth and eleventh century in South India which raised the songs of the Alvar saints to the status of smrti (that which has been remembered), one finds ethics that are almost democratic and a scorn for status and wealth. Perhaps in his Ramacaritamanasa, Tulsi Das was trying to legitimize the low-class Bhagavata religion in the eyes of the Brahmins and to reestablish the position of the Brahmins within it. While the devotional religion of the Sants, the Alvars and to some extent the followers of Caitanya all had low-class orientations, the main bhakti treatise of Hindustan, Tulsi's Ramacaritamanasa, tried to reincorporate the Brahmins into their traditional social position at the head of the democratic devotional teachings. This would also account for Tulsi Das' decision to write in the vernacular as Tulsi would wish to have this message of respect for the Brahmins accessible to all.

Bagchi discusses the popularization of the Ramaite creed among the Brahmins and the formulation of the Adhyatma Ramayana as a Sanskritic canonical basis for the Rama bhaktas.

The followers of Ramananda were all non-Brahmins and it was probably through the activities of Tulasidasa that the Rama cult was introduced amongst the Brahmins. The Adhyatma Ramayana seems to have been composed in this period, perhaps a little earlier than the time of Tulasidasa, about the fifteenth century, when the Ramaite cult was being introduced into the Brahmanical fold. The idea of writing a work, imbibed by the Ramaite spirit, that would have the appearance of a canonical text, could not have started except with the orthodox section, which probably resented the predominance of teachers belonging to the lower castes.¹⁴

Thus, as Tulsi Das modeled his version of the epic along the lines of the Adhyatma Ramayana and chose to write his work in the vernacular, it seems that he was completing the process of legitimizing the Ramaite devotional religion among the Brahmins.

Alongside his praise of the Brahmins, Tulsi Das also inculcates respect for the Vedas. The only aspect of Vedic religion which Tulsi Das openly denigrates is the position of the lesser gods of Hinduism. Tulsi Das characterizes the gods as "selfish by nature and malicious at heart"¹⁵ and elsewhere he speaks of the "wicked gods."¹⁶ The differing characterizations of Indra, one of the foremost of the deities mentioned in the Rigveda, in the works of Valmiki and Tulsi Das further illustrate this point. Valmiki praises Indra and uses Indra's virtues to glorify Rama: "In his love and zeal for truth, he is equal to Indra," "In forbearance, he is like the earth, in wisdom like Brihaspati, in valour like Indra."¹⁷ The Indra of Tulsi Das however, is ignorant and

¹⁴ Bagchi, Studies, p. 21.
¹⁵ Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, ii, p. 217.
¹⁶ Ibid., ii, p. 17.
selfish like his compatriots: "though endowed with a thousand eyes, Indra was really blind (lacked discernment)." Again Tulsi Das has Brhaspati, Indra's perceptor, tell Indra that he is ignorant and dominated by self-interest. Macdougall suggests that Tulsi Das' disrespect towards the lesser gods was accepted in his day in the sectarian, not orthodox, schools such as the Rama cult. This again reinforces the idea that Tulsi Das was reflecting and not reformulating the ideas of his day.

In his denigration of the lesser gods of Hinduism, Tulsi Das further rationalizes the conception of Rama along Weberian lines. By belittling Indra and the other gods, Tulsi Das highlights the greatness of Rama. Here we also see Tulsi Das adding to a more monotheistic conception of the deity with the other deities becoming subordinate to the supreme one. Tulsi Das, however, retains the gods in his work and does not attempt to do away with them completely. As Tulsi Das' Rama becomes immanent in the world through the power of his incarnation, he fits in exactly with the Weberian process. Talcott Parsons points out, "In spite of the generality of the monotheistic trend, however, it is one of Weber's important points that the direction of the immanent conception of divinity, however monotheistic at the highest philosophical levels, is much more favorable to the retention and prominence of polytheistic elements in the total system than is the transcendental type."  

In the concluding chapter of this paper, I will examine Tulsi Das' presentation of Rama as both a transcendant and immanent deity.

Returning to the appeal of Tulsi Das to the upper strata of North Indian Hindu society, for the Kṣatriya caste, the virtue of the lord in choosing to incarnate in a Kṣatriya human form must have been pleasing. The position of this caste in sixteenth century India was particularly ambiguous. They had virtually lost their ruling position in North India and yet under the influence of Akbar and his integrative policies, some of the Kṣatriyas were again assuming administrative positions. Weber believes that a salvation religion is most appealing to socially privileged groups who have lost the possibility of political activity. "Consequently, salvation religions usually emerged when the ruling classes, noble or middle class, have lost their political power to a bureaucratic, militaristic imperial state." 21 Although Islamic rule in India had been a reality since the end of the twelfth century, the process of that rule filtering down throughout the various levels of Hindu society was a slow one. The composition of Tulsi Das' Ramacaritamanasa was synchronic with the consolidation of the Mughal bureaucratic state by Akbar. Akbar's great achievement was the incorporation of the Hindu princes into the service of the Mughal state through the process of integration and liberalization. 22 A Hindu, Raja Todar Mal held the highest revenue appointment in the state. There is a great possibility that this Todar Mal was a close friend of Tulsi Das.

21. Ibid., p. 122.

22. Ahmad, Studies, p. 103.
A legal document of A.D. 1612 records the division of the estate of Todar Mal after the dispute of his son Anand Ram and grandson Kanhai by another son Ram Bhadra. This document bears the autograph of Tulsi Das who arbitrated the dispute and the document until recently was in the possession of the descendants of Todar. The likelihood is great that the finance minister of Akbar was a close friend of Tulsi Das and a member of his devotional group (satsanga) in Benares. Thus the possibility that the greatest Rajput of Tulsi's day followed the teachings of the Ramacaritamanasa may suggest that this work appealed to the Rajputs of North India.

Tulsi Das is also presenting in his work a picture of the ideal political state. The deva-raja (god-king) concept of ancient Hinduism is exemplified in the person of Rama, god-incarnate and ruler of Ayodhya. Also the idea of "exemplary center" is brought out in the politics of Tulsi Das as he believes the government should bear full responsibility for the physical set-up and mental mould of its subjects. Professor Sharma goes on to characterize the political philosophy of Tulsi Das: "Perfect spiritual growth needs an ideal social life; and an ideal society exists only under the protective care of an ideal State."


Appeal to the Lower Classes

And the humblest creature that breathes, if possessed of De-
votion, is dear to Me as life: such is My nature. With uplifted arms He took a vow to rid the earth of demons.27

In his emphasis on a personal relationship with god, Tulsi Das appeals to the lower classes of North India. Tulsi is saying here that however low-born or despised by society a person is, if he is devoted to Rama, he can achieve salvation. This is a simple message and is reinforced in Tulsi Das' work by his treatment of Rama's relationship with the untouchable Niṣāda Guha, whom Rama allows to accompany him on his journey from Ayodhya to the forest hermitage.28 Rama and his brother Laksmana, and even their Brahmin gurus embrace Guha and treat him with affection as a Rama bhakta. Thus Tulsi Das goes beyond caste boundaries in his soteriology while upholding caste boundaries in real life. In this way, Tulsi Das could appeal to all the castes while remaining within the orthodox Hindu structure.

The second message which Tulsi Das had for the village people of North India concerns the traditional purpose of Rama's incarnation which was to rid the earth of demons. The emphasis on this aspect of Rama further rationalized Tulsi Das' conception of Rama along Weberian lines in its clarification and specification of Rama's function. The denigration of the lower gods also added to the power of Rama to deal with the demons. In this day and age when Western society looks upon

27. Ibid., ii, p. 250.
28. Ibid., ii, pp. 80-100.
the idea of demons as superstitious fantasy, the tendency to underestimate this aspect of Rama and its appeal to the masses is understandable. However, in Tulsi's day, this must have had tremendous psychological appeal to the people of village India struggling under the influences of the evil-eye, the ancestors and other phenomena from the spirit world, which they felt constantly plagued their lives. To these people, the demons probably represented the personified emotions which Westerners know as anger, fear, lust, pride, envy, etc. Macdougall suggests that to these illiterate masses, the path of devotion to Rama meant salvation from these very demons. Through his emphasis on the efficacy of the Name, Tulsi Das is giving the masses a tool with which to combat the demons. If the devotee repeats the Name with a pure heart, he will be released from the power of the demons.

Weber sees a new type of divinity emerging from the old god of nature who struggled with darkness and cold and "having won a victory over them ushers in the spring, there now arises on the basis of the salvation myths a savior who, like Christ, liberates men from the power of the demons." Thus this aspect of Rama which had probably appealed to the masses of India over the centuries as they heard the legends recited by the bards, was reemphasized in the Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das and this communication was facilitated as the exploits of Rama were now more accessible through the vernacular translation.

Tulsi Das as a Weberian Prophet

In the first chapter of this paper, we encountered the idea of the prophet as the main agent in the process of religious rationalization. According to Weber the prophet is identified by his ability to break with the established normative order. Weber further defines the role of the prophet in a variety of ways. For the prophet and his followers, prophetic revelation involves a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life. The prophet strives to produce for his followers a meaningful ordered totality. Weber also distinguishes between the 'exemplary' and the 'ethical' prophet. The ethical prophet serves as the instrument of a transcendent god and he demands obedience as an ethical duty. "On the other hand, the prophet may be an exemplary man who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation, as in the case of the Buddha." The prophet does not usually come from the priestly classes whose duty it is to uphold the normative order. Finally, the core of the prophet's mission is based on doctrine and not magic.

In what ways does Tulsi Das fulfill the Weberian requirements for prophecy? Did Tulsi Das make a break with the established order? I believe Tulsi Das' decision to write his version of the epic in the vernacular to be indicative of such a break. Through this decision Tulsi Das opened himself up to direct criticism from the Brahmins of

31. Ibid., pp. 46-59.
32. Ibid., p. 55.
his day. Secondly, Tulsi Das' denigration of the lesser gods also broke with the established order. Finally, Tulsi Das' emphasis on salvation for all, regardless of social position, also went against the normative order.

Tulsi Das' decision to write in the vernacular and in particular, the Baiswari or Avadhi dialect of eastern Hindi, is a crucial factor in accounting for his appeal (see Fig. 1). Scholars such as Macdougall and Allchin feel that this dialect enabled the work to exercise a much larger influence than if it had been written in the Braj dialect of western Hindi. Macdougall explains how the Baiswari is easily understood throughout the whole Gangetic Valley, and is a form which stands midway between western Hindi and Bihari, one of the main languages of Eastern India. Thus, through his choice of this dialect, Tulsi Das made his work intelligible to the speakers of both of these language groups. Allchin believes that Tulsi Das' choice of Avadhi was apt for several reasons. One reason refers to a tradition of narrative poetry already flourishing in Avadhi with the Padmavati of Jayasi, a Muslim poet influenced by Sufi traditions who wrote in the early sixteenth century. The followers of Ramananda had also chosen dialects very closely related to Avadhi, if not identical with it. Tulsi Das did use the Braj dialect for several other of his major works and this seems to indicate an intuitive sense on the part of the poet, or perhaps a method which was aware of what language was best suited

34. Allchin, Kavitavali, p. 56.
Figure 1. Map of the extent of the Hindi-speaking area of North India.
to his purposes. Tulsi Das used both tatsama, pure Sanskrit words, and
tadbhava, vernacular forms of Sanskrit words which Allchin mentions as
giving his writing its particular flavor. Tulsi's use of Persian and
Arabic loan words and intimate village terminology also contributes to
his wide appeal.

Why Tulsi Das chose to write in the vernacular is a question
unresolved by his biographers. Macdougall feels that Tulsi Das wrote
in Hindi because he wanted to reach the masses with his message of sal­
vation through Rama. Macdougall also suggests that while Tulsi Das
was aware that he would receive criticism from the Brahmin pandits, he
had something of the prophetic spirit and the fact that he kept on in
spite of criticism shows that within his own life he had built up an
ideal world order in which Rama was the center and sustainer. 35
Grierson suggests that Tulsi Das chose to write in Hindi because he
was not a great Sanskritist. 36 That a Brahmin, who supposedly had
Sanskritic background, would choose to use a common idiom, was a revo­
lationary act in itself. The most plausible reasons for Tulsi Das' choice of the vernacular form were his attempts: (a) to legitimitize
the devotional religion in the eyes of the Brahmins; (b) to reestablish
the traditional Brahminical position within the devotional religion;
and (c) to assure that this message could be understood and memorized


36. Grierson documents this opinion with reference to grammati­
cal blunders in some of Tulsi Das' Sanskrit verses. However, in speak­
ing of one of the poet's other works, Vinaya-pattrika, Grierson says
the poem is incomprehensible to anyone who is not a Sanskrit scholar. See "Tulasi-Dasa," pp. 470f., 471.
by all. Tulsi's decision to write in the vernacular more than any other factor assured his popularity as it enabled every person in the North Indian villages to understand the message of devotion to Rama.

In his introduction to his translation of the Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das, W. Douglas P. Hill discusses the criticism that Tulsi Das received from the Brahmin pandits for writing his work in the vernacular. "It is thought that the first part of the Balakanda was composed after the second part and the Ayodhya and Aranyakandas had been written, as a reply to the criticisms of the orthodox pandits who regarded with intense disfavor a sacred poem written in any language but Sanskrit."37

There are also legends which Hill mentions that relate the Brahmins' hesitancy to accept the work of Tulsi Das. One such legend concerns the temple of Viṣvanath in Kaśi (Benares). In the temple one night the pandits placed a copy of the Veda, beneath it certain śastras, beneath them a Purana and below them all a copy of the Ramacaritamanasa. In the morning they found Tulsi Das' work on the top of the pile, were convinced that the work was acceptable and they begged the poet's pardon.38

Tulsi Das' denigration of the lesser gods also indicates a break with the established order. As the Brahmins functioned as intermediaries between these gods and man, Tulsi Das de-emphasis on the necessity of paying respect to the lesser deities could have limited the ritual role of the priests. Through his emphasis on direct

38. Ibid.
experiential contact with the divine through the efficacy of the Name, Tulsi was again limiting the necessity for the ritual services of the priests.

The last illustration of Tulsi Das' break with the established order concerns his democratic soteriology. Although Tulsi Das emphasized the necessity of paying respects to the Brahmins in his Ramacaritamanasa, the actual message which he gave to the masses of North India was one of democratic salvation for all. In the following speech Rama tells of his love for humanity.

But human beings are the dearest to Me of all. Of human beings, the Brahmins; of the Brahmins, those well-versed in the Vedas; of these, again, those that follow the course of conduct prescribed in the Vedas; of these latter, those who are averse to the pleasure of sense are dear to Me, and yet more the wise, of the wise too I love a man of realization all the more; more beloved to Me even than these is my own servant (devotee), who solely depends on Me and has no other hope. Again and again I repeat to you the truth that no one is so dear to Me as My devotee. 39

Thus although on the social level Tulsi Das is seen to reinforce the boundaries of caste, on the soteriological level, he is opening the doors of devotion to Rama to all castes.

In his Ramacaritamanasa, Tulsi Das was trying to appeal to all the elements of Hindu society. On the social level he assured the Brahmins of continued primacy in the traditional caste system. On the level of religion as practiced, he incorporated the Sudras and Untouchables too through his use of the vernacular form which enabled them to hear and understand the possibility of salvation through the power of

39. Tulasidas, Ramacaritamanasa, iii, p. 240 (emphasis mine).
Rama's Name. Allchin suggests that Tulsi's immediate spiritual group in Benares included members from all castes and even Muslims. Thus, if this were so, in his own life Tulsi Das was also opposing the established order. Tulsi Das, through his stress on bhakti as the most efficacious path in the Kali Age, is striving to produce for his followers a meaningful ordered totality. As Macdougall has suggested, within his own life Tulsi Das had set up an ideal world in which Rama was the center and sustainer.

In Kavitavali, one of Tulsi Das' later works, he says:

In spite of which the influence
Force and Splendour of Ram's Name is such
That now the world even likens me
To the great sage Valmiki.

Tulsi Das is here indicating that all he had to do was to mutter Rama's Name and now the world calls him an incarnation of Valmiki. Thus, in his own life Tulsi Das was experiencing direct revelations. Tulsi Das was demonstrating to others his particular path of religious salvation through its effectiveness in his own life. He was not demanding obedience as an ethical duty and therefore he was serving as an exemplary rather than an ethical prophet of Rama. In these various ways, Tulsi Das broke with the established order of his day and perhaps functioned in the role of the Weberian prophet as an expeditor of religious change.

40. Allchin, Kavitavali, p. 38.
41. Ibid., p. 159.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I will summarize the findings of this analysis of Tulsi Das' *Ramacaritamanasa* and relate them to contemporary studies of religion in the field of social science. Then I will address myself to the possibilities for further research which this study suggests and conclude with an evaluation of the significance of this analysis of Tulsi Das' version of the epic for the South Asianist, the social scientist and the scholars of comparative religion.

Summary

In the first chapter of this paper, I defined the Weberian concept of rationalization. In the following chapters, I referred to this process twice in relation to the ideas of Tulsi Das. I first pointed out the gradual rationalization of the conception of the deity beginning with the non-dualistic universe of Śankara and ending with the personal deity who incarnates into the world in Tulsi Das' version of the epic. In the ideology of Śankara, there was no reality apart from the one eternal *Brahman*. In the thought of Ramanuja, duality was admitted and man became separate from the divine. Ramananda, who is credited with founding the Ramaite cult in North India, gave the name of Rama to his conception of the divine and in the *Ramacaritamanasa* of Tulsi Das the nirguna Rama of Ramananda becomes identified with Rama,
the son of Dasaratha. Further on in this study, we saw the functions of Rama clarified and specified through emphasis on the purpose of his incarnation to rid the world of demons and through Tulsi Das' denigration of the lesser Hindu gods. Thus the great god Rama, representative of the Upaniṣadic Brahman, incarnated into the world to help each individual to deal with the particular demons which plagued his life.

In this process of rationalization, the problem of distance appears as the duality of Rama, the lord, and his devotees must naturally exist. How does Tulsi Das solve this increased separation of man from the divine? The first way in which Tulsi answers this is through the power of incarnation. Although the rationalization process separates man from the divine, through incarnation Rama returns into the world and becomes accessible to his devotees. Of the two solutions which Weber offered to the problem of distance, Tulsi Das stresses direct experiential contact with the divine through mysticism. Through Tulsi's emphasis on the repetition of the Name, a technique definitely associated with Tantric practices, Tulsi Das is offering the devotee a personal and direct method in which to contact the supreme deity. By the repetition of Rama's Name, the devotee has a tool which enables him to deal with his ultimate goals and his individual welfare. The Name, by its constant repetition becomes a form of concretized spiritual energy. In the theology of Tulsi Das, the Name is a link not only between the nirguna and saguna forms, but also between the individual and the divine.
Turning to the other requirements of Weberian rationalization, the importance of the written sacred tradition is certainly fulfilled through Tulsi Das' *Ramacaritamanasa*. Here again we saw that Tulsi Das stabilized the Ramaite oral tradition and wrote down the version of the epic which had been transmitted from guru to disciple over the centuries, and which was popular in his own day. We found that Tulsi's work was not unique and that its strength lay in its ability to synthesize and harmonize the earlier philosophies. Thus Tulsi Das' version of the epic is a reflection of the thought of his time. In Tulsi's work, a more monotheistic conception of the deity is in evidence through his denigration of the lesser gods and his emphasis on the supremacy of Rama. Again we must remember that Tulsi was probably reflecting the thought of his day in which the lesser gods had already lost their status.

Tulsi Das broke with the established order of his day by choosing to write his work in the vernacular and through his democratic soteriology. Tulsi Das was continuing the process, which the writers of the *Adhyatma Ramayana* had begun, of legitimizing the devotional religion of the *Bhagavata Purana* in the eyes of the Brahmins and re-establishing the social position of the Brahmins within the Ramaite devotional religion. This may be a partial explanation of why Tulsi Das chose the vernacular form for his work as he would want his message of respect for the Brahmins to be understood by all. Here we can see the process of Brahmanical adaptation of the popular religious forms taking place. This process may help explain the viability of Hinduism.
in the face of religious reform and the ability of Hinduism to reabsorb the followers of its protest movements. Through his break with the established order, Tulsi Das satisfies the Weberian criteria for prophecy and functions as an agent of religious change.

These ideas of Weber are further developed by Morris Opler's explanation of particularization and generalization as cultural processes. Opler defines particularization as a process of ideological flow in which values associated with the remote and the important become effective in dealing with the immediate, the humble and the individual. Tulsi Das' conception of Rama as the killer of demons illustrates this process. Rama, representative of the Upanigadic Brahman can help the average individual to deal with his personal demons. In the work of Tulsi Das "every means whereby Rama could be localized and related to scenes, events, traditions, and turns of speech, which were familiar to all, would serve to make him that much more real and intimate to the life and needs of all." The process of generalization, according to Opler, deals with the progression from the specific to the more comprehensive. Starting with the immediate and the personal, movement is toward the timeless and the abstract. In the work of Tulsi Das this process is illustrated through the use of the Name. By this mystical technique which is immediate and personal, the devotee

achieves union with the abstract universal Brahman. The Name is the path to union with the supreme.

This interaction between the remote and the immediate goals and values of the individual leads into the idea of god as immanent and transcendent. Through Tulsi Das' rationalization of the conception of Rama, he is necessarily making the deity more transcendent and yet through the path of incarnation Rama also becomes more immanent. Through the mystical technique of repetition of the Name, the transcendent deity Rama becomes immanent in the life of the devotee (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The Name as a channel between the immanent and transcendent aspects of divinity.
Another method of dealing with the dual aspects of god and the dual needs of man incorporates the ideas of David Mandelbaum who sees this duality as the pragmatic and transcendental religious complexes. The pragmatic complex includes individual welfare and proximate means as its function, local deities and vernacular folklore as its forms and lower caste shamans as its practitioners. The transcendental complex includes the long-term welfare and ultimate goals as its functions, the Sanskritic great tradition as its form and the Brahmin priests as its practitioners. Mandelbaum suggests that "In the devotional bhakti sects, the devotees ignore the pragmatic aspect in their rapt dedication to a high god." I believe that in the devotional path outlined by Tulsi Das in his Ramacaritamanasa, the devotee does not ignore the pragmatic complex, but the functions of this complex are assumed by the transcendental one. Perhaps the Ramacaritamanasa functions as a channel between the transcendental and pragmatic complexes. Through the repetition of the Name, both problems of long-term welfare and individual welfare are solved. Through the gathering of devotees to sing the story of Rama, ultimate goals can be reconciled with proximate means. By the devotees repetition of the Name he maintains the system and deals with personal exigencies at the same time.

Turning to the forms of these complexes, Tulsi Das reconciles the Sanskritic texts of Valmiki and the Adhyatma Ramayana with the


vernacular folklore through his stabilization of the Ramaite oral traditions. He also reconciles the Sanskritic theology of the great tradition with the epic mythology of the village bards. He synthesizes the essence of the Brahmanical philosophies and presents them to the masses of North India in the common idiom. Tulsi Das also reconciles the lower gods of the Hindu pantheon with the universal gods by establishing a hierarchy with Rama at the top. Rama can assume the functions of the lesser gods in his easy access through the Name.

In Mandelbaum's construct, the functions of both the priest and the shaman become unnecessary as all can be their own practitioners through devotion to Rama. Through the use of the Name as concretized spiritual energy, the devotee can contact the supernatural through his own efforts. In the soteriology of Tulsi Das, the devotee can purify himself through the constant repetition of the Name (Fig. 3).

Thus the *Ramacaritamanasa* of Tulsi Das may function as a channel between the transcendental and pragmatic religious complexes. This perhaps can also explain why the work remains the most important religious treatise in North India.

**Points for Further Research**

In order to validate this study of Tulsi Das' version of the epic, field research must be carried out in North India to test whether Tulsi's *Ramacaritamanasa* does act as a channel between the pragmatic and transcendental religious complexes. This could incorporate investigation into the practices of the Ramaite sects in order to discover if they utilize the services of the shamans and Brahmin priests.
<table>
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<td>Religious Practitioners:</td>
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Figure 3. The Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das as a channel between the transcendental and pragmatic religious complexes. Parts of this figure were taken from Mandelbaum, "Introduction," p. 10.
In his recent study in Chattisgarh, Lawrence Babb investigated aspects of popular Hinduism and tested Mandelbaum’s theories. Babb indeed found two existing religious complexes which utilized the services of Brahmin and Baiga (lower caste shaman) priests but he did not specify whether the same men who sit and sing Tulsi’s Ramayana on the temple verandas solicit the services of the religious practitioners. Do the Rama bhaktas use the Name in dealing with personal exigencies? Does the singing of Tulsi’s verses satisfy ultimate goals and individual welfare? These and other questions must be answered in order to determine the ways in which the Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das continues to meet the religious needs of the people of North India.

Another opportunity for further research presents itself through a comparative study of the various regional recensions of the Ramayana, to discover the ways in which these works reflect the particular social patterns and values of their areas of India. Although a study of this nature would require excessive language control, a group of scholars competent in their own areas could successfully undertake such research. A comparison of the various regional recensions offers exciting possibilities to the social scientist and South Asianist who desires to take an integrative look at the subcontinent to see the ways in which the pan-Indian theme of Valmiki has been modified by the popular oral traditions and vernacular writers. A comprehensive study of this nature could also penetrate to Southeast Asia as

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the *Ramayana* is also currently performed and recited in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

**Significance of the Study of Tulsi Das' Ramacaritamanasa**

For the South Asianist, I hope that this study of Tulsi Das' Ramacaritamanasa has helped to place this work in the context of the North Indian medieval devotional tradition. As Tulsi's version of the epic continues to play an important part in the religious life of North India, the study of its origins and the roots of its philosophy can hopefully clarify why this work has successfully answered the religious needs of the people of North India and why it continues to do so. Besides being a religious treatise, the Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das offers viable ethical models to millions of North Indians. It reflects the values of the Hindi speaking areas of North India and as such, cannot be ignored by anyone interested in South Asia.

For the social scientist and comparative religionist, I have attempted to test the theories of Weber, Geertz, Opler and Mandelbaum through their application to a specific religious phenomenon. I have found that these theories help to clarify the processes of religious change when applied to specific forms. Although the work of modern social science has been slow to test these theories on historical data from the past, the necessity of doing so will become increasingly apparent in order to complete the understanding of contemporary religious practices. Through a thorough comprehension of the variety
of needs which religious works such as Tulsi Das' *Ramaritamanasa*
satisfy, perhaps the study of the ways in which religion functions in
the life of man can progress.
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