



## SANT TULSIDAS

**Rambola Dubey** (Hindi pronunciation: [\[ra:məbo:la: dube:\]](#); 11 August 1511 – 30 July 1623<sup>[1]</sup>), known as **Tulsidas** (Sanskrit pronunciation: [\[t̪ʊlsi:da:sa:\]](#)),<sup>[2]</sup> was a [Vaishnava](#) ([Ramanandi](#)) [Hindu](#) saint and poet, renowned for his devotion to the deity [Rama](#). He wrote several popular works in [Sanskrit](#), [Awadhi](#), and [Braj Bhasha](#), but is best known as the author of the [Hanuman Chalisa](#) and of the epic [Ramcharitmanas](#), a retelling of the Sanskrit [Ramayana](#), based on Rama's life, in the vernacular Awadhi language.

Tulsidas spent most of his life in the cities of Banaras (modern [Varanasi](#)) and [Ayodhya](#).<sup>[3]</sup> The [Tulsi Ghat](#) on the [Ganges](#) in Varanasi is named after him.<sup>[2]</sup> He founded the [Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple](#) in Varanasi, believed to stand at the place where he had the sight of [the deity](#).<sup>[4]</sup> Tulsidas started the [Ramlila](#) plays, a folk-theatre adaptation of the *Ramayana*.<sup>[5]</sup>

He has been acclaimed as one of the greatest poets in [Hindi](#), [Indian](#), and [world literature](#).<sup>[6][7][8][9]</sup> The impact of Tulsidas and his works on the art, culture and society in India is widespread and is seen today in the vernacular language, Ramlila plays, [Hindustani classical music](#), popular music, and television series

The Sanskrit name of Tulsidas can be transliterated in two ways. Using the original Sanskrit, the name is written as *Tulasīdāsa*. Using the [Hunterian transliteration](#) system, it is written as *Tulsidas* or *Tulsīdās* reflecting the vernacular pronunciation (since the written Indian languages maintain the vestigial letters that are no longer pronounced). The lost vowels are an aspect of the [Schwa deletion in Indo-Aryan languages](#) and can vary between regions. The name is a [compound](#) of two Sanskrit words: *Tulasī*, which is an Indian variety of the [basil](#) plant considered auspicious by [Vaishnavas](#) (devotees of god [Vishnu](#) and his [avatars](#) like Rama),<sup>[15][16]</sup> and *Dāsa*, which means *slave* or *servant* and by extension, *devotee*.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Sources

Tulsidas himself has given only a few facts and hints about events of his life in various works. Till late nineteenth century, the two widely known ancient sources on Tulsidas' life were the [Bhaktamal](#) composed by [Nabhadas](#) between 1583 and 1639, and a commentary on *Bhaktamal* titled *Bhaktirasbodhini* composed by Priyadas in 1712.<sup>[18]</sup> Nabhadas was a contemporary of Tulsidas and wrote a six-line stanza on Tulsidas describing him as an incarnation of Valmiki. Priyadas' work was composed around a hundred years after the death of Tulsidas and had eleven additional stanzas, describing seven miracles or spiritual experiences from the life of Tulsidas.<sup>[18]</sup> During the 1920s, two more ancient biographies of Tulsidas were published based on old manuscripts – the *Mula Gosain Charit* composed by Veni Madhav Das in 1630 and the *Gosain Charit* composed by Dasanidas (also known as Bhavanidas) around 1770.<sup>[18]</sup> Veni Madhav Das was a disciple and contemporary of Tulsidas and his work gave a new date for Tulsidas' birth. The work by Bhavanidas presented more narratives in greater detail as compared to the work by Priyadas. In the 1950s a fifth ancient account was published based on an old manuscript, the *Gautam Chandrika* composed by Krishnadatta Misra of Varanasi in 1624.<sup>[18]</sup> Krishnadatta Misra's father was a close companion of Tulsidas. The accounts published later are not considered authentic by some modern scholars, whereas some other scholars have been unwilling to dismiss them. Together, these five works form a set of traditional biographies on which modern biographies of Tulsidas are based.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Incarnation of Valmiki

He is believed by many to be a reincarnation of [Valmiki](#).<sup>[8]</sup> In the Hindu scripture [Bhavishyottar Purana](#), the god [Shiva](#) tells his wife [Parvati](#) how Valmiki, who received a boon from Hanuman to sing the glory of Rama in vernacular language, will incarnate in future in the [Kali Yuga](#) (the present and last [yuga](#) or epoch within a cycle of four yugas). Nabhadas writes in his *Bhaktamal* (literally, *the Garland of bhakt or devotee*) that Tulsidas was the re-incarnation of Valmiki in the Kali Yuga.<sup>[20][21][22][23]</sup> The [Ramanandi](#) sect believes that it was Valmiki himself who incarnated as Tulsidas in the Kali Yuga.<sup>[19]</sup>

According to a traditional account, Hanuman went to Valmiki numerous times to hear him sing the Ramayana, but Valmiki turned down the request saying that Hanuman being a monkey was unworthy of hearing the epic.<sup>[19]</sup> After the victory of Rama over [Ravana](#), [Hanuman](#) went to the Himalayas to continue his worship of Rama. There he scripted a play version of the Ramayana called *Mahanataka* or *Hanuman Nataka* engraved on the Himalayan rocks using his nails.<sup>[24]</sup> When Valmiki saw the play written by Hanuman, he anticipated that the beauty of the *Mahanataka* would eclipse his own Ramayana. Hanuman was saddened at Valmiki's state of mind and, being a true [bhakta](#) without any desire for glory, Hanuman cast all the rocks into the ocean, some parts of which are believed to be available today as *Hanuman Nataka*.<sup>[19][24]</sup> After this, Valmiki was instructed by Hanuman to take birth as Tulsidas and compose the Ramayana in the vernacular.

Tulsidas was born on [Saptami](#), the seventh day of [Shukla Paksha](#), the bright half of the lunar [Hindu calendar](#) month [Shraavana](#) (July–August).<sup>[25][26]</sup> This correlates with 11 August 1511 of the [Gregorian calendar](#). Although as many as three places are mentioned as his birthplace, most scholars identify the place with [Soron](#), [Kasganj district](#) in [Uttar Pradesh](#), a city on the banks of the river [Ganga](#). In 2012 [Soron](#) was declared officially by the government of Uttar Pradesh as the birthplace of Tulsidas.<sup>[1][19][27]</sup> His parents were Hulsī and Atmaram Dubey. Most sources identify him as a [Sanadhya Brahmin](#) of the [Bharadwaj Gotra](#) (lineage).<sup>[1][19][27]</sup> Tulsidas and [Sir George Grierson](#) give the year of his birth as Vikram 1568 (1511 CE).<sup>[1][28]</sup> These biographers include Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Ramghulam Dwivedi, James Lochtefeld, [Swami Sivananda](#) and others.<sup>[1][25][27]</sup> The year 1497 appears in many current-day biographies in India and in popular culture. Biographers who disagree with this year argue that it makes the life span of Tulsidas equal 126 years, which in their opinion is *unlikely if not impossible*. In contrast, Ramchandra Shukla says that an age of 126 is not impossible for a [Mahatma](#) (*great soul*) like Tulsidas. The [Government of India](#) and provincial governments celebrated the 500th birth anniversary of Tulsidas in the year 2011 CE, according to the year of Tulsidas' birth in popular culture.<sup>[1]</sup>

Legend goes that Tulsidas was born after staying in the womb for twelve months, he had all thirty-two teeth in his mouth at birth, his health and looks were like that of a five-year-old boy, and he did not cry at the time of his birth but uttered *Rama* instead.<sup>[27][29][30][31]</sup> He was therefore named *Rambola* (literally, *he who uttered Rama*), as Tulsidas himself states in [Vinaya Patrika](#).<sup>[32]</sup> As per the *Mula Gosain Charita*, he was born under the Abhuktamūla constellation, which according to [Hindu astrology](#) causes immediate danger to the life of the father.<sup>[30][31][33][34]</sup> Due to the inauspicious events at the time of his birth, he was abandoned by his parents on the fourth night, sent away with Chuniya (some sources call her Muniya), a female servant of Hulsī.<sup>[28][35][29]</sup> In his works *Kavitavali* and *Vinayapatrika*, Tulsidas attests to his parents abandoning him after birth due to an inauspicious astrological configuration.<sup>[23][36][37][38]</sup>

Chuniya took the child to her village of Haripur and looked after him for five and a half years, after which she died.<sup>[35][31][33]</sup> Rambola was left to fend for himself as an impoverished orphan, and wandered from door to door begging for alms.<sup>[28][31]</sup> It is believed that the goddess Parvati assumed the form of a Brahmin woman and fed Rambola every day.<sup>[29][30]</sup> or alternately, the disciple of Anantacharya.<sup>[31][33]</sup> Rambola was given the *Virakta Diksha* (Vairagi initiation) with the new name of Tulsidas.<sup>[35]</sup> Tulsidas narrates the dialogue that took place during the first meeting with his guru in a passage in the *Vinayapatrika*.<sup>[28][32]</sup> When he was seven years old, his [Upanayana](#) ("sacred thread ceremony") was performed by Narharidas on the fifth day of the bright half of the month of [Magha](#) (January–February) at [Ayodhya](#), a pilgrimage site related to Rama. Tulsidas started his learning at Ayodhya. After some time, Narharidas took him to a particular *Varaha Kshetra* [Soron](#) (a holy place with temple dedicated to [Varaha](#) – the boar avatar of Vishnu), where he first narrated the Ramayana to Tulsidas.<sup>[30]</sup> Tulsidas mentions this in the Ramcharitmanas.

Most authors identify the Varaha Kshetra referred to by Tulsidas with the Sookarkshetra is the [Soron](#) Varaha Kshetra in modern-day [Kasganj](#),<sup>[30]</sup> Tulsidas further mentions in the Ramcharitmanas that his guru repeatedly narrated the Ramayana to him, which led him to understand it somewhat.<sup>[29]</sup>

Tulsidas later came to the sacred city of Varanasi and studied [Sanskrit grammar](#), four [Vedas](#), six [Vedangas](#), Jyotisha and the six schools of [Hindu philosophy](#) over a period of 15–16 years from the guru Shesha Sanatana who was based at the Pancaganga Ghat in Varanasi.<sup>[35]</sup> Shesha Sanatana was a friend of Narharidas and a renowned scholar on literature and philosophy.<sup>[31][33][35][40]</sup>

## Marriage and renunciation

There are two contrasting views regarding the marital status of Tulsidas. According to the *Tulsi Prakash* and some other works, Tulsidas was married to Ratnavali on the eleventh day of the bright half of the [Kartik](#) month (October–November) in Vikram 1604 (1561 CE).<sup>[30]</sup> Ratnavali was the daughter of Dinbandhu Pathak, a Brahmin of the [Parashar gotra](#), who belonged to narayanpur village of [Gonda district](#).<sup>[35][41][42]</sup> They had a son named Tarak who died as a toddler.<sup>[42]</sup> Once when Tulsidas had gone to a Hanuman temple, Ratnavali went to her father's home with her brother. When Tulsidas learned of this, he swam across the Sarju river in the night to meet his wife.<sup>[41]</sup> Ratnavali chided Tulsidas for this, and remarked that if Tulsidas was even half as devoted to God as he was to her body of flesh and blood, he would have been redeemed.<sup>[35][43]</sup> Tulsidas left her instantly and left for the holy city of [Prayag](#). Here, he renounced the [grihastha](#) (householder's life) stage and became a [sadhu](#) (ascetic).<sup>[28][41]</sup>

Some authors consider the marriage episode of Tulsidas to be a later interpolation and maintain among that he was celibate.<sup>[31]</sup> These include Rambhadracharya, who cite two verses in the *Vinayapatrika* and *Hanuman Bahuka* that Tulsidas never married and was a sadhu from childhood.

After renunciation, Tulsidas spent most of his time at Varanasi, Prayag, Ayodhya, and Chitrakuta but visited many other nearby and far-off places. He travelled across India to many places, studying with different people, meeting saints and sadhus, and meditating.<sup>[44]</sup> The *Mula Gosain Charita* gives an account of his travels to the [four pilgrimages](#) of Hindus ([Badrinath](#), [Dwarka](#), [Puri](#) and [Rameshwaram](#)) and the [Himalayas](#).<sup>[44][45]</sup> He visited [Lake Manasarovar](#) in current-day [Tibet](#), where tradition holds he had [Darshan](#) (sight) of [Kakabhushundi](#),<sup>[46]</sup> the crow who is one of the four narrators in the *Ramcharitmanas*.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Darshan of Hanuman

Tulsidas hints at several places in his works, that he had met face to face with Hanuman and Rama.<sup>[44][48]</sup> The detailed account of his meetings with Hanuman and Rama are given in the *Bhaktirasbodhini* of Priyadas.<sup>[49]</sup> According to Priyadas' account, Tulsidas used to visit the woods outside Varanasi for his morning ablutions with a water pot. On his return to the city, he used to offer the remaining water to a certain tree. This quenched the thirst of a [Preta](#) (a type of ghost believed to be ever thirsty for water), who appeared to Tulsidas and offered him a boon.<sup>[49][50]</sup> Tulsidas said he wished to see Rama with his eyes, to which the Preta responded that it was beyond him. However, the Preta said that he could guide Tulsidas to Hanuman, who could grant the boon Tulsidas asked for. The Preta told Tulsidas that Hanuman comes everyday disguised as a leper to listen to his Katha, he is the first to arrive and last to leave.<sup>[44][49]</sup>

That evening Tulsidas noted that the first listener to arrive at his discourse was an old leper, who sat at the end of the gathering. After the Katha was over, Tulsidas quietly followed the leper to the woods. In the woods, at the spot where the [Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple](#) stands today,<sup>[44][51]</sup> Tulsidas firmly fell at the leper's feet, shouting "I know who you are" and "You cannot escape me".<sup>[44][49][50]</sup> At first the leper feigned ignorance but Tulsidas did not relent. Then the leper revealed his original form of Hanuman and blessed Tulsidas. When granted a boon, Tulsidas told Hanuman he wanted to see Rama face to face. Hanuman told him to go to Chitrakuta where he would see Rama with his own eyes.<sup>[44][46][49][50]</sup>

At the beginning of the *Ramcharitmanas*, Tulsidas bows down to a particular Preta and asks for his grace (*Ramcharitmanas*, Doha 1.7). According to Rambhadracharya, this is the same Preta which led Tulsidas to Hanuman.<sup>[51]</sup>

### Darshan of Rama

As per Priyadas' account, Tulsidas followed the instruction of Hanuman and started living in an Ashram at [Ramghat](#) in [Chitrakoot Dham](#). One day Tulsidas went to perform the [Parikrama](#) (circumambulation) of the [Kamadgiri](#) mountain. He saw two princes, one dark and the other fair, dressed in green robes pass by mounted on horsebacks. Tulsidas was enraptured at the sight, however he could not recognise them and took his eyes off them. Later Hanuman asked Tulsidas if he saw Rama and his brother [Lakshmana](#) on horses. Tulsidas was disappointed and repentful. Hanuman assured Tulsidas that he would have the sight of Rama once again the next morning.<sup>[44][46][51]</sup> Tulsidas recalls this incident in a song of the *Gitavali* and laments how "his eyes turned his own enemies" by staying fixed to the ground and how everything happened in a trice.<sup>[44]</sup>

On the next morning, Wednesday, the new-moon day of Magha, Vikram 1607 (1551 CE) or 1621 (1565 CE) as per some sources, Rama again appeared to Tulsidas, this time as a child. Tulsidas was making sandalwood paste when a child came and asked for a sandalwood [tilaka](#) (a religious mark on the forehead). This time Hanuman gave a hint to Tulsidas and he had a full view of Rama. Tulsidas was so charmed that he forgot about the sandalwood. Rama took the sandalwood paste and put a tilaka himself on his forehead and Tulsidas' forehead before disappearing. This famous incidence is described in the verse "चित्रकूट के घाट पर हुई संतन की भीर तुलसीदास चन्दन घिसे तिलक देते रघुबीर".<sup>[44][45][46][51]</sup>

In a verse in the *Vinayapatrika*, Tulsidas alludes to a certain "miracle at Chitrakuta", and thanks Rama for what he did for him at Chitrakuta.<sup>[52]</sup> Some biographers conclude that the deed of Rama at Chitrakuta referred to by Tulsidas is the Darshan of Rama.<sup>[44][51]</sup>

### Darshan of Yajnavalkya and Bharadvaja

In Vikram 1628 (1572 CE), Tulsidas left Chitrakuta for Prayag where he stayed during the [Magh Mela](#) (the annual festival in January). Six days after the Mela ended, he had the Darshan of the sages [Yajnavalkya](#) and [Bharadvaja](#) under a banyan tree.<sup>[46]</sup> In one of the four dialogues in the *Ramcharitmanas*, Yajnavalkya is the speaker and Bharadvaja the listener.<sup>[47]</sup> Tulsidas describes the meeting between Yajnavalkya and Bharadvaja after a Magha Mela festival in the *Ramcharitmanas*, it is this meeting where Yajnavalkya narrates the *Ramcharitmanas* to Bharadvaja.

Most stories about Tulsidas tend to be [apocryphal](#), and have been carried forward by word of mouth. None of them were related by Tulsi himself, thus making it difficult to separate fact from lore and fiction. In Priyadas' biography, Tulsidas is attributed with the power of working miracles.<sup>[20][54]</sup> In one such miracle, he is believed to have brought a dead Brahmin back to life.<sup>[54][55][56][57]</sup> While the Brahmin was being taken for cremation, his widow bowed down to Tulsidas who addressed her as *Saubhagyavati* (a woman whose husband is alive).<sup>[55]</sup> The widow told Tulsidas her husband had just died, so his words could not be true.<sup>[56]</sup> Tulsidas said that the word has passed his lips and so he would restore the dead man to life. He asked everyone present to close their eyes and utter the name of Rama. On doing so, the dead man was brought back to life. Also one who was with him for a certain period of their life received [moksha](#) (spiritual liberation) from [Maya](#) (illusory world).<sup>[55][56]</sup>

Tulsidas was acclaimed in his lifetime to be a reincarnation of Valmiki, the composer of the original *Ramayana* in Sanskrit.<sup>[58]</sup>



In another miracle described by Priyadas, the [Mughal](#) Emperor [Akbar](#) summoned Tulsidas on hearing of his bringing back a dead man to life.<sup>[54][55][59][60]</sup> Tulsidas declined to go as he was too engrossed in creating his verses but he was later forcibly brought before Akbar and asked to perform a miracle, which Tulsidas declined by saying "It's a lie, all I know is Rama.". The emperor imprisoned Tulsidas at [Fatehpur Sikri](#), saying "We will see this Rama."<sup>[60]</sup> Tulsidas refused to bow to Akbar and created a verse in praise of Hanuman, the *Hanuman Chalisa*, and chanted it for forty days.<sup>[61][62][page needed]</sup> Suddenly an army of monkeys descended upon the town and wreaked havoc in all corners of Fatehpur Sikri,<sup>[61]</sup> entering each home and the emperor's harem, scratching people, and throwing bricks from ramparts.<sup>[60]</sup> An old [Hafiz](#) told the emperor that this was the miracle of the imprisoned Tulsidas.<sup>[59]</sup> The emperor fell at Tulsidas' feet, released him, and apologised.<sup>[57]</sup> Tulsidas stopped the menace of monkeys and asked the emperor to abandon the place. The emperor agreed and moved back to Delhi.<sup>[54][55][59][60]</sup> Ever since Akbar became a close friend of Tulsidas and he also ordered a [firman](#) that followers of Rama, Hanuman, and other Hindus, were not to be harassed in his kingdom.<sup>[63][page needed]</sup>

Priyadas narrates a miracle of Tulsidas at Vrindavan, when he visited a temple of [Krishna](#).<sup>[57][64]</sup> When he began bowing down to the idol of Krishna, the [Mahant](#) of the temple named Parshuram decided to test Tulsidas. He told Tulsidas that he who bows down to any deity except their [Ishta Devata](#) (cherished form of divinity) is a fool, as Tulsidas' Ishta Devata was Rama.<sup>[64][65]</sup> In response, Tulsidas recited the following extemporaneously composed couplet:

Tulsidas started composing poetry in Sanskrit in Varanasi on the Pahlada Ghat. Tradition holds that all the verses that he composed during the day, would get lost in the night. This happened daily for eight days. On the eighth night, Shiva – whose famous [Kashi Vishwanath Temple](#) is located in Varanasi – is believed to have ordered Tulsidas in a dream to compose poetry in the vernacular instead of Sanskrit. Tulsidas woke up and saw both Shiva and Parvati who blessed him. Shiva ordered Tulsidas to go to Ayodhya and compose poetry in Awadhi. Shiva also predicted that Tulsidas' poetry would fructify like the [Sama Veda](#).<sup>[66]</sup> In the *Ramcharitmanas*, Tulsidas hints at having the Darshan of Shiva and Parvati in both dream and awakened state.<sup>[67]</sup>

Tulsidas is also credited with having composed a number of wise sayings and *dohas* containing lessons for life. A popular maxim among them is: Don't go there, even if a mountain of gold is showered ([Hindi](#): आवत ही हरसय नहीं, नैनन नहीं सनोह । तुलसी वहाँ न जाइये, चाहे कञ्चन बरसे मेर ॥ सिया पति राम चन्द्र जी की जय, जय जय बजरंगबली ।।, [romanized](#): *Aawat hi harshe nahin, nainan nahin saneh. Tulsi tahan na jaiye, chahe kanchan barse megh*, [lit.](#) 'A place where people are not happy or welcoming when you come, where their eyes have no affection for you').

In the year Vikram 1650 (1593 CE), Tulsidas started composing the *Ramcharitmanas* in Ayodhya on Sunday, [Ramnavami](#) day (ninth day of the bright half of the [Chaitra](#) month, which is the birthday of Rama). Tulsidas himself attests this date in the *Ramcharitmanas*.<sup>[68]</sup> He composed the epic over two years, seven months and twenty-six days, and completed the work in Vikram 1633 (1577 CE) on [Vivaha Panchami](#), which commemorates the wedding day of Rama and [Sita](#). Tulsidas came to Varanasi and recited the *Ramcharitmanas* to Shiva (Vishwanath) and Parvati ([Annapurna](#)) at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. A popular legend goes that the Brahmins of Varanasi, who were critical of Tulsidas for having rendered the Sanskrit Ramayana in the Awadhi, decided to test the worth of the work. A manuscript of the *Ramcharitmanas* was kept at the bottom of pile of Sanskrit scriptures in the sanctum sanctorum of the Vishvanath temple in the night, and the doors of the sanctum sanctorum were locked.