# Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation focuses on the two primary facets of Ram devotion in North India. The cult of Ram, which is not only central to the practice of modern Hinduism but is also the lynchpin of Hindu nationalist politics, emerged as a major devotional tradition in sixteenth century North India. The Ram tradition was propelled by two primary forces - the famous devotional composition of Tulsidas, the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the rapidly expanding monastic community, the Ramanandi sect. Modern scholarship on Ram devotion has either tended to treat each facet separately or has simply assumed that the text forms the theological core of the sect. My research shows that although text and sect emerged almost simultaneously in the sixteenth century, they represented distinct theologies until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when they were united under the patronage of a rising Hindu polity. My dissertation focuses on the earliest literary-theological link between the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the Ramanandi sect. Through a study of early sectarian commentaries, I show how the Ramanandis shaped the contours of the Ram tradition by incorporating their distinct theology into the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The sectarian adoption of the devotional text, and the spurt in the production of exegetical literature among other genres, highlights the centrality of literary cultures to the formation of the Ram devotional community in early modern North India. This project thus not only makes an intervention into the history of Ram devotion, but also has wider implications for the study of the formation of modern Hindu religious traditions.

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**Between Text and Sect:**
**Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram**

## Introduction

On December 6th 1992, the sixteenth century Babri mosque in the North Indian city of Ayodhya was attacked and demolished by a mob claiming the site as the birthplace of Ram. The incident resulted in widespread violence between Hindus and Muslims that continues to grip India to this day. With the destruction of the mosque, Ram came to occupy center stage in Indian politics - he can start riots and win elections. Ram has become the "face" of Hindu nationalism.

The Ram *kathā*, or the legend of Ram the prince of Ayodhya, is, of course, best known in Valmiki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*. Valmiki is known as the *ādi kavi* (the first poet of the Rāmāyaṇa tradition) and his *Rāmāyaṇa* is the earliest version of the legend. Since the composition of this work in the first few centuries of the Common Era, there have been numerous retellings, both in Sanskrit and in the many regional languages of India, so much so that it has become common to speak of the *Rāmāyaṇas* in the plural.[1] These renditions of the Ram *katha* have placed the legend in a variety of literary and religious contexts. Invariably, the Ram *katha* became central to the medieval devotional traditions known as *bhakti*.

*Bhakti* comes from the Sanskrit root *bhaj*, which means to share or participate. While the word is usually translated as "devotion", *bhakti* takes on a very specific meaning in that it comes to represent the cultivation of an intense and personal relationship between devotee and God.[2] Originating in South India, *bhakti* spread toward the North around the fifteenth century.

In North India, *bhakti* is usually divided into two streams, *saguṇ*, or iconic *bhakti* and *nirguṇ* or aniconic *bhakti*. *Sagun bhakti* in North India in primarily Vaishnava in nature, as it focuses mainly on the worship of the two major *avatars* or incarnations of Vishnu- Ram and Krishna. Devotion to Ram, however also crosses over into the *nirgun* stream, but the Ram that is the object of worship in this stream is without qualities and aniconic in nature.

Ram *bhakti* thus represents one of the major devotional streams, encompassing both *nirgun* and *sagun* traditions in North India.[3] While Sanskrit texts placing Ram as the object of worship and ritual started to emerge in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it was not until the sixteenth century that Ram

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[1] On the dating of the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Robert Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīkī: Bālakāṇḍa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 20-23. On the diversity of the Rāmāyaṇa tradition, see Paula Richman, ed., *Many Rāmāyaṇas Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[2] Recent scholarship has challenged the centrality of the "personal" in *bhakti*. See Christain Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[3] The two incarnations of Vishnu, Ram and Krishna, dominate the *sagun* (with attributes) devotional tradition.

*bhakti* truly became a popular tradition in the *sagun* context. This occurred with the composition of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Composed in 1574 in Avadhi by Tulsidas, the *Rāmcaritmānas* was the first authoritative rendition of the Ram *katha* into a vernacular language of the Gangetic plain of North India.[4] The text was commenced in Ayodhya and finished in Varanasi, where the poet Tulsidas spent the greater part of his life. The *Rāmcaritmānas* is also considered the quintessential text of Ram *bhakti* in North India, as it was the first North Indian vernacular work to place the Ram *katha* within a devotional framework. The text presents a "syncretic" view of some of the key factions / positions of contention within North Indian *bhakti* - Shaivism and Vaishnavism, and *nirgun* and *sagun bhakti*.

The text has been hailed as the 'Bible of North India' and was probably the most widely known text before the advent of print. The popularity and influence of this poetic work can be dated back to the poet's own lifetime when he was eulogized by his contemporary Nabhadas in the hagiographical compendium the *Bhaktamāl* (ca. 1600). In this work, Nabhadas praised Tulsidas as Valmiki incarnate.[5] Although Valmiki is still considered the *adikavi*, it is Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* that is identified as *the Rāmāyaṇa* in large parts of North India.

While Ram *bhakti* in North India is inevitably associated with this text and poet, there is another significant facet to this tradition - the Ramanandi *sampradāy* or sect.[6] The Ramanandi sect, which represents devotion to Ram, is the largest religious community of its kind in North India. The *sect* traces itself back to Swami Ramanand, a Vaishnavite saint belonging to the lineage of the eleventh century South Indian philosopher-theologian Ramanuja. Recent anthropological work has shown that the Ramanandi *sampraday* comprises three distinct groups of practitioners – *tyāgīs* (probably the earliest and "original" Ramanandis – also known as *bairāgīs*), *rasiks* (sixteenth century), and *nāgās* (eighteenth century).[7] Although the sect puts the dates of Ramanand as early as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the earliest historical evidence of a settled lineage of Vaishnavas tracing themselves back to Ramanand, emerges only in the sixteenth century. This occurred in the towns of Raivasa and Galta, close to present day Jaipur, in Rajasthan. The community of Ramanandi ascetics that settled here is now known as the *rasik* sampraday. The *rasiks*, or self-styled "connoisseurs" of Ram *bhakti* are the most articulate branch of the Ramanandi sect, with several works of devotional poetry, theology and ritual (in Sanskrit and in vernaculars of

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[4] An earlier Braj *bhāṣā* version was the *Rāmāyaṇ kathā* of Viṣṇudās, composed in 1442. See R.S. McGregor, "An Early Hindi (Brajbhāṣā) Version of the Ram Story," in *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India*, edited by Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991), 181-196.

[5] Nabhadas, *Śri Bhaktamāl*, with the commentary of Priyadas, ed. with sub-commentary by Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad Rupkala, 4th ed. (Lucknow: Tejkumar Press, 1962), 756.

[6] I translate *sampraday* as sect. However, this does not imply any schism from any central or original community.

[7] Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious Experience and Identity in Ayodhya* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Rajasthan) to their credit. The *Dhyanmanajri* of Agradas (sixteenth century) and the *Aṣṭayām* (sixteenth/early seventeenth century) are two such texts.

The *rasiks* were deeply influenced by the theology and practices of the major Krishna devotional traditions, in particular those of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas.[8] Their devotion was based thus on a theology in which Ram was worshipped as the exemplar of playfulness (*līlā puruṣottam*), engaged in eternal erotic sport that sustained the universe. They practiced a domesticated form of worship to the *yugal svarūp,* or the divine couple, Ram and his consort Sita. The devotional practices of the *rasiks* would also include elaborate *rās līlās* (plays) based on Ram's dalliances with Sita and their companions, all of which would be played out in an idealized and supramundane landscape called Saket. Thus, although both text and sect emerged almost simultaneously in the sixteenth century, the Ram *rasik* tradition that emerged in Rajasthan practiced a radically different form of Ram *bhakti* than that the one presented in Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*. However, both text and sect represent key facets of the Ram *bhakti* tradition.

Recent scholarship on the Ram *bhakti* tradition has tended to consider the *Rāmcaritmānas* as the "theological core" of the Ramanandi sect.[9] However, there has been no critical study on the relationship between text and sect and this assumption is at best ahistorical, if not revisionist. Although there is some evidence to show that the *rasik* Ramanandis in Rajasthan were aware of Tulsidas and his composition, this dissertation will argue that the Ramanandi interest in the *Rāmcaritmānas* can be located in the historical and political contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

By the late eighteenth century the etiolated Mughal Empire had made way for the rise of smaller regional Hindu kingdoms across North India. The *Rāmcaritmānas*, with its strong devotional ethos framed in an idealized vision of Hindu society and state, would have provided the ideal socio-political framework within which Hindu rulers could locate their temporal authority. By the early nineteenth century therefore, the Hindu courts of North India (such as Varanasi, Rewa, as well as Dumrao and Orccha) had become major centers of *Rāmcaritmānas* and possibly Ramanandi patronage, commissioning illustrated manuscripts and commentaries. The eighteenth century also saw the expansion of the Ramanandi sect from its centers in Rajasthan to new sites in the Gangetic plain and beyond. This movement was accompanied by the rediscovery of key sacred sites in the Ram tradition, such as Chitrakut, Janakpur (Nepal) and, of course, Ayodhya. With access to new sources of patronage, the Ramanandis began to establish their *maṭhs* or monasteries, and temples in these new areas. It is in this period that they also attached themselves to the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The earliest link between the Ramanandi *sampraday* and the *Rāmcaritmānas* is literary-theological, and is in the form of works of exegesis. These commentaries on the *Rāmcaritmānas* date to the early nineteenth century and the exegetes were

[8] The Gaudiya Vaishnava community traces itself to Chaitanya (1486-1534) and is centered on the worship of Radha and Krishna.

[9] van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 81-85.

initiates of the *rasik* branch of the Ramanandi sect. I study two of the earliest and most influential *rasik* commentaries in this dissertation.

My research thus seeks to fill a gap in the study of Ram *bhakti* by examining the link between its two major facets, the devotional text, the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the devotional community, the Ramanandi *sampraday* through a study of the early commentaries. This dissertation is therefore a study of the early modern reception of the text within the Ramanandi *sampraday* as it came into contact with the new socio-political realities of North India.

My dissertation also sheds new light on the emergence and advancement of the *Rāmcaritmānas* as *the* exemplary Hindu scripture in North India. While it is clear that the popularity and reach of the *Rāmcaritmānas* multiplied exponentially with the emergence of colonial interest in the mid to late nineteenth century, my research will show that interest in this text emerged in an earlier period, when the text became crucial to the expansion of the Ramanandi sect in North India, as well as to its links with the regional Hindu courts of North India. It was on he heels of this conjunction between text and sect (and courts) that colonial interest emerged.

This dissertation is divided into two main sections, each focusing on one of the two major facets of Ram *bhakti* in North India – the text and the sect. Section I will focus on the components of the text, the *Rāmcaritmānas*. In Chapter 1, I discuss the poet Tulsidas. In Chapter 2, I focus on the narrative and theological structure of the text, in order to lay the ground-work for the discussion of the theological shifts made by the Ramanandi commentators in Section II. Chapter 3 is a review of the scholarship on the *Rāmcaritmānas* and an attempt to how the text has been studied and interpreted in virtually every context except that of the largest Ram *bhakti sampraday*.

Section II focuses on the second facet of Ram *bhakti* in North India, the Ramanandi *sampraday* as well as two early *rasik* commentaries on the text. In Chapter 4, I discuss the Ramanandi sect, and trace its history up to the early twentieth century. Chapter 5 will discuss the first of the two earliest and most influential Rasik Ramanandi commentaries, the *Ānand laharī* (1808). The *Ānand laharī* is a lengthy and dense prose commentary by *mahant* Ramcharandas, an influential Ramanandi theologian who is credited with the expansion of the *rasik sampraday* in Ayodhya. This chapter will focus on one aspect of the commentary, the theology of sacred space in relation to Ayodhya. Chapter 6 will continue the discussion of the *Ānand laharī* by focusing on the theology of *bhakti rasa*. Chapter 7 will discuss the *Mānas mayaṅk* (1818), a verse commentary of approximately two thousand verses by Pandit Shivalal Pathak, also *rasik* Ramanandi. The focus of this short commentary is the use of *bhakti rasa*.

# Section I

# The Text

**Introduction**

It is traditional for any work of classical Indian literature to begin with at least one, if not a series of invocations to various divinities and/or more earthly patrons. Perhaps it is in observance of this very tradition that most modern scholarly studies of the *Rāmcaritmānas* invariably begin by invoking the enthusiastic endorsements of eminent British scholar-administrators and Indologists of the late nineteenth century. It would be in keeping with that tradition then to begin this chapter by quoting the words of two of the most famous students and scholars of the text, Sir George Abraham Grierson and Frederick S. Growse. Both Grierson and Growse were members of the Indian civil service and their contributions to the critical scholarship on the *Rāmcaritmānas* will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3. Sir George Grierson called Tulsidas "the greatest star in the firmament of mediæval Indian poetry."[10] No less hyperbolic, F.S. Growse proclaimed of Tulsidas's most famous composition, the *Rāmcaritmānas*, "The Hindi poem is the best and most trustworthy guide to the popular living faith of the Hindu race…"[11]

Grierson and Growse might have used hyperbolic language, but their faith in the text was by no means misplaced. The first three chapters of this dissertation, comprising Section I, are entirely devoted to the discussion of the first major and much celebrated component of Ram *bhakti* in North India, the *Rāmcaritmānas*. I begin, Chapter 1 of this section, with a discussion of the life of author of this work, the poet Tulsidas. I review some of the major themes in the life of the poet as described in early and key works of hagiographical literature dating to the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, as well as his own later poetic compositions. Throughout my discussion I will also highlight the involvement of the Ramanandi *sampraday* in the composition or patronage of such hagiographical texts. In Chapter 2, I will move on to discuss Tulsidas's magnum opus, the *Rāmcaritmānas*. I focus my attention on the narrative structure and more particularly, on the theology of the text in order to provide a basis for a discussion of the Ramanandi commentaries on the text in Section II. In Chapter 3, I will consider the emergence of modern critical interest in the text as well as some of the key traditions of textual interpretation, again, highlighting the involvement of the Ramanandi *sampraday* as and when relevant.

[10] George A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of India* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1889), 42.

[11] Frederick Salmon Growse, trans., *The Ramayana of Tulsidas* (Cawnpore: E. Samuel, 1891), i.

## Chapter 1
## Tulsidas: The life of a poet

While the allure of *bhakti*, for both scholar and devotee alike, lies primarily in the extraordinary poetry composed in this mode, the lives of its exemplary poets are also a source of endless fascination. Indeed it is virtually impossible to speak of one without the other. After all, it is in the devotional literature of India that we encounter most distinctly the note of the personal or the voice of the individual, as he or she forges a connection with a personal god. While the notion of the personal or individual voice in *bhakti* poetry is an exemplary feature of such literature, it is usually mediated through the voice of the poet. Whether it is Tulsidas or Kabir, Mira or Surdas, the most famous quartet of North Indian *bhakti* poets, each name calls to mind a unique voice - the plain speaking and irascible voice of Kabir, the plaintive pleas of Mira, each is instantly recognizable. While this kind of poetic "voice" might be qualitative and subtle, the presence of the poet also makes itself felt in more tangible ways in *bhakti* poetry.

It is in the literature of *bhakti* that the poetic signature, known as the *chāp* or seal, makes a widespread appearance.[12] In an essay based on North Indian *bhakti* literature, Jack Hawley argued that these 'signatures' were much more than simple signifiers of authorship. They were used instead to invoke the spiritual "authority" associated with the most famous *bhakti* poets.[13] The *chap* of Kabir or Mira, for instance, was in use long after the lifetime of these poets. Using the *chap* of Kabir or Mira allowed later poets to anchor their compositions not only to the spiritual authority that these names invoked, but also to their charisma.[14] The authority and charisma behind the names of the major *bhakti* poets flows in large part from the legends associated with them, for the *chap,* according to Hawley, "anchors a poem to a life, a personality…"[15] These legends were collected in the hagiographical literature of the period.[16]

As part of the devotional culture of North India, hagiographies emerged as a popular genre of literature across the various *bhakti* traditions of North India

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[12] The *chap* typically appears in the last lines of a verse and takes various forms, for example, *kahat Kabir* (thus says Kabir), or *Mira ke prabhu* (Meera's lord).

[13] John S. Hawley, "Author and Authority in the *Bhakti* Poetry of North India," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47:2 (1988), 272-90. Hawley's understanding of authorship has recently been extended by Christian Lee Novetzke to the notion of "corporate authorship" based on his research on the Marathi *kirtan* tradition associated with Namdev. See "Divining an Author: The Idea of Authorship in an Indian Religious Tradition" *History of Religions,* Vol. 41, No. 3 (February 2003), 213-242.

[14] An important collection of essays edited by Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof examines the role of charisma (in conjunction with the notion of canon) in the religious traditions of South Asia. See *Charisma and Canon: Essays of the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). The keynote essay by Heinrich von Stietencron "Charisma and Canon: The Dynamics of Legitimization and Innovation in Indian Religions", 14-38, deals specifically with the notion of charisma.

[15] John S. Hawley, "Author and Authority," 287.

[16] Steven Rosen has discussed the appropriateness of the term 'hagiography' in the context of the religious traditions of India. See "Introduction," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* vol. 1 (1993): 1-2.

in the seventeenth century. Some of the major hagiographies to emerge in the this period included the *Bhakatanāmāvalī* of Dhruvdas (Radha Vallabh *sampraday*, early seventeenth century), the *Bhaktamāl* of Raghavdas (Dadu Panthi *sampraday*, 1660), and the *Paracais* of Anantadas (Ramanandi, n.d.), which recorded the lives of *nirgun sant* poets such as Kabir and Raidas. Another major hagiography was Gokulnath's *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* (1620), which recorded the lives of devotees belonging to the Pushtimarg *sampraday*. Sikh hagiographies, known as the *Janam Sākhīs* recount tales from the life of Guru Nanak (early seventeenth century onwards).[17] It is to such hagiographical literature that we now turn, if not to glean historically verifiable details about Tulsidas's life, but to learn how the poet is remembered by the community of devotees who venerate him.

Although there is no absolute certainty about Tulsidas's dates, scholars have generally accepted 1532 C.E. as the most likely birth date.[18] Details about his place of birth and early life are also scant, as we will see. While many regions in present day Uttar Pradesh such as Ayodhya, Varanasi, Rajapur and Soron, to name only a few, have been put forward as a likely birthplace, these suggestions can only remain in the realm of speculation.[19] Unfortunately, Tulsidas's poetry does not offer many clues about such details. It is clear, however, that Tulsidas did spend a large part of his life in Varanasi, where he died in 1623 C.E. A popular, though apocryphal, verse declares:

> *saṃbata soraha sau asī asī gaṅga ke tīra /*
> *śrāvaṇa śyāma tīja śani tulasī tajyau śarīra //*[20]
>
> In *vikram samvat* 1680 (1623 C.E.) on Assi ghat on the banks of the Ganga, in the month of *shravan*, on the third day of the lunar fortnight, on a Saturday, Tulsidas abandoned his body.[21]

**Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl***

One of the earliest references to Tulsidas and his major composition, the *Rāmcaritmānas*, occurs in a brief verse in the important Vaishnava hagiography, the *Bhaktamāl* or 'The Garland of Devotees'.[22] This work was composed in the

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[17] A collection of essays edited by Winand M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell discusses the hagiographical literature of India. The essays in this volume have a wide focus across sectarian and regional divides. *According to Tradition: Hagiographical writing in India*. (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994).

[18] Various other dates in contention are discussed in Mataprasad Gupta, *Tulsidās: Ek samālocanātmak adhyayan* (Allahabad: Hindi Parishad, 1965), 142-144.

[19] Ibid., 144-161.

[20] This verse is attributed to the *Gosāīṃ carit* of Bhavanidas, which will be discussed below.

[21] All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[22] The standard work of scholarship on this text is in Hindi. See, Narendra Jha, *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan evam vivecan* (Patna: Anupam Prakashan, 1978).

early seventeenth century by Nabhadas, a resident of the Ramanandi *maṭh*, or monastery, in Galta, which is on the outskirts of present day Jaipur in Rajasthan. Nabhadas was a protégé and disciple of Agradas, the founding *mahant,* or abbot of the Galta Ramanandi *math* in Rajasthan.[23] Although it is unclear whether Nabhadas was ever actually initiated into the order, he is generally considered a Ramanandi within the tradition.[24] While Nabhadas is also considered the author of two other ritual Ramanandi texts known as *Aṣṭayām*, one in Braj *bhasha* prose and one in verse, his most famous composition is the *Bhaktamāl*.

This work of hagiographical literature consists of two hundred and fourteen Braj *bhasha* verses, largely in the quasi-hexametric *chappai* metrical format.[25] The work chronicles the devotion of ordinary *bhakts* (the laity) along with that of the founders and initiates of the major monastic orders in North India.[26] Nabhadas also discusses both Shaiva and Vaishnava devotees in his work, and thus presents an expansive vision of religious communities. This work quickly became the paradigmatic hagiography, with many subsequent hagiographers incorporating the word 'Bhaktamāl' into their titles as a generic term to indicate the nature of their work.[27]

In the *Bhaktamāl*, Nabhadas devotes one verse to Tulsidas:

*kali kutila jīva nistāra hita bālamīka tulasī bhayau/*
*tretā kabya nibandha kariva sata koti ramāyana/*

---

[23] I will discuss the importance of this *math* further in Chapter 2. For details about the history of the Galta math, see Monika Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan,* ed. Lawrence A. Babb, Varsha Joshi and Michael Meister (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 141-197.

[24] According to Priyadas, who wrote the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* commentary, Agradas and Kilhadev, two Ramanandi ascetics, came across an abandoned and blind infant boy in a forest during a time of great famine. Taking pity on the child, Kilhadev sprinkled water onto the boy's eyes, granting him earthly and divine vision. They subsequently took him with them to the monastery in Galta, where he was known as Nabhadas. Priyadas also tells us that the child devoted himself to the service of the ascetics, eating their leftover food. See Sitaramshran Bhagvanprasad Rupkala, *Śrī Bhaktamāl* (Lucknow: Tejkumar Press Book Depot, 2001), 41-42. The fluctuating position of Nabhadas within the Ramanandi community vis-à-vis his composition of the *Bhaktamāl* is examined in William Pinch's essay, "History, Devotion and the search for Nabhadas of Galta" in *Invoking the Past*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 367-399.

[25] Of the two hundred and fourteen verses in the *Bhaktamāl*, there are one hundred and ninety five *chappais*, nineteen *dohās* and one *kuṇḍaliyā*. Of the two hundred and fourteen verses, one hundred and seventy six verses are in praise of devotees of the *kali* age, and twenty-two are in praise of devotees belonging to the previous three ages (*satya*, *treta* and *dvapara* ages). The remaining sixteen verses introduce and conclude the work. For an introduction to Braj *bhasha* prosody, see Rupert Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhāṣā Reader* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991).

[26] The term *bhakta* is used in here the generic sense to mean devotee and Nabhadas often uses the terms *bhakta* and *sant* interchangeably. It has been argued that the distinction between *bhakta* (representing the *sagun* tradition) and *sant* (representing the *nirgun* tradition) did not emerge till later. See Karine Schomer, "The Sant Tradition in Perspective," in *The Sants*, edited by Karine Schomer (Berkeley: Religious Studies Series, 1987), 3.

[27] See Kailash Chandra Sharma, *Bhaktamāl aur hindi sāhitya meṃ uskī paramparā* (Rohtak, Haryana: Manthan Publications, 1983).

*ika akṣara uddharaiṃ brahmahatyādi parāyana//*
*aba bhaktani sukhadaina bahurilīlā bisatārī/*
*Ramcarana rasa matta raṭata aha nisi bratadhārī//*
*saṃsāra apāra kepara ko sugama rūpa navakā layau/*
*kali kutila jīva nistāra hita bālmīka tulasī bhayau//*
(129)

To help individuals surmount the ordeals of the Kali age, Valmiki took the form of Tulsi. In the *treta* age (Valmiki) fashioned one hundred crore tales of Ram, in prose and verse, each syllable of which saves (even those) absorbed in (great sins such as) brahminicide. Now (in this age) to please devotees he told many tales. (Like a bee) maddened by the nectar of Ram's (lotus) feet, this taker of vows repeats (Ram's name) day and night. To cross the difficult (ocean) of existence, (he) took this easy boat. To help individuals surmount the ordeals of the Kali age, Valmiki took the form of Tulsi.

Although Nabhadas was undoubtedly a contemporary of Tulsidas, his verse reveals frustratingly little.[28] As a verse it is rather unremarkable, and the imagery is fairly conventional. While it is tempting to attribute the image of Tulsidas as a bee rendered intoxicated by the nectar of Ram's lotus feet to Nabhadas's connection with the *rasik* Ramanandis, it is a fairly standard image and doesn't get us any further with Tulsidas's biography or his sectarian affiliation, if any. What is clear, however, is that the fame of Tulsidas's composition had spread as far West as Rajasthan, lending credence to the well-known claim that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was the most widely known text in North India before the advent of print. To consider Tulsidas the *kali* age incarnation of Valmiki in less than two decades of the composition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* (commenced in 1584) is certainly telling. However, this single verse in Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl* leaves us with more questions than answers. Did Nabhadas know the *Rāmcaritmānas* only by reputation, or was he familiar with the text? How did the text reach Galta? How well was it known there? Did the text find a place in Ramanandi theology or liturgy? These questions remain to be answered.

Interestingly, Tulsidas himself seems to be aware of his fame as Valmiki incarnate and makes a self-deprecating reference to it in the *Kavitāvalī*, a compilation of verses in Braj *bhasha*.[29] In this composition, Tulsidas says:

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[28] Economy of verse is a feature of the entire work, and not limited to the verse dedicated to Tulsidas alone. George Grierson, who relied greatly on the *Bhaktamāl* for information on the *bhakti* period, its poets and communities, considered this a deliberate stylistic conceit, with "every possible superfluous word being omitted, and every epithet being intended as the clue to some legend not otherwise recorded". See "Gleanings from the Bhakta-mala" *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic* (1909): 608. This concision, according to Grierson, was what made possible the expanded exegetical commentaries that were to soon emerge, the most important of these commentaries being that of Priyadas (The *Bhaktirasabodhini ṭīkā*, 1712) and that of Sitaramsharan Bhagvanprasad 'Rupkala' (The *Bhaktisudhāsvād tilak*, 1903-1909).

[29] Citations from all works of Tulsidas apart from the *Rāmcaritmānas* are taken from the *Tulsī granthāvalī*, ed. Ramchandra Shukla. 4 vols. (Varanasi: Nagri Pracharini Sabha, 1973-77).

*ramanāma ko prabhāu pāu mahimā pratāpa*
*tulasī se jaga maniyata mahāmuni so/*
*atihi abhāgo anurāgata na rāma pada*
*mūḍha eto baḍo acaraja dekhi suni so //*

(7.72.2)

The power of Ram's name is such that I gained fame glory.
The world believes that I, Tulsidas, am the great sage (Valmiki).
After seeing or hearing such a great miracle as this,
any fool who is not devoted to Ram's feet is indeed most unfortunate.

While it might be tempting to conclude that Tulsidas's reference to being compared to Valmiki could be based on Nabhadas's panegyrical verse in the *Bhaktamāl,* we can, of course, by no means be certain of this. He was certainly aware of the reputation he had acquired, either through this text or otherwise. How well the *Bhaktamāl* was known in the areas of Uttar Pradesh is another question that remains to be answered. However, we might perhaps conjecture that texts such as the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the *Bhaktamāl* were in circulation, if not in written form, conceivably at least in oral form, between areas as far apart as Galta in Rajasthan and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.[30] We might go further to surmise that members of the Ramanandi *sampraday* were traveling between these areas, carrying with them information about new works of literature, if not the texts themselves. However, we have yet to understand the position of the Ramanandi sect in Varanasi and the rest of present day Uttar Pradesh in the seventeenth century.

Another point of significance in the *Bhaktamāl* verse lies in a silence. Nabhadas does not include Tulsidas within any of the lineages of the Ramanandi religious community. Nabhadas was clearly sensitive to both the concerns of *sampraday* in general, and to those of the Ramanandi *sampraday* in particular.[31] After all, his work not only contains one the earliest (if not *the* earliest) literary reference to the *catuḥ sampraday*, or the four sect, model of Vaishnavism for North India, but also contains the famous legend of Kabir's initiation by Ramanand, which brought Kabir into the Ramanandi *sampraday*.[32] It is important, therefore,

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[30] Based on these verses from the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Kavitāvalī*, it is certainly tempting to imagine, at the very least, some sort of reciprocity of reference between Nabhadas and Tulsidas. Commentators of the *Bhaktamāl*, beginning with Priyadas, would go on to actually concoct a meeting between the two figures. I discuss this meeting in the section below on the *Bhaktirasabodhinī ṭīkā*.

[31] I will discuss the treatment of the Ramanandi community in the *Bhaktamāl* further in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

[32] Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl* is the perhaps the earliest text to mention the *catuh sampraday* system. The four-fold organization of North Indian Vaishnava communities comprised the Ramanandis (Shri *sampraday*), the Nimbarkis (Sanakadi *sampraday*), the Vishnuswamis (Rudra *sampraday*) and the Madhvas (Brahma *sampraday*). The Madhvas (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) are an exclusively South Indian sect (belonging to Udupi in Karnataka). Nothing is known about Vishnuswami or the community he founded. Nimbarka (thirteenth century?), from the Andhra Pradesh area, founded his sect in Vrindavan in North India. The Śhri *sampradaya*, founded by

to take note of and underscore Nabhadas's silence on any affiliation between the Ramanandis and Tulsidas. While the *Bhaktamāl* does not seem to have a sectarian agenda, it is important to remember that it was composed at the Ramanandi *math* in Galta, under the patronage of its *mahant*. We might conclude therefore, that in the early seventeenth century, while the Ramanandi community in Galta, might have been aware of, and even familiar with Tulsidas and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, it felt no need to claim the poet or the text as one of its own. This early silence on Tulsidas's position within the Ramanandi community is noteworthy in light of later sectarian hagiographies such as the *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl* (1839), which would effect ingenious twists in the Ramanandi lineages to incorporate Tulsidas into the community.[33]

**Priyadas's *Bhaktirasabodhinī ṭīkā***

The next layer of information about Tulsidas comes from the *Bhaktirasabodhinī ṭīkā*, Priyadas's commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* (1712 C.E.). Priyadas's sectarian affiliation was Gaudiya Vaishnava, but his commentary quickly became the standard work of exegesis on the *Bhaktamāl*.[34] Priyadas's commentary consists of six hundred and thirty *kavitta* verses in Braj *bhasha*. More specifically for our purposes, this work of exegesis came to constitute the standard body of knowledge about Tulsidas, at least until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his commentary, Priyadas added seven legends in *kavitta* form as the gloss to Nabhadas's single verse on Tulsidas. I discuss these by theme, and not in order of appearance.

The first two verses describe Tulsidas's awakening to Ram *bhakti*. In the first verse, Priyadas describes Tulsidas as a rather uxorious husband who, unable to bear the separation, follows his wife to her parents' house while she is making a customary visit. Later versions embellish this journey and highlight his fervor to reach his wife by adding gory details such as Tulsidas's clinging to a floating corpse in order to cross a swollen river, and climbing up to his wife's window on a huge serpent that he has mistaken for a rope.[35] When he finally reaches his wife's maternal house, she is not pleased to receive him. Embarrassed by his ardor, she chastises him saying, "Have you no love for Ram? My body is but

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Ramanuja (eleventh and twelfth centuries), is known as the Ramanandi community in North India and the Shri Vaishnanva community in South India. In North India, the system of these four *sampradays* survives in modified forms as various devotional communities claim to be direct inheritors of the 'original' four. The Chaitanya Gaudiya community traces itself back to Madhva. The Pushtimarg sect of Vallabha claims to be the inheritor of the Vishnuswami tradition and the Ramanandis claim to be the spiritual descendants of Ramanuja, and therefore, align themselves with the Śhri *sampraday*.

[33] I will discuss the *Rasik prakāś bhakatamāl* in Chapter 5.

[34] Priyadas begins his commentary with an invocation to Krishna Chaitanya. For more details of the author of the sub-commentary, see R.D. Gupta, "Priyā Dās: Author of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32, no. 1 (1969): 57-70.

[35] This recalls the famous *rajju sarpa nīti,* or the analogy of the serpent and the rope, commonly used to explain the concept of *māya* in the *advaita* context.

flesh and bone."[36] Tulsidas experiences an awakening (literally, "*māno hoya gayo prāta"* or "it was as if daybreak") and hastens to Kashi (Varanasi) where he devotes himself to the worship of Ram and longs to be granted a *darśan* (vision).

Tulsidas's first vision of Ram and Lakshman comes through the good offices of a friendly spirit or ghost who is grateful to Tulsidas for leaving him the remainder of the water he has used for his ablutions. The ghost tells Tulsidas to appeal to Hanuman who attends every *Rāmāyaṇ katha* disguised as a poor man. The ghost advises Tulsidas on how to recognize him– Hanuman would be the first person to arrive and the last to leave. Tulsidas follows this advice and seeks out Hanuman. He then convinces Hanuman of his great devotion to Ram and begs him for a *darshan*. Hanuman then names a place where Tulsidas is to wait for his *darshan* of Ram. When Ram and Lakshman do come, they arrive on horseback disguised as hunters and Tulsidas, in his impatience, fails to recognize them. Hanuman then returns to instruct Tulsidas on how to recognize Ram. Both these legends address a common *bhakti* trope about vision. While Surdas, the blind poet, could "see" Krishna, Tulsidas even with his visual faculties intact needs instruction (from his wife, the ghost and Hanuman) on how to see; he has to cultivate his vision. *Bhakti*, therefore, is not just a spontaneous emotion; it has to be learned and cultivated, even by Tulsidas.

In verse four, thieves arrive at Tulsidas's house at night but are repelled by a dark-skinned young man with his bow drawn. The thieves make several attempts to rob Tulsidas, but are constantly repelled by the young guard's vigilance. Finally, exhausted by their repeated failure, they approach Tulsidas at daybreak and, confessing their intent to rob him, ask him about his young guardian. Tulsidas immediately realizes that the young guard is none other than Ram. Overcome with gratitude and shame, Tulsidas gives away all his wealth in order to spare Ram the trouble of protecting it. Witnessing this great love between Ram and his devotee, the thieves too give up their evil ways and are given *dīkṣā* or initiation by Tulsidas. This legend exemplifies another familiar *bhakti* trope of god laboring on behalf of his devotee.[37]

The seventh and final verse describes a meeting between Tulsidas and Nabhadas in Vrindavan. When Tulsidas is taken to visit the famous shrine of Madan Gopal, he expresses the desire to his *iṣṭa devatā,* his desired or favorite divinity, and the Krishna idol is transformed into that of Ram. Ram then tells Tulsidas that the Krishna avatar, or incarnation, is the greatest and that he was only an *aṃśāvatār*, a partial incarnation. This last verse clearly reflects the sectarian bias of the commentator Priyadas, who is keen to establish that the greatest poet of Ram *bhakti* has conceded the superiority of the Krishna avatar, after being told so by Ram himself.

Verse six describes a confrontation with a figure of temporal authority – that of an anonymous emperor of Delhi (*dillipati patsaha)*. When the emperor hears of Tulsidas resurrecting the Brahmin he sends officers to fetch him to court where he is received graciously and honored. The emperor speaks of Tulsidas's fame and asks him to perform a miracle. When Tulsidas refuses, claiming any and all power rests with Ram, the emperor has him thrown in prison. Tulsidas

[36] *prīti rām nahīṃ tana hāḍa cāma chāye haiṃ |*

[37] In a similar legend, Ram weaves the cloth Kabir has forgotten, saving his family from starvation.

prays to Hanuman and the city of Delhi is immediately besieged by an army of marauding monkeys. Desperate, the emperor appeals to Tulsidas who stops the assault. Tulsidas then tells the emperor that Delhi has become Ram's abode (*Rāmju kau ghara*) and to leave immediately. The emperor does so, building himself a new fort. Although this verse has been read as a victory of Ram devotees over Muslim oppression, the legend is really about the triumph of devotion over earthly/royal authority. The emperor here is generic – he is anonymous, and neither Hindu nor Muslim.[38]

Before we leave the legends of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* there are two more important verses to discuss. Verses three and five describe the tension between Tulsidas's Ram *bhakti* and a different kind of authority, customary Brahmanical practice and power. I will discuss these verses at some length in order to highlight the tension between the hagiographic accounts of Tulsidas's confrontation with Brahmanical authority and his perpetuation of the same in his poetry.

In verse three, a murderer of a Brahmin arrives in Varanasi seeking alms and chanting the name of Ram.[39] While everyone shuns him, Tulsidas invites him to his house and offers him *prasād*. The outraged Brahmins of Varanasi summon Tulsidas to a conclave (*Brahma sabhā*) and demand an explanation. Tulsidas explains that while they might be well versed with the holy books, they have understood nothing and remain blind to god. The Brahmins are disturbed; they go back to their texts and find that the power of the name (Ram *nām*) is indeed potent, but remain unconvinced that it can cleanse one of the sin of murdering a Brahmin. In order to test the power of the name, the Brahmins device a test – if Shiva's bull Nandi will accept offerings from the hands of the murderer, he would indeed be considered redeemed and accepted into their society. Nandi duly accepts the offerings and Tulsidas stands vindicated. In verse five, Tulsidas encounters a Brahmin woman who is following her husband's corpse to the funeral pyre in order to commit *sati*. Tulsidas fails to notice the funeral procession and blesses her as a *suhāgavatī* (married woman). When the woman explains her situation to him, Tulsidas decides to fulfill the import of his words. He promises to restore the woman's husband to life if she and her entire family pledge their lives to the devotion of Ram. Thus, these two verses speak to the power of Ram *bhakti* – true devotion to Ram can redeem the worst of sinners and even raise the dead. In these legends Tulsidas challenges the established Brahmanical conventions regarding commensality and *sati* through the power of his devotion to Ram, though never quite deposing them entirely.

Another famous legend of Tulsidas's resistance (not in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*) to the orthodoxy of the Brahmins of Varanasi centers on the *Ramcaritmānas* itself, in particular, on the language in which the text was composed. The Brahmins challenge Tulsidas's right to render the Ram *katha* into *bhasha* (vulgar tongue, or the vernacular) and Shiva himself is enlisted as arbiter. The *Rāmcaritmānas* is placed at the bottom of a pile of Sanskrit texts inside the

[38] Kumkum Sangari has written on the ambiguity in the identification of Akbar as a Hindu and/or Muslim emperor. See "Tracing Akbar: Hagiographies, Popular Narrative Traditions and the Subject of Conversion," in *Mapping Histories: Essays presented to Ravinder Kumar*, ed. Neera Chandhoke (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 61-103.

[39] *Brahmahatyā*, or the murder of a Brahmin is considered one of the greatest *pāpas* or sins.

sanctum of the Vishvanath temple and locked for the night. When the sanctum is opened the following morning, the *Rāmcaritmānas* has risen to the top.[40] In some versions, the words '*satyam śivam sundaram*' (truth, auspiciousness, beauty) appear on the top page. Yet another version has the Brahmins of Varanasi flinging the text of the *Rāmacaritmānas* (weighted down with metal chains and heavy stones) into the Ganga as a trial of its worthiness. The text of course floats to the top untouched by the water, presumably with the blessing of the Ganga. These legends speak to the antagonism that Tulsidas faced in the wake of his daring to render the Ram *katha* into the vernacular. The one exception to Brahamnical opposition to Tulsidas in Varanasi might have been the famous scholar of *advaita*, Madhusudhan Saraswati, who would have been a contemporary of the poet. However, the verse attributed to him might be apocryphal:

*ānandakānane kaśyāṃ tulasī jaṅgamastaruḥ/*
*kavitāmañjarī yasya rāmabhramarabhūṣitā//*

In the pleasure groves of Kashi, Tulsidas is a moving tree
whose poem in the form of a creeper is adorned by the bee that is Ram.

Confrontation with authority, whether that authority is patriarchal (in the case of Mira) or royal (Kabir, Tulsidas), is central to the charisma of the *bhakti* poets, but in Tulsidas's case, his antagonism with Brahmanical norms reflects a very real tension in his work. While he challenges Brahmanical authority by daring to write the *Rāmcaritmānas* in Avadhi, and by championing the power of *bhakti* over all other paths, he also conforms to its conventions and rules. The devotional thrust of Tulsidas's work is undeniably contained within the framework of the traditional social order of *varṇāśrama dharma*, the order of castes and stages of life. Although Tulsidas's many confrontations with Brahmanical conventions is central to the construction of his charisma, he is also considered, in the words of David Lorenzen, "the maximum champion of a conservative interpretation of *varṇāśrama dharma* within the *saguṇī* camp".[41] The *Rāmcaritmānas* is also usually considered to be the *bhakti* text that epitomizes the values of Brahmanical orthodoxy. Detractors often cavil at the work for its conservative orientation on the strength of few revealing verses. One favorite verse of *Rāmcaritmānas* detractors that is usually quoted out of context is:

*ḍhol gavāṃr sūdra pasu nārī / sakala tāḍanā ke adhikārī //*
(5.59.3)

[40] John S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 160.

[41] David Lorenzen, "The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion" in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 14.

Drums, rustics, *shudras*, cattle and women, all these deserve to be beaten.[42]

This verse occurs in the *Sundar kāṇḍ*. When repeated requests for help in transporting his army across to Lanka are ignored by Sagara, the lord of the ocean, Ram loses his temper and threatens to dry up the ocean unless he receives Sagara's cooperation. Sagara then emerges from the ocean and tried to propitiate Ram. The verse quoted above is uttered in contrition by Sagara. There are other verses in which the poet himself celebrates the upholding of the traditional social order. When Ram is consecrated as king in the *Uttar kāṇḍ* of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsidas begins his description of his reign, *Ram rājya*, as follows:

*baranāśrama nija nija dharama nirata beda patha loga /*
*calahiṃ sadā pāvahiṃ sukhahi nahiṃ bhaya soka na roga //*
(7.20)

With each person devoted to his duty in accordance with his *varna* and his stage of life, people constantly followed the path of the Vedas. They enjoyed happiness and knew neither fear nor sorrow nor disease.

Ram rajya rests on the foundation of Vedic practice and *varnashrama dharma*; the maintenance of this order results in moral and material prosperity and well being.[43] The destruction of these leads to chaos, the antithesis of Ram *rajya* – to the age of *kali*. Describing this in the *Kavitāvalī*, he says:

*barana dharama gayo āsrama nivāsa tajyo*
*trāsana cakita so parāvano paroso hai/*
*karama upāsanā kuvāsana bināsyo gñāna*
*vacana birāga beṣa jagata haro so hai //*
(7.84.1)

The law of *varna* is gone, the life of the *ashramas* has been abandoned,
petrified with fear, like fugitives they have fled.
Base desires have destroyed good deeds and service and wisdom,
dispassion has become a mere word as the world has put on this guise.

While there is happiness and prosperity within the norms of *varnashrama*, without it, the world to Tulsidas is in disorder and therefore, hard to navigate. The poet seems deeply disturbed by the collapse of social order around him. [44]

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[42] I am always struck by the similarity of this line to the sixteenth century English saying, "The dog, the woman and the walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be."

[43] For a more details on the notion of Ram *rajya* in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, see Philip Lutgendorf, "Interpreting Rāmrāj: Reflections on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Bhakti and Hindu Nationalism," in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 253-287.

[44] This verse is part of a lengthier description of the *kali* age, which seems to preoccupy Tulsidas not only in the *Rāmcaritmānas* but also in his other works.

The tone of the *Kavitāvalī* verse is one of overwhelming melancholy and despair. Now consider the following verse from the *Rāmcaritmānas:*

*svapaca sabara khasa jamana jaḍa pāṃvara kola kirāta /*
*rāmu kahata pāvana parama hota bhuvana bikhyāta //*
(2. 194)

Uttering the name of Ram, even a pariah, a *shabara*, a *khasi*, a stupid *yavana* and a vile kola or *kirata* become supremely sanctified and renowned throughout the world.

On the surface, this first verse seems to be offering Ram *bhakti* as way out of a host of lowborn states. It certainly conveys the power of Ram's name to sanctify even the most vile and lowborn.[45] But there is no sense that 'vile kola' or the 'stupid *yavana'* can ever fully transcend his status; he simply goes from being a 'vile kola' to a renowned kola or a renowned *yavana*. It also must be said that the poet seems to take a certain pleasure in cataloguing the various lowborn states as reflected in the rhythmic cadence of the first line.

Now consider the following verses that describe two separate episodes from the *Araṇya kāṇḍ*, and that seem to contradict each other. The first:

*sunu gandharba kahauṃ maiṃ tohi / mohi na sohāi brahmakula drohi/*
(3.33.4b)

*mana krama vacana kapaṭa taji jo kara bhūsura seva /*
*mohi sameta biranci siva basa tākeṃ saba deva //*
(3.33)

*sāpata tāḍata paruṣa kahṃtā / bipra pūjya asa gāvahiṃ santā /*
*pūjia bipra sīla guna hīnā / sūdran na guna gana gyāna prabīna //*
(3. 34.1)

Listen O Gandharva to my words. I cannot tolerate an enemy of the Brahmins.

Forsaking guile in thoughts, words and deeds, he who does service to the gods on earth (Brahmins) wins over Brahma, Shiva, and myself along with all the other divinities.

Although he curse you, beat you, speak harshly to you, a Brahmin is still worthy of reverence, so sing the holy men. A Brahman must be respected though he lack amiability and virtue. Not so a *shudra* however virtuous and wise.

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[45] The valorization of Ram *nam*, or the name of Ram, will be discussed separately in the context of Tulsidas's theology.

In this first verse, Ram offers advice to a *gandharva*, a semi-divine being, who has been cursed by the famously hot-tempered sage Durvasa to take the form of the demon Kabandha until Ram arrives to kill him.[46] Ram releases the *gandharva* from his curse, but advices him to never antagonize a Brahmin. There is no question of Brahmin is as Brahmin does. However egregious his behavior, a Brahmin must be shown respect and deference. However virtuous a *shudra's* behavior, he deserves none.

Let us now consider the very next episode in the *Araṇya kāṇḍ* that indicates that Tulsidas's attitude towards the orthodoxy of *varnashrama dharma* might be more complex. After imparting his advice to Kabandha, Ram and Lakshman travel onward and meet Shabari.

*pāni jori āgeṃ bhaḍa ṭhāḍī / prabhuhi biloki priti ati bāḍhī /*
*kehi bidhi astute karauṃ tumhāri / adhama jāti maiṃ jaḍamati bhārī //*
*adhama te adhama adhama ati nārī / tinha mahaṃ maiṃ matimanda agahārī/*
*kaha raghupati sunu bhāmini bātā / manauṃ eka bhagati kara nātā //*
*jāti pānti kula dharma baḍāi / dhana bala parijana guna caturāi /*
*bhagati hīna nara sohai kaisā / binu jala bārida dekhia jaisā //*
(3.35.1-3)

With her palms joined, she stepped forward to stand before Ram. And beholding the lord, her love grew manifold and she said, 'How shall I praise you, lowest of birth and dullest of wit as I am?
Of those who rank the lowest of the low, women are even lower. Of these women I am the most stupid.'

The lord of Raghus said 'Listen to my words good lady! The only kinship I recognize is that of devotion.
In spite of caste, kinship, lineage, piety and reputation, wealth, strength, family, talent and intelligence, a man who lacks devotion is worthless, like a cloud devoid of water.

In this much-loved episode, Ram reassures Shabari that none of the worldly signs of rank and status matter to him and that it is her total devotion to him that makes her worthy of his grace.[47] Shabari is worthy of Ram's grace in spite of her lowliness and also because she recognizes and acknowledges her lowliness. It is this very same self-deprecating attitude of the Nishada king Guha

[46] The *Rāmcaritmānas* does not into details regarding why Durvasa cursed the *gandharva*. It should also be noted that details of this episode vary in different versions of the Rāmāyaṇa. In the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is Indra who curses the *gandharva* with the proviso that he will be released when Ram and Lakshman cut off his hands.

[47] This and other similar verses (related to the figure of the Nishada king Guha) go on to become important to the Ramnami tradition. See Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, 'Ramnam', and Untouchable Religion in Central India* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). Also see Philip Lutgendorf, "Dining Out at Lake Pampa: The Shabari Episode in Multiple Ramayanas," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, ed. by Paula Richman (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119-136.

that also makes him an exemplary devotee of Ram.[48] The message, is that Ram *bhakti* is open to people of any and all castes and indeed encouraged, but that such devotion does not erase caste altogether.

On the one hand, Ram stresses that the true devotee is dear to him regardless of caste status, particularly in the case of figures like Guha and Shabari. On the other hand, Tulsidas does not alienate the Brahminical orthodoxy either, often praising Ram as the defender of Brahmins and cows. The devotional thrust of Tulsidas's work is contained very much within the framework of the traditional societal order of *varnashrama dharma*. The *Rāmcaritmānas* does not, by any means, advocate the complete eradication of caste hierarchies, common to many of the poets of the *sant* or the *nirgun* tradition. In light of the evidence from the *Rāmcaritmānas* presented above, Lorenzen's claims of Tulsidas being the champion of *varnashrama dharma* seem to be valid. When compared to Kabir, Tulsidas will be found wanting and less radical every time. However, such claims do not take into account the tension with Brahmanical authority as evidenced by the hagiographic legends surrounding Tulsidas. His very act of composing the *Rāmcaritmānas* in Avadhi was radical and seems to have put him at odds with the establishment of Varanasi.

Part of the reason behind the condemnation of Tulsidas as a champion of conservatism also stems from the understanding of *bhakti* as a reformist movement.[49] Such an understanding of *bhakti* dates to Indological scholarship in the nineteenth century and was perpetuated in the work of several nationalist scholars.[50] Just as *bhakti* itself is a more complex phenomenon, so too is Tulsidas's work and his attitude towards systems of social hierarchy. Some of this complexity is reflected in his other works of poetry.

**Tulsidas's poetry (*Kavitāvalī* and *Vinay patrikā*)**

While what little is known to us about the life of the poet Tulsidas comes primarily from various hagiographic accounts, the internal evidence of his poetry also deserves some consideration. There are twelve works that are attributed to Tulsidas.[51] There are six major works. (1) *Rāmcaritmānas*, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. (2) The *Vinay patrikā,* which consists of two hundred and seventy nine verses styled as a petition to Ram. This is generally considered to have been composed during a period of drought and famine in Varanasi and is believed to be his last work. (3) *Kavitāvalī*, also known as *Kavitta Rāmāyaṇ* tells the Ram *katha* using the *kavitta*, *ghanākṣari* and *savaiyya* meters. (4) The *Dohāvalī* tells the Ram *katha* in five hundred and seventy three *dohās*. This work includes

[48] The episode relating to Guha can be found in the *Rāmcaritmānas* 2. 194.

[49] George Grierson, for instance, referred to the *catuh sampraday* model as "the four churches of the reformation. See "Bhakti Marga," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings, Vol 2. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 544.

[50] See Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective. A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987).

[51] For a fuller description of all these works, see George A. Grierson, "Notes on Tul'sī Dās" *The Indian Antiquary* 22 (1893): 89-98, 122-29, 197-206, 225-36, 253-74.

material from the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Vairāgyasaṃdīpanī* and the *Rāmājñyā praśna*. (5) *Gītāvalī,* also knows as *Gīt Rāmāyaṇ* tells the Ram *katha* in seven chapters using various ragas, or song meters. (6) The *Śrī kṛṣṇagītāvalī* tells the story of Krishna in sixty-nine verses.

There are six minor works attributed to him. (7) The *Rāmlalla nahcchū* is a short work of twenty verses (in the meter *sohar chand*) that describes the ceremony of touching Ram's nails. This ceremony performed before auspicious occasions such as the investiture of the sacred thread or before the wedding. (8) The *Vairāgyasaṃdīpanī* is a short work of three chapters called '*prakash'* (consisting of *dohās* and *caupāīs*) that praise the quality of dispassion. (9) The *Barvai rāmāyaṇ* tells the legend of Ram in seven chapters in the *barvai* meter. (10) The *Rāmājñyā praśna* is a version of the Ram *katha* told in seven chapters, each consisting of seven *dohas* and is used a tool in foretelling. (11) The *Pārvatī maṅgal* is a work of three hundred and sixty lines (sixteen stanzas) that describes the wedding of Shiva and Parvati. (12) The *Jānaki maṅgal* is a work of twenty-four stanzas that describes Ram and Sita's wedding.

These are the works that have been accepted by most scholars as Tulsidas's work. The famous *Hanumān Cālisa* is considered to be Tuslidas's composition, but there is very little evidence for this. Of these twelve works attributed to him, three - *Kavitāvalī*, *Gītāvalī* and *Vinaypatrikā* - were composed in Braj and the rest in Avadhi. Not all of his compositions can be dated accurately, but we know that the *Rāmājñyā praśna* has a date of 1564 C.E., the *Dohāvalī*, date of 1584 and the *Pārvatī maṅgal*, a date of 1587.

While Priyadas's legends form the core of how Tulsidas's life is remembered by Ram devotees, his later works such as the *Kavitāvalī* and *Vinay patrikā*, which are intensely personal in nature, offer us some clues about his life, although nothing is historically verifiable. Tulsidas was very likely a Brahmin by birth and had access to Brahmanical learning. In the section on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, I discuss some of the works of Sanskrit literature that he was clearly familiar with. He was very likely a *smārta*[52] Vaishnavaite, oriented towards *pañcāyatan pūjā* (the worship of five deities: Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Devi and Surya) as most of his works begin with invocations to these deities.[53] Such practice would be against that of sectarian Vaishnavas, in particular, the various Krishna *bhakti sampradays* and possibly also the Ramanandi *sampraday*.

His poetry also suggests that he was abandoned by his parents as a child and that he lived in great poverty. He writes movingly of his early life in the *Kavitāvalī*.[54]

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[52] *Smārta* is a term used to refer to those who follow *smriti* (*smarta* is the *vṛddhi* form of *smriti*). *Smartas* of North and South India have different practices. The term *smarta* refers to Vaishnavas in North India. In South India, *smartas* are generally associated with the worship of Shiva. On the *smarta* tradition in South India see Yoshitsugu Sawai, *The Faith of Ascetics and Lay Smārtas: A Study of the Śaṅkaran Tradition of Śṛṅgeri* (Vienna : Sammlung De Nobili, Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1992).

[53] On *smarta* rituals of worship, see Gudrun Buhnemann, *Puja: A Study in Smarta Ritual* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie, Universität Wien, 1988).

[54] F.R. Allchin has translated this text with a critical introduction in which he makes note of the personal nature of many of the verses. See *Kavitāvalī* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964).

*pātaka pīna kudārida dīna malīna dhare katharī karava hai /*
*loka kahai bidhiū na likhyo sapanehuṃ nahī apane bara bāhai //*

*ram ko kikara so tulasī samujhehi bhalo kahibo na ravā hai /*
*aise ko aiso bhayo kabahūṃ na bhaje bina bānara ke caravāhai //*
(7.56)

'He is nurtured by vice, wretched from terrible poverty, is clad in rags and carries a water-pot.'
This is what the world said of me, 'Destiny has written nothing for him, he has no strength in his arms, not even in is dreams.'
Tulsi is now Ram's servant, this is easy to see and doesn't need to be told.
For such a (wretched) one could never have become such, had he not sung of the provider of the monkeys.

*mātu pitā jaga jāya tajyo bidhihū na likhī kachi bhāla bhalāī /*
*nīca nirādara bhājana kādara kūkara ṭūkana lāgi lalāī /*

*ram subhāu sunyo tulasī prabhu so kahyoṃ baraka peta kalāī /*
*svāratha ko paramāratha ko raghunātha so sāhaba khori na lāī //*
(7.57)

His father and mother brought him into this world and abandoned him for destiny had written nothing good on his forehead.
He was low, deserving of disrespect, a person who would be glad of the scraps thrown to dogs.
Then Tulsi heard of the nature of Ram and told him once of his empty stomach.
Such a master as Raghunath left nothing lacking for his personal good and highest good.

Similarly, in the *Vinay patrikā*, he writes:

*dvāra dvāra dīnatā kahī kāḍhī rada pari pāhūṃ /*
*haiṃ dayālu duni dasa disā dukha doṣa dalana chama kiyo na saṃbhaṣana kāhu //*
*tanu janyo kuṭila kīta jyōṃ tajyo mātu pitā hūṃ /*
*kāhe ko rosa dosa kāhi dhauṃ mere hī abhāga mosoṃ sakucata chui sava cāhūṃ //*
*dukhita dekhi santana kahyo socai jani mana māhūṃ /*
*tose pasu pāṃvara pātakī parihare na sarana gaye raghuvara ora nibāhūṃ //*
*tulasi tihore bhaye bhayo sukhī prīti pratīti binā hūṃ /*
*nāma kī mahimā sīla nātha ko mero bhalo biloki aba teṃ sakucāhu sihāhūṃ//*
(275)

I told of my poverty from door to door, I grit my teeth and fell at peoples' feet. There are men of compassion in this world who could ease the sorrows and errors of the ten quarters, yet none such spoke to me.

My mother and father gave birth to me and cast me away like a worthless insect. Why should I be angry? Whom should I blame? My misfortune was such that they shrank even from my shadow.
Seeing my distress, some holy men said, "Do not let your heart grieve, animals were even more wicked and sinful, yet Ram did not abandon them."
When Tulsi became Ram's, even without love and faith, he became content. Seeing the greatness of the name of my noble master, and my well being, may people be filled with envy and awe.

In these moving verses Tulsidas describes his wretched childhood – clad in rags and begging for food. He is taunted and ridiculed and made to feel unworthy even of the scraps of food thrown to dogs. He writes with shame further on in the *Kavitāvalī* that, "at the command of my appetite, I ate the leavings of all castes, my caste, high castes, low castes; this is well known."[55] It is likely that he joined a group of itinerant Vaishnavas who taught him about Ram, one of the few options that seem to have been open to such abandoned or orphaned children.[56] Tulsidas however makes no reference to any specific guru or teacher. In the introductory verses of invocation in the *Bāl kāṇḍ* of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tuslidas, says:

*bandauṃ guru pada kanja kṛpā sindhu nararūpa hari /*
*mahāmoha tama punja jāsu bacana rabi kara nikara //*
(1.5)

I bow to the lotus feet of my preceptor who is an ocean of mercy and Hari himself in human form, whose words are like rays of the sun that dispel the intense darkness that is (my) profound ignorance.

But, Tulsidas does not clearly identify a guru in this verse, merely referring him in the fairly standard adulatory form as, "Hari in human form." Identifying this "Hari in human form" with a historical figure would become a great preoccupation with devotees and later, with scholars. Some would be content to simply refer to him as "Narharidas," based on Tulsidas's eulogy. This nomenclature would become tremendously useful to the Ramanandi *sampraday* in the nineteenth century, for they were then able to connect Tulsidas to their community via an actual Ramanandi ascetic named Narharidas.[57] Whether or not the Vaishnava ascetics Tulsidas fell in with were in fact affiliated with the Ramanandi *sampraday* remains a mystery, but we might accept that he was introduced to some sort of Ram devotion through such a community, for Tulsidas identifies Ram as his spiritual as well as material savior. He goes on to say in the *Kavitāvalī*:

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[55] *Jati ke sujāti ke kujāti ke petāgibasa khāe ṭūka sabake bidita bata duni so* / *Kavitāvalī* 7.73

[56] Nabhadas was similarly adopted and given protection by Kilhadev and Agradas, see note 24.
[57] As far as my research thus far indicates, the Ramanandis first make this connection in the *Rasik praskaś bhaktamāl* and I will discuss this verse in detail in Chapter 3.

*chāra te saṃvārikai pahara hūṃ te bhārī kiyo*
*gāro bhayo pañca meṃ punīta paccha pāikai /*
*hauṃ tau jaiso taba taiso aba adhamāī kai kai*
*peṭa bharauṃ rāma rāvaroī guna gāikai //*

*āpane nivāje kī pai kījai jaja mahāraja*
*merī ora herikai na baiṭhie risāikai /*
*pāli kai kṛpālu byāla bāla ko na mārie*
*au kātie na nātha biṣahu ko rūkha lāikai //*
(7.61)

You raised me from dust and made me loftier than a mountain
Joining your holy group I gained dignity among the elders.
Yet, as I was once, so am I still, still performing low acts.

I fill my belly singing of your virtues Ram.
Lord, hide this shame of your befriended
Do not regard me with anger, for
O merciful, one should not kill a young snake having reared it
nor should one cut down a poison tree having planted it.

In his final, and perhaps his darkest work, Tulsidas is reflecting on his career with dissatisfaction and shame. He is no longer the despised, unloved and hungry young boy; he is famous and well respected, after all, he is renowned as Valmiki incarnate. However, he feels no satisfaction, no pride. Instead he feels he has betrayed Ram by "en-cashing" his name to fill his belly. He compares himself to a poison tree and a snake and begs Ram's forgiveness for using him ill. There are verses of self-deprecation in the *Rāmcaritmānas* that are formulaic, even impertinent, but the *Kavitāvalī* verses are bleak and desolate. The life of Tulsidas, the most celebrated and venerated poet of the Ram tradition, began in misery and seems to have ended just as poorly.

## Chapter 2
## The *Rāmcaritmānas*

Considering that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was one of Tulsidas's earliest compositions, it is a work of remarkable beauty, complexity, and simplicity, and is evidence of a poet at the height of his artistic power. In this section, I will discuss the narrative and theological structure of this much-loved text. Unlike many works of Indian literature, the author of the *Rāmcaritmānas* reveals the exact date on which he commenced his composition:

> *sādara sivahi nāi aba māthā / baranauṃ bisada rāma guna gāthā //*
> *saṃbata soraha sai ekatīsā / karauṃ kathā hari pada dhari sīsā //*
> *naumī bhauma bāra madhumāsā / avadhapurīṃ yaha carita prakāsā /*
> (1.34.2-3)
>
> With reverence I bow my head to Lord Shiva and proceed to sing the manifold virtues of Ram. In the *vikram samvat* year of 1631 (1574 C.E.) I commence this tale, placing my head at Hari's feet. On the ninth day of the lunar month of *chaitra*, this tale unfolded in the city of Ayodhya.

Although we know that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was begun in 1574 C.E in Ayodhya, it is not known how long Tulsidas took to complete it and indeed when this work was actually completed. Most scholars, however, agree that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was completed in Varanasi, where the poet is alleged to have moved half way through its composition.[58]

The oldest manuscript of the *Rāmcarimtānas* is in the Shravan Kunj temple situated on Vasudev ghat on the banks of the River Sarayu. The manuscript is incomplete (only the *Bāl kāṇḍ* survives) and has been dated to 1604 C.E. The oldest complete manuscript of the text (dated 1647 C.E.) is in Ramnagar, and is the property of the current maharaja of Benares. There are two manuscripts that are famous for ostensibly being in Tulsidas's own hand, although the veracity of this claim has been disproved in both cases. One is a complete manuscript in Malihabad, near Lucknow. It is thought to be of considerable antiquity, but has not been dated. The other manuscript in Rajapur is incomplete, and contains only the *Ayodhyā kāṇḍ*.[59]

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[58] The evidence cited for this is the invocation in the fourth book, the *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍ:*
> *mukti janma mahi jāni gyāna khāni agha hāni kara/*
> *jahaṃ basa sambhu bhavāni so kāsī seyia kasa na//* (4.2)
>
> Why not reside in Kashi (Varanasi), the abode of Shambhu and Bhavani, and knowing it to be the birthplace of *moksha*, the source of wisdom and the destroyer of sin?

[59] Mataprasad Gupta, *Tulsidās: Ek samālocanātmak adhyayan* (Allahabad: Hindi Parishad, 1965), 95-101.

**Narrative Format and Structure**

Tulsidas composed the *Rāmcaritmānas* in Avadhi at a time when Braj *bhasha* had become consecrated as the literary language of the *bhakti* poets, who were writing primarily in the tradition of Krishna *bhakti*.[60] Tulsidas himself, as we have seen, composed in both Braj and Avadhi.[61] Although he does not discuss the choice between Braj and Avadhi, Tulsidas was definitely conscious of writing in *bhasha*, or the vernacular (*bhāṣā nibhandham*), as opposed to classical Sanskrit.[62] He says:

> *priya lagahi ati sabahi mama bhaniti rāma jasa saṇga /*
> *dāru bicāru ki karayi koū bandiya malaya prasaṅga//*
>
> *syāma surabhi paya bisada ati gunada karahiṃ saba pāna /*
> *girā grāmya siya rāma jasa gāvahiṃ sunahiṃ sujāna //*
> (1.10.a-b)
>
> By its association with the glory of Ram, my words will be pleasing to everyone, just as no one questions timber of any variety if it is from the region of the Malaya mountain.
>
> Just as the milk of a dark cow is white, possesses medicinal properties and is drunk by all, so too, the wise hear and sing the glories of Ram and Sita, even though couched in the vulgar tongue.

In this verse Tulsidas doesn't quite apologize for his choice of Avadhi, but he does defend his choice of the vernacular by pointing out that regardless of the medium in which it is told, the story of Ram is, in and of itself, worthy of being heard and sung. Historically, the choice of Avadhi as the language for this work, and indeed the metrical format of the narrative of the *Rāmcaritmānas* (as a series of *chaupais* followed by a *doha* or *soṛṭhā*) are both indebted to the genre of Sufi narrative literature.[63] By the fourteenth century, the tradition of the Sufi literary romance, known as the *masnavī*, had shifted its register from Persian to Avadhi,

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[60] For a discussion on the historical development of Braj bhasha, Avadhi and Hindi, see Stuart McGregor, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom," in *Literary Cultures in South Asia: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 912-957.

[61] As mentioned above, three of his works, the *Kavitāvalī*, the *Gītāvalī* and the *Vinaypatrikā,* were composed in Braj *bhasha*.

[62] *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.7 śloka.

[63] Aditya Behl has remarked on this several times, most recently in "Presence and Absence in Bhakti: An Afterword," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, 3 (2007): 320 and also Thomas de Bruijn, "Dialogism in a medieval genre: the case of the Avadhi epics," in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture,* ed. by Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

with Maulana Daud's *Candāyan* (1379) being one of the early examples.[64] By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the genre of the literary romance, which became known as the *premākhyān*, became fully crystallized as the most popular genre of narrative literature in North India. Following the *Candāyan,* these romances were composed in the vernacular (primarily in Avadhi), and the narrative was structured in form of stanzas consisting of a fixed number of *chaupais* (usually five or seven or eight), followed by a *doha*. Many of these literary romances continued to be composed within the Sufi tradition, but secular romances were also popular.[65] The most famous of such romances within the Sufi tradition include Shaikh Qutban's *Mṛgāvatī* (1503/04), Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmāvat* (1540/41), and Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* (1545). Premakhyans were also being composed outside the Sufi tradition, for instance, Ishvardas's *Satyavati kathā* (1501).[66] All these texts, therefore, must certainly be considered as part Tulsidas's literary inheritance, for both the language and metrical and narrative format of the *Rāmcaritmānas* can be traced directly to the Sufi tradition of the literary romance.

The question of the literary sources that inspired the *Rāmcaritmānas* has engendered much speculation and scholarly argument. Although he does refer to his composition as being inspired by several other works, Tulsidas himself reveals tantalizingly little detail. In the final verse of the series of Sanskrit invocations that open the *Bāl kāṇḍ*, Tulsidas says:

> *nānāpurāṇanigamāgamasammataṃ yad rāmāyaṇe nigaditaṃ kvacidanyato'pi /*
> *svāntaḥ sukhāya tulasi raghunāthagāthābhāṣānibandhamatimañjulamātanoti //*
> (1.7 *śloka*)

> For his own enjoyment, Tulsidas presents this exceedingly elegant composition, relating in the vernacular language, the legend of the Lord of Raghus in accordance with various Puranas, Vedas, Agamas, and as it has been chronicled in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (of Valmiki) and some other sources.

Tulsidas is thus catholic in counting among his sources, the literature of the *smṛtis* (*nigamas*/vedas), the *śrutis* (the Puranas were counted as *shruti* from medieval times), and *āgamas*, which would include the *tantras* and the *saṃhita* literature, as well as the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki.

One of the earliest scholars to write on Tulsidas's literary influences was the Italian scholar L.P. Tessitori, who argued that excluding the first part of the *Bāl kāṇḍ* and the entire *Uttar kāṇḍ,* the *Rāmcaritmānas* was based primarily on the

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[64] R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its beginnings to the nineteenth century* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 26-27. Also see Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Hindi ke sūfī premākhyān* (Prayag: Leader Press, 1962) and Shyam Manhohar Pandey, *Madhyayugīn premākhyān* (Allahabad: Lok Bharati Prakashan, 1965).

[65] McGregor has also pointed out the affinities of some of these secular romances with the *rāsau* literature of Western India. "*Hindi Literature*," 60-63.

[66] Ibid., 63. Also see de Bruijn, Thomas. "Many roads lead to Lanka: The intercultural semantics of Rama's quest," in *Contemporary South Asia,* 14 (2005): 39-53.

Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*.[67] Any differences between the texts were attributed to Tulsidas's orientation as a *smarta* Vaishnavaite.[68] The quest for the "literary influences" on Tulsidas invariably raised the question of the originality of the *Rāmcaritmānas.* Although Tessitori stressed on the originality of Tulsidas's composition in his work, allegations would surface in the early twentieth century that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was actually a translation of a Sanskrit work called the *Śambhu Rāmāyaṇa*. George Grierson would discredit this, showing that the Sanskrit work was in fact a translation of the Avadhi poem.[69] This dispute speaks to the fact that the conflict between the choice of Sanskrit and the vernacular languages of North India, as described in the hagiography of Tulsidas, was still being played out in the twentieth century.

In more recent scholarship, Charlotte Vaudeville and Mataprasad Gupta have also commented extensively on sources that inspired this work. Among the sources for the text, both Vaudeville and Gupta cite the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa*, portions of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, the *Hanumān nātaka*, and the *Prasannarāghava*. Mataprasad Gupta places the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* as the foremost source, going so far as to contend that Tulsidas was referring to this text and not to the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* in his invocatory verse (*shloka* number 7).[70] Vaudeville, however, contends that since the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* was, itself, closely modeled on Valmiki's version, it is impossible to tell with any certainty which text Tulsidas was borrowing from. Nevertheless, she does not dispute that this text had a significant impact on the structure of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[71]

Structurally, the most obvious reflection of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* in the *Rāmcaritmānas* is the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, a framework that is borrowed from the Tantric tradition. Another text that influences the *Shiv carit* sections of the *Bāl kāṇḍ* is the *Shiva Purāṇa* (distinct from the *Shaiva Purāṇa*). The plays *Hanumān nātaka* and *Prasanna Rāghava* are also sources, the latter particularly influencing sections in the *Bāl kāṇḍ* and *Sundar kāṇḍ*. The *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* is thought to have influenced the dialogues between Kak Bhushundi

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[67] L.P. Tessitori, "The *Rāmcharitamānasa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*," *Indian Antiquary* 41 (1912): 273-286 and 42 (1913) 1-18. Originally published "Il *Rāmcharitamānasa'* e il *Rāmāyaṇa*," *Giornale della Societa Asiatica Italiana* 24 (1911-12). George Grierson published a review of this work in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (July 1912): 794-98.

[68] The term *smarta* as it relates to North Indian Vaishnavism has been discussed in Chapter 1.

[69] This claim was made by a committee of six pandits, who issued editions of the *Araṇya kāṇḍ* and the *Sundar kāṇḍ* with the alleged "original" Sanskrit text printed facing the Avadhi text of Tulsidas. See George A. Grierson, "Is the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulasī Dāsa a Translation?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1913): 133-141. Also see Lala Sitaram's more forceful response, "The Originality of the Ramayana of Tulasi Dasa," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1914): 416-421.

[70] Gupta, *Tulsīdās*, 281-84.

[71] Charlotte Vaudeville, "Tulsīdās kṛt *Rāmcaritmānas* ke srot aur unkī racnā," in *Tulsi granthāvalī*, ed. Ramchandra Shukla (Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1976), 3: 154.

and Garuda.[72] As Bhushundi also figured in the *Yogavaśiṣṭha,* this text could also have been available to Tulsidas.

Apart from the Sanskrit sources discussed above Tulsidas might also have had access to vernacular narrative poetry (outside the *premakhyan* tradition). Indebted to earlier Jain literary narratives in prakrit and apabhramsha, such works of narrative poetry were composed primarily on themes from Sanskritic literature, and in particular, epic literature. The primary center for such narrative, or *carit* literature was Gwalior, from where we have works like the *Pradyumna carit* (?1354) of Sudharu as well as the more famous Braj bhasha compositions, the *Pāṇḍav carit* (1435) and *Rāmāyaṇ kathā* (1442) of Vishnudas.[73]

Thus, it is clear that the *Rāmcaritmānas* is heir to a staggering variety of literary and religious traditions – the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition (various retellings), *carit* literature (Vishnudas's *Rāmāyaṇ kathā*), Sufi *masnavis* and *premakhyans* as well Sanskrit philosophical and dramatic literature.[74]

Following the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki, the *Rāmcaritmānas* is comprised of seven books of varying length. The seven books take their titles from Valmiki with the exception of the sixth book, which is called *Lanka kāṇḍ* (*Yuddha kāṇḍa* in Valmiki). The seven books are: *Bāl kāṇḍ* (361 stanzas), *Ayodhyā kāṇḍ* (326 stanzas), *Araṇya kāṇḍ* (46 stanzas), *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍ* (30), *Sundar kāṇḍ* (60 stanzas), *Laṅka kāṇḍ* (121 stanzas), and *Uttar kāṇḍ* (130 stanzas). Each "stanza" or canto is comprised of a series of *chaupais* followed by either a *doha* or a *sortha*, following the tradition of *masnavis* and *premakhyans*, as discussed above[75] Apart from *chaupais* and *dohas/sorthas*, the *Rāmcaritmānas* also contains meters such as the *harigītikā chand*,[76] which Tulsidas uses during highly emotional moments such as Ram and Sita's wedding, and the *tomar chand* (spear meter) used to great effect in the battle

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[72] It was commonly accepted that the *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* had been available to Tulsidas. See Bhagavati Prasad Singh, "Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa and Its Influence on the Medieval Ramayana Literature," in *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, edited by V. Raghavan, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980), 475-504. For a refutation of this view see, Alan Mott Keislar, "Searching for the Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa: One Text or Many? The *Ādi rāmāyaṇa*, the *Bhuśuṇḍi-rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa-mahā-mālā*," Ph.D diss.,(University of California, Berkeley, 1998). Keislar has argued convincingly that the version of the *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* cited by Singh and Raghavan was actually composed in the sixteenth century. The text that Tulsidas might have had access to has not yet surfaced.

[73] McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 33-38. For more Vishnudas's *Rāmāyaṇ kathā*, see See R.S. MacGregor, "An Early Hindi (Brajbhāṣā) Version of the Ram Story," in *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India*, edited by Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991), 181-196.

[74] I will discuss the influence of such sources on the theology of the text, in the next section.

[75] In this I follow Lutgendorf's definition. *Life of a Text*, 14. A *chaupai* is usually a two-line unit (some maybe a single line) with each line known as an *ardhālī* (half) and comprising 32 beats. Two feet (*pad)*, each of sixteen beats and separated by a caesura, make up one *ardhali*. A *doha* is a couplet with each line comprising two unequal parts, usually thirteen and eleven beats respectively. A *sortha* is a *doha* in reverse, with each line comprising eleven and thirteen beats.

[76] The *harigitika chand* has four equal lines of twenty-six to thirty beats with an internal rhyme scheme, and hence is most often set to music.

scenes. Sanskrit meters such as the *śloka* and *stuti* are occasionally used for invocations and hymns of praise.

While the stanzas are the primary way by which the text is organized, it is also common to speak of specific episodes (*prasaṅg*) and dialogues (*samvād*) in the text. Reflective of the oral expository traditions of the *Rāmcaritmānas,* these episodes and dialogues usually refer to famous or most-beloved passages (such as, the *van gaman prasang*, the forest-going episode or the *Ram kevaṭ samvād*, the dialogue between Ram and the boatman Guha). These special episodes and dialogues are often marked for easy identification in the margins of modern editions of the text.[77]

The *Rāmcaritmānas* has a complex narrative structure that the poet lays out in the introductory portions of the *Bāl kāṇḍ*. Approximately twenty-nine stanzas into the first book, Tulsidas discloses that the story of Ram is revealed in four dialogues, which form the narrative framework of the poem. The four dialogues in the text are between (i) Shiva and Parvati, (ii) Garuda and Kak Bhushundi, (iii) Yagyavalkya and Bharadvaj, and (iv) Tulsidas and his audience. The dialogue between Shiva and Parvati is the main frame of the text, and is most clearly evident in the *Bāl kāṇḍ*. The dialogues between Yagyavalkya and Bharadvaj and between Garuda and Kak Bhushundi are more clearly in evidence in the *Uttar kāṇḍ*, the latter taking greater precedence. The dialogue between Tulsidas and his audience is present throughout the text. The dialogues between Shiva and Parvati and that between Garuda and Kak Bhushundi are also the means through which much of the theological content of the text is transmitted. These dialogues make for a layeredness that endows the text with a complexity of structure. This layeredness is also able to contain a complex system of theology that in turn permits a range of interpretations, as we shall see below. The story itself, Tulsidas points out, was first revealed in series of narrations.

> *sambhu kīnha yaha carita suhāvā / bahuri kṛpā kari umahi sunāvā /*
> *soi siva kāgabhusuṇḍihi dīnhā / Ram bhagata adhikāri cīnhā //*
> *tehi sana jāgabalika puni pāvā / tinha puni bharadvāja prati gāvā //*
>
> (1.30.2-3)

> *maiṃ puni nija gura sana sunī kathā so sūkarakheta /*
> *samujhi nahiṃ tasi bālapana taba ati raheuṃ aceta //*
>
> (1.30.a)

> This beautiful story was fashioned by Shiva, who graciously related it to Uma. Shiva then gave the tale to Kak Bhushundi, knowing him to be a worthy devotee of Ram. Yagyavalkya obtained the tale from him (Kak Bhushundi) and narrated it to Bharadvaja.
>
> I heard the same story in Sukarkeshetra from my own guru, but due to my youth, I remained oblivious and did not understand it fully.

[77] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 14.

In these *chaupais*, Tulsidas credits Shiva with the original composition of the Ram *katha* that he is about to narrate, thus anticipating one of his major theological positions, the compatibility between Shaivism and Vaishnavism, which I will discuss in greater detail below.[78] Shiva telling the story to his wife, Parvati is also a feature common to many the Tantric tradition, the influence of which will be discussed in further detail below. Shiva, Ram's greatest devotee, then transmits the tale to another worthy devotee – the semi-divine crow Kak Bhushundi. From the realm of the divine and semi-divine, the tale passes to the realm of the sages such as Yagyavalkya and Bharadvaj. Tulsidas then hears the story in Sukarkshetra (modern Soron in Uttar Pradesh) from his guru, which he then proceeds to narrate to his audience, the final layer in this chain of transmission.[79] Thus, the *guru paramparā*, or the line of transmission between teacher and student begins with Shiva. The text then travels via Kak Bhushundi, Yagyavalkya, Bharadvaja and finally Tulsidas before it is conveyed to the ordinary Ram devotee. Tulsidas, therefore, puts his composition in its context as a devotional text that is meant to be transmitted to and among the devotees of Ram. These earliest transmitters of the tale, Shiva and Parvati, also appear as characters within the narrative, as well as narrators of the tale in the first framework of the text.

From stanza 35-43 in the *Bāl kāṇḍ*, Tulsidas sets up the elaborate and complex imagery of his composition as a lake. Shiva, apart from fashioning the narrative, also gives it the name *Rāmcaritmānas*.

> *raci mahesa nija mānasa rākhā | pāyi susamau sivā sana bhākhā |*
> *tāteṃ rāmacaritamānasa bara | dhareu nāma hiyaṃ heri harakhi hara ||*
> *kahauṃ kathā soi sukhada suhāī | sādara sunahu sujana mana lāyī ||*
> (1.35.6-7)

> Having composed it, Mahesh (Shiva) treasured it (the tale) in his mind. When the time was favorable, he told it to Parvati. After due thought, Shiva joyously gave it the excellent name of Rāmacaritamānas. I repeat that very same pleasing and enchanting tale, listen with reverence and attention, O noble souls.

The word "*mānas*" can mean both lake and mind. The title, therefore, refers to the fact that the tale was conceived in Shiva's mind as well as to the imagery of the tale itself being a lake. Tulsidas then goes on to create elaborate imagery of the contents of his work, likening every aspect of the narrative to a feature of the lake. The four dialogues described above become the four *ghats*, banks of the lake. Further, each of the seven books is described a *sopāna* or a descent into the lake:

> *suṭhi sundara sambāda bara birace buddhi bicāri/*
> *teyi ehi pāvana subhaga sara ghāta manohara cāri ||*

[78] Lutegndorf, *Life of a Text*, 24.

[79] The controversy regarding Tulsidas's guru was addressed in Chapter 1.

(1.36.)

*sapta prabandha subhaga sopānā / gyāna nayana nirakhata mana mānā /*
*raghupati mahimā aguna abādhā / baranaba soyi bara bāri agādhā //*
*rāma sīya jasa salila sudhāsama / upamā bīci bilāsa manorama /*
*purayini saghana cāru caupāī / juguti manju mani sīpa suhāī //*
(1.37.1-2)

The four charming and excellent dialogues (Between (i) Shiva and Parvati, (ii) Garuda and Kak Bhushundi, (iii) Yagyavalkya and Bharadvaj, and (iv) Tulsidas and his audience) that have been woven cleverly into this tale are the four lovely ghats of this holy and beautiful lake.

The seven chapters are the seven beautiful flights of steps, which the mind delights to behold with the eyes of wisdom. The unqualified and boundless greatness of Raghupati, which is described in this tale, is the fathomless depth of this lake.

The glory of Ram and Sita is the nectar-like water and the similes are the delightful waves in the water. The beautiful *chaupais* are the densely growing lotus plants and other poetic devices are pearl-yielding shells.

The complexity of the narrative structure as a series of dialogues and the consequent layeredness of the text also imply that the composition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* was probably undertaken in several stages. Although scholars disagree on the placement of certain stanzas, there is broad consensus that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was completed in three distinct stages.[80] The theological complexity of Tulsidas's work also becomes apparent if one accepts the theory of the three stages. Based primarily on consistency of verse from, Tulsidas is considered to have composed the latter half of the *Bāl kāṇḍ* (stanzas 184-361), and the *Ayodhyā kāṇḍ* in the first stage. At this stage, it is believed that Tulsidas had no intention of making this a religious work or of giving it mythic narrators. The decision to frame the work in a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati was conceived in the second stage, the decision probably being inspired by Tulsidas's familiarity with the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. The bulk of the poem was completed in this stage, culminating with the end of the Ram story in stanza 52 of the *Uttar kāṇḍ*. In stage three, Kak Bhushundi was introduced, the Shiv *carit* of the *Bāl kāṇḍ* and the *Uttar kāṇḍ* completed. This re-construction of the text reflects the complexity of its narrative structure and also reveals why it is able to contain Tulsidas's complex theological formulations.

[80] I am summarizing the views of four scholars in this section. Charlotte Vaudeville, *Étude sur les sources et la composition du Rāmāyaṇa de Tulsī Dās,* translated by J.K. Balbir (Pondicherry: Institut Français D'Indolgie, 1959). Mataprasad Gupta, *Tulsīdās*, 263-276. Camille Bulcke, *Rāmkathā aur Tulsīdās* (Allahabad, Hindustani Academy, 1977), 53-60. Ramnaresh Tripathi, *Tulsī aur unkā kāvya* (New Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 1951), 106-110, 215-216.

**Theology**

The *Rāmcaritmānas* is generally considered to be the quintessential work of *sagun* Ram *bhakti*. However, this is an oversimplification. To distill any single theological position from the complexity of ideas in the *Rāmcaritmānas* is an extremely problematical proposition. Just as the narrative structure and format of the text is an intricate amalgamation of multiple literary traditions; the theology of Ram presented by Tulsidas in the *Rāmcaritmānas* is also a complex configuration of ideas. That being said, it is incontrovertible that it is in this text that Ram becomes fully realized as a figure of *bhakti*. As mentioned earlier, there was at least one vernacular rendition of the Ram *katha* before Tulsidas's work, Vishnudas's *Rāmāyaṇ kathā (*1442). This text, however, did not frame the Ram *katha* within any theological position. Tulsidas's work was the first vernacular rendition of this legend in North India to present Ram as a *bhakti* figure.

Tulsidas espouses a variety of theological positions within this framework of *bhakti*. His theological positions have often been called '*samanvay vādī*,'or 'syncretic.' In my discussion of his theology, I begin with his valorization of *bhakti* and then I will focus on two core ideas. First, Tulsidas stresses the essential compatibility of the *nirgun* (transcendental, aniconic or impersonal) and *sagun* (phenomenal, iconic or personal) conceptions of God. In doing so, Tulsidas offers the power of Ram *nam*, or the name of Ram, as the best mediator between *sagun* and *nirgun* traditions, often asserting that it is Ram *nam* that is the most powerful way to cultivate *bhakti*. Secondly, Tulsidas effects reconciliation between the two major strains of *bhakti* - Shaivism and Vaishnavism.[81]

This complexity in Tulsidas's theology reflects the historical development of what Hans Bakker has called the 'cult of Ram.'[82] According to Bakker, Ram had become a popular subject for literature in the fifth century, during the reign of the Guptas. He cites the Jain text *Paumacarya* of Vimalasuri (fourth century), Bhasa's *Pratimānaṭaka* (fourth century) and Kalidasa's *Raghuvaṃśa* (mid fifith century) as examples of the Ram literature that emerged during the Gupta period. The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the composition several other key texts that stand out in the history of Ram devotion. These included the Sanskrit ritual texts the *Rāmapūrvatāpanīya Upaniṣad*, the *Rāmarakṣāstotra* and the *Agastyasaṃhitā*.[83] Of these the *Agastyasaṃhitā* was the most crucial, for it made the innovation of replacing the older and complex Vaishnavite *pāñcarātra* doctrine of *vyūhas* and *śaktis*, or emanations and powers, with a more simplified conception

[81] This is not to imply that devotion to Ram is subsumed under devotion to Vishnu. By the time of Tulsidas's composition, Ram is more than an *avatar* of Vishnu, replacing the latter as the supreme *Brahman*. The overarching framework, however, is still Vaishnava.

[82] Hans Bakker, *Ayodhyā* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 68. Also see "Reflections on the Evolution of Ram Devotion in the Light of Textual and Archaeological Evidence," *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunde Südasiens* 31 (1987): 9-42.

[83] On the *Ramrakṣāstotra* of Buddhakaushika, see Gudrun Bühnemann, *Budha-Kauśika's Rāmarakṣāstotra: A contribution to the study of Sanskrit devotional poetry* (Vienna: Indologisches Institut der Universität Wien, 1983).

of Vishnu in his *sagun avatar* as Ram.[84] Although it was modeled on the older *pancharatra samhitas*, and is very much a part of that tradition, the *Agastysaṃhitā* makes the identity between Vishnu and Ram.[85] The next text that would have the greatest impact on Tulsidas in his composition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* was the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (fourteenth or fifteenth century), a work that re-interpreted the Ram *katha* in light of this theological modification. This text is often venerated above the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* in North India, particularly by the Ramanandi *sampraday*.[86] The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* also interpreted the Ram *katha* within an *advaita* framwork. In the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, Ram and Sita are equated with the *saṃkhyā* concepts of *puruṣa* and *prakriti*, the primordial male and female principles, as well as with the *advaita* concepts of *Brahman*, or transcendental reality and *māya,* or illusion.[87] It is from the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* that Tulsidas derives not only one of his major frameworks – the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati – but also one his major theological positions, the reconciliation between Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

Much ink has been spilt on Tulsidas's theology in the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The contributions of Mataprasad Gupta and Charlotte Vaudeville, whose works will be discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3, are most noteworthy in this respect, as they do not try to reduce the text to one theological position.[88] I am presenting the major theological concerns of the text in this chapter as a foundation for understanding the commentaries in Chapters 6 and 7 of section II. The commentators base their work on the concerns that emerge in Tulsidas, but modify them by highlighting the aspects that are of interest to them and brushing aside others.

**The Primacy of *bhakti* and its Practice**

Tulsidas's work is a fundamentally devotional work that often stresses the path of *bhakti* over the path of *jñān,* gnosis or knowledge. Within this framework of devotion, Tulsidas proposes various means to cultivate and attain *bhakti*. Ram himself discourses on his partiality to the path of devotion in the *Uttar kāṇḍ* and reveals how such devotion can be attained:

> *jauṃ paraloka ihāṃ sukha cahahu / suni mama bacana hṛdaya gahahuṃ/*
> *sulabha sukhada māraga yaha bhāī / bhagati mori purāna śruti gāī //*
>
> *gyāna agama pratyūha anekā / sādhana kaṭhina na mana kahuṃ ṭekā /*
> *karata kaṣṭha bahu pāvai koū / bhakti hīna mohi priya nahiṃ soū //*

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[84] On the *pāñcarātra* doctrines see F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya saṃhitā* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1973) and Mitsunori Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra saṃhitās & early Vaiṣṇava theology, with a translation and critical notes from chapters on theology in the Ahirbudhnya saṃhitā* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994).

[85] See Hans Bakker, *Ayodhyā* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 67-78.

[86] Lamb, *Rapt in the Name*, 28.

[87] Ibid., 30.

[88] Gupta, *Tulsīdās* and Charlotte Vaudeville, *Etude sur les sources*.

*bhakti sutantra sakala sukha khānī / binu satasanga na pāvahi prānī/*
*punya punja binu milahiṃ na santā / satasangati susṛti kara antā//*
(7.45.1-3)

Those who seek happiness in this world and the next, listen to my words and take them to your heart. My brothers! The path of devotion to me is easy and pleasant, so say the *Shrutis* and *Puranas*.

The path of knowledge is difficult and beset with obstacles; the path is rough with no place to rest the mind. Many struggle with it and few attain it, for without devotion no one is dear to me.

*Bhakti* is independent and the source of all happiness, but men cannot attain it without the fellowship of holy men. Holy men cannot be attained without the accumulation of merits, but their fellowship puts to an end the cycle of birth and death.

In this verse Tulsidas suggests that the means to attain Ram bhakti is through the fellowship of holy men. Tulsidas repeatedly stresses the importance of such fellowship with holy men, or *satsaṅg*. Again:

*santa sanga apabarga kara kāmī bhava kara pantha/*
*kahahiṃ santa kabi kobida śruti purāna sadagrantha//*
(1.7.33)

The fellowship of holy men is the path to release, whereas the fellowship of sensualists leads to the cycle of birth and death. So say the holy men themselves, as well as the wise and the learned, the *shrutis*, *puranas* and other holy texts.

One aspect of communion with holy men is the constant recitation (or singing) of the text as well as listening to readings of the text in such fellowship. This "listening" and "reading" to the exploits of Ram, brings to mind one of the central tenets of Vaishnava practice, *navadhā bhakti*, which Tulsidas also refers to explicitly in a verse from the *Araṇya kāṇḍ*, during Ram's conversation with Shabari. Advising her on the methods through which to cultivate devotion, Ram enumerates on the path of navadha Bhakti, or the nine-fold path of devotion:

*navadhā bhagati kahahuṃ tohi pāhiṃ / sāvadhāna sunu dharu mana māhiṃ/*
*prathama bhagati santanha kara sangā / dūsari rati mama kathā prasangā //*
(3.35.4)

*gura pada pankaja sevā tīsari bhagati amāna /*
*cauthi bhagati mama guna gana karayi kapata taji gāna//*
(3.35)

*mantra jāpa mama dṛḍha bisvāsā / pancama bhajana so beda prakāsā/*
*chata dama sīla birati bahu karamā / nirata nirantara sajjana dharama //*

*sātavaṃ sama mohi maya jaga dekhā / moteṃ santa adhika kari lekhā/*
*āṭhāvaṃ jathālābha santoṣā / sapanehuṃ nahiṃ dekhayi paradoṣā//*

*navama sarala saba sana chalahīnā / mama bharosa hiyaṃ haraṣa na dīnā/*
*nava mahuṃ ekau jinha ke hoīṃ / nāri puruṣa sacarācara koī//*
(3.36.1-3)

I will now tell you the nine forms of *bhakti*, listen with attention and take them to heart. The first form of *bhakti* is to seek the fellowship of holy men and the second is a love of my stories and tales.

The third form of devotion is humble service to the lotus feet of one's guru and fourth form is in the singing of my praises with a guileless heart.

Reciting my name with firm faith is the fifth form of devotion as revealed in the Vedas. The sixth is the cultivation of self-discipline and virtue, the avoidance of too many activities, and the constant pursuit of good conduct.

The one who practices the seventh form of *bhakti* sees me in the entire world and holds the saints in greater esteem than me. The eighth form of *bhakti* is the cultivation of contentment with what one has and the refusal to even dream of seeking faults in others.

The ninth form is to be kind and forthright in one's dealings with others and to cultivate implicit faith in me, without happiness or sorrow.

Tulsidas's description of *navadha bhakti* deviates in part from the standard enumeration in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*.[89] The nine-fold path of *bhakti sādhanā*, or practice, described in this text is the foundational for all Vaishnavas.[90] The nine practices described by Prahalad, the archetypal Vaishnava devotee, are as follows: (1) *śravaṇa*, listening to the tales of Vishnu, (2) *kīrtana*, praising and singing of Vishnu, (3) *smaraṇa*, remembering, or fixing the mind on Vishnu at all times, (4) *pādasevana*, rendering service to Vishnu's feet, (5) *arcana*, the worship of

[89] The verse from the *Bhāgavata* is:
*śrī prahalāda uvāca*
*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣnoḥ / smaraṇam pādasevanam/*
*arcanam vandanam dāsyam / sakhyam ātmanivedanam//*
*iti puṃsārpitā viṣṇau / bhaktiścennavalakṣaṇā/*
*kriyeta bhāgavatyaddhā / tan manye 'dhītam uttamam//* (7.5.23)

[90] Vaishnava *sampradays* with their own theological formulations usually incorporate this basic navadha list into their practices. For example, the Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe that these nine practices have a place within the doctrine of *rāgānugā* bhakti. See David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 134. These practices are also prevalent in the Pushtimarg sect of Vallabhacharya. See Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992), 83-85.

Vishnu 's image, (6) *vandana*, prayer and paying homage, (7) *dāsya*, the love and worship of Vishnu in the role of a servant, (8) *sākhya*, the love and worship of Vishnu in the role of a friend, and lastly, (9) *ātma nivedana*, complete self surrender. While the first four, even five forms of *bhakti* described by Tulsidas, are variations on *shravana*, *kirtana* and *padasevana*, the rest of his list diverges from the standard *Bhāgavata* enumeration.

The rest of Tulsidas's inventory of *navadha bhakti* is a catalog of ideal human behavior. This modification of the standard *navadha* practices has not been given much importance in discussions of Tulsidas's theology. It is important to make note of this however, because it shows that Tulsidas was certainly aware of this *bhakti* theology current during his time and central to the major Krishna *bhakti sampradays*. However, he chose reinterpret the practices of *navadha bhakti* in his most famous composition, the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

Tulsidas's enumeration of *navadha bhakti* places a greater emphasis on one's involvement with the world and one's behavior towards one's fellow human beings. While he continues to stress the centrality of devoting oneself to Ram, the means of doing so lies primarily in one's moral attitude and not merely in ritual practice. Tulsidas's *navadha* is a less of a list of practical and physical things to do in the service of Ram and more a guide on how to live morally in the world. However, the importance of practices such as *shravana*, *kirtana*, *padasevana* and *satsang* cannot be overstated. The consequences of not performing these activities are clearly to be regarded as evil.

> *jinha hari kathā suni nahiṃ kānā / śravana randhra ahibhavana samānā/*
> *nayaninha santa darasa nahiṃ dekhā / locana morapaṅkha kara lekhā /*
>
> *te sira katu tumbari samatūlā / je na namata hari gura pada mūlā //*
> *jinha haribhagati hṛdayaṃ nahiṃ ānī / jīvata sava samāna teī prānī /*
>
> *jo nahiṃ karai rāma guna gānā / jīha so dādura jīha samānā //*
> *kulisa kaṭhora niṭhura soi chātī / suni haricarita na jo haraṣātī /*
> (1.113.1b-4a)
>
> The ears of those who have never heard the tale of Ram are like snake holes. Eyes that have never beheld the sight of holy men are no better than the false eyes on the tail of a peacock.
>
> Heads that do not bow to the feet of Hari and to the feet of there are like bitter pumpkins. Those who have not cultivated devotion to Hari in their hearts are like living corpses.
>
> The tongue that does not sing the praises of Ram is like the tongue of a frog. The heart that does not exult on hearing the deeds of Hari is cruel and adamantine.

### *Sagun bhakti*, *nirgun bhakti*, and Ram *nam*

It has been argued that the distinction between *nirgun bhakti* and *saguna bhakti* (which was primarily identified with the sectarian Vaishnavas of the *catuh*

*sampraday* system) as two separate traditions developed as late as the mid-nineteenth century, whereby the *nirgun bhaktas*, also known as the *sants* (saint-poets), were considered to belong to a distinct tradition, known as the *sant parampara*, and to have a distinct and coherent body of teaching known as *sant mat*.[91] Scholarship on North Indian *bhakti* traditions also began to recognize this distinction only in the early twentieth century.[92] However, based on his research of anthology manuscripts, Jack Hawley has argued that there is a cautious case to be made for tracing the distinction between *nirgun* and *sagun* traditions back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[93] Indeed that such a distinction was recognized in the sixteenth century is evident from the *Rāmcaritmānas*, for Tulsidas goes out of is way to assert the essential compatibility of both conceptions of Ram.

Early in the *Bāl kāṇḍ*, Parvati expresses her doubts about how Ram, the prince of Ayodhya, can also be the all-pervading Brahman:

> *prabhu je muni paramārathabāī / kahahiṃ rāma kahuṃ brahma anādī /*
> *sesa sāradā beda purānā / sakala karahiṃ raghupati guna gānā //*
>
> *tumha puni rāma rāma dina rātī / sādara japahu anaṅga ārātī /*
> *rāmu so avadha nṛpati suta soī / kī aja aguna alakha gati koī //*
>
> (1.108.3-4)
>
> *jauṃ nṛpa tanaya ta brahma kimi nāri birahiṃ mati bhori /*
> *dekhi carita mahimā sunata bhramati buddhi ati mori //*
>
> (1.108)
>
> O Lord! Sages who discourse on the supreme reality say that Ram is Brahman, who has no beginning. Sesha, Sharada, the Vedas and the Puranas, all sing the praises of the lord of Raghus.
>
> O conqueror of Love, you too, reverently chant the name of Ram day and night. Is this Ram the same as that son of the King of Ayodhya? Or is he some other unborn, unqualified and invisible being?
>
> If he is a king's son, how can he be Brahman? And if he is Brahman, how is can his mind become distressed at the loss of his wife? Witnessing his actions and hearing of his glory, my mind is utterly confused.

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[91] Karine Schomer, "The Sant Tradition in Perspective," in *The Sants*, edited by Karine Schomer (Berkeley: Religious Studies Series, 1987), 3.

**[92]** See Pitambar Barthwal, *The Nirguṇa School of Hindi Poetry: An Exposition of Medieval Indian Sant Mysticism* (Banaras: Indian Book Shop, 1936). Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat kī sant-paramparā* (Prayag: Bharati Bhandar, 1952). Ramchadra Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (1930; reprint, Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1988).

[93] John S. Hawley, "The *Nirguṇ*/*Saguṇ* Distinction in Early Manuscript Anthologies of Hindu Devotion" in *Bhakti Religion in North India; Community Identity an d Political Action*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 160-180.

Here Parvati expresses inability to reconcile the transcendental greatness of the *nirgun* Ram with the worldly and mundane actions of the *sagun* Ram as described in the *Rāmcaritmānas* (in particular Ram's mental anguish on losing Sita in the *Araṇya kāṇḍ*)[94]. Her doubts are answered by Shiva, who explains:

> *sagunahi agunahi nahiṃ kachu behdā / gāvahiṃ muni purāna budha bedā/*
> *aguna arūpa alakha aja joī / bhagata prema basa saguna so hoī//*
>
> *jo guna rahita so saguna so kaiseṃ / jalu hima upala bilaga nahiṃ jaise /*
> *jāsu nāma bhrama timira patangā / tehi kimi kahia bimoha prasangā//*
> (1.121-3-4)
>
> Wise men, sages, the Vedas and Puranas declare that there is no difference between the *sagun* and *nirgun* forms of Brahman. That which is without attributes, without form, imperceptible, and without birth is compelled to takes on the qualities of the iconic under the influence of the devotees love.
>
> How can that Absolute without attributes become qualified? In the same way that water and hailstones are not different from each other. He whose very name is like the sun to the darkness of ignorance, tell me how can he be subject to ignorant delusion?

Shiva thus lectures Parvati that her delusion itself is delusional, and that the substance or essence of both forms is essentially the same. Thus Tulsidas stresses the essential correspondence between *sagun* and *nirgun bhakti* forms of Ram. While Tulsidas for the most part takes a position of reconciliation between these two forms of *bhakti*, he does, at certain points, indicate a preference of one over the other. Typically preference is expressed for *sagun bhakti* over *nirgun bhakti*. But such instances are rare and they usually only express a preference based on the ease and beauty of the former, and not a fundamental theological superiority of one position over the other. Indra, in the *Lankā kāṇḍ*, for example, expresses his preference for *sagun* over *nirgun bhakti*:

> *kou brahma nirguna dhyāva / abyakta jehi śruti gāva /*
> *mohi bhāva kosala bhūpa / śrī rama saguna sarūpa //*
> (6.113. 7)
>
> Some meditate on the *nirgun* Brahman that the *Shrutis* praise as the Unmanifest. I am attracted by the King of Kosala, the *sagun* form of Shri Ram.

But in the *Uttar kāṇḍ,* Kak Bhushundi discourses on the greatness of the *nirgun* form of Ram:

[94] I will discuss this episode in chapter 3 in the context of *rasa*.

*jo māyā saba jagahi nacāvā / jāsu carita lakhi kāhuṃ na pāvā /*
*soi prabhu bhrū bilāsa khagarājā / nāca natī iva sahita samājā //*

*soi saccidānanda ghana rāmā /aja bigyāna rūpa bala dhāmā /*
*byāpaka byāpya akhaṇḍa anantā / akhila amoghasakti bhagavantā //*
(7.72.1-2)

*bhagta hetu bhagavāna prabhu rāma dhareu tanu bhūpa /*
*kiye carita pāvana parama prākṛta nara anurūpa //*

*jathā aneka beṣa dhari nṛtya karayi naṭa koī /*
*soi soi bhāva dekhāvayi āpuna hoi na soi //*
(7.72.a-b)

Maya, who makes the world dance to her tune, whose tale no one has been able to fathom, like an actress on stage with all her troupes dances to the play of the Lord's eyebrows, O Garuda!
Such is Ram, the manifestation of Truth, Consciousness and Bliss, devoid of birth, the personification of wisdom, beauty and strength, pervading and pervaded, indivisible and infinite, absolute, the Lord of infallible power.

The Lord Ram took on the form an earthly king for the sake of his devotees and performed supremely sacred deeds like an ordinary mortal. Just as an actor while acting assumes various guises in order to exhibits various characters, but himself remains unchanged.

While celebrating the *nirgun* form of Ram, Kak Bhushundi like Shiva, states that Ram takes on a *sagun* form and performs his deeds on earth for the sake of his devotees. While the *sagun* form is considered a manifestation of *nirgun* Ram, Kak Bhushundi goes on to expresses a profound attachment to Ram's exploits in his *sagun* incarnation. The aspect of *sagun* Ram that is most celebrated in this text is Ram's exploits as a child. When just as Parvati, Kak Bhushundi too is unable to reconcile the *sagun* and *nirgun* aspects of Ram, when he wonders how a child that plays and cries like any other can be God, he is transported into the child Ram's mouth, where he witnesses the passing of cosmic time and his illusion is removed.[95] I will discuss the veneration of the child Ram further in a section on the use of *rasas* in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

While continuing to assert the compatibility between *sagun* and *nirgun bhakti*, Tulsidas also introduces another major theological position as a middle ground. Tulsidas proposes Ram *nam*, or the name of Ram, as a compromise between the seemingly opposing philosophies that stress the superiority of either the unqualified Absolute and the qualified divinity.

*nāma rūpa gati akatha kahānī / samujhata sukhada na parati bakhānī /*
*aguṇa saguṇa bica nāma susākhī / ubhaya prabodhaka catura dubhāṣī //*
(1.21.4)

The path of name and the form is a tale that cannot be told;

[95] *Ramcaritmānas*, 7.75-83.

Though it delightful to comprehend, it not easy to put into words.
Between *nirgun* and *sagun*, the name is the perfect mediator;
Clever, it speaks the language of both and illuminates.

In this verse from the *Bāl kāṇḍ*, Tulsidas introduces his argument for the essential compatibility of the *nirgun* and *sagun* positions, which he goes on to elaborate upon in later sections that have been discussed above. While stressing this compatibility, he also suggests that, in his view, the Name is superior to both:

*aguna saguna dui brahma sarūpā / akatha agādha anādī anūpā //*
*moreṃ mata baḍa nāmu duhū te / kiye jehiṃ juga nija basa nija būteṃ //*
(1.23.1)

*ubhaya agama juga sugama nāma teṃ / kaheūṃ nāmu baḍa brahma bibekū /*
(1.23.3a)

*nirgun* and *sagun* are two forms of Brahman; Unspoken, unfathomable, without beginning and without comparison.
To my mind, the name is the greater of the two; It has subdued both with its might.

Though both (*nirgun* and *sagun* forms of Ram) are by themselves hard to reach, they are easily attained through the Name. I say, therefore, that the Name is greater than Brahman (*nirgun*) and Ram (*sagun*).

The cult of the Name also has a long history, and has been adopted in the practices of various traditions.[96] The *Agastysaṃhitā* stresses the significance of the Ram *mantra* or hymn – *rām rāmāya namaḥ* - that later becomes the initiation mantra of the Ramanandi *sampraday*.[97] The doctrine of the Name is also stressed in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, where the four syllables of the name Narayana are considered highly potent.[98] This doctrine, however, is not peculiar to Vaishnavism, and can be traced to the Tantric notion of *śabdabrahman* or the phonic body of God. The doctrine of the Name was most extensively adopted by the *nirgun* tradition, in the poetry of *sants* such as Kabir.[99]

Unlike Kabir, who warns against the mindless chanting of the Name, Tulsidas believes that the potency of the Name is so great that it requires no other deeper understanding. In a verse from the *Kavitāvalī*:

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[96] See Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 128-143. Hans Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 119-124. Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name*, 183-194.

[97] The official Ramanandi mantra considers 'Ram' as a more potent utterance than 'Oṃ,' hence *Ram rāmāya namaḥ* instead of *Oṃ rāmāya namaḥ*. The South Indian Shri Vaishnava mantra is *Oṃ śrīmannārāyaṇanāya namaḥ*.

[98] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 119.

[99] According to the popular hagiographical tradition, Kabir is considered to have been initiated by Ramanand with the mere word Ram.

*āndharo adhama jaḍa jājaro jarā javana*
*sūkara ke sāvaka ḍhakā ḍhakelyo maha maiṃ /*
*giro hiye hahari harām ho harām hanyo*
*hāya hāya karata parīgo kālaphaṅga maiṃ //*
*tulasī bisoka hvai trilokapati loka gayo /*
*nāma ke pratāpa bāta bidita hai jaga maiṃ //*
*soī ramanāma jo saneha soṃ japata jana /*
*tākī mahimā kyoṃ kahī hai jāti agamaiṃ //*
(7.76)

A blind, vile and dim-witted old *yavana* trembling with age was struck and knocked down on the road by a young pig.
He fell, lamenting in his heart, A pig has struck me! A pig has killed me! Wailing Alas! Alas! He was caught up in the snare of time (death). Tulsidas! His woes were banished and he went straight to the world of the Lord of the three worlds, by the glory of the Name that is famous in the world. How then can the wonders be told of the servant who repeats the name of Ram with love?

The pun in this verse is in the word *harām*, which is to be read as 'ha Ram.' While the Muslim is lamenting his contact with the forbidden pig, his cry is heard as a call to Ram and he is immediately transported to Ram's heaven.[100]

Tulsidas's usage of the Name however cannot be conflated with the *nirgun* tradition. In the introductory stanzas of the *Bāl kāṇḍ* Tulsidas introduces the doctrine of the Name as one of his main theological positions under which he also subsumes various other theological doctrines.[101] He adopts the Tantric view that assigns every syllable of the Sanskrit alphabet to one or more divinity. In his view, the syllables Ra, Ā and Ma, thus, not only represent the Gods Agni, Surya and Chandra, but also the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.[102] Although Ram is considered an incarnation or avatar of Vishnu in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, he supersedes Vishnu as the Supreme God or Brahman.

*ākhara madhura manohara doū / barana bilocana jana jiya joū /*
*sumirata sulabha sukhada saba kāhū / loka lāhu paraloka nibāhū //*

*kahata sunata sumirata suṭhi nīke / rāma lakhana sama priya tulasi ke /*
*baranata barana prīti bilagātī / brahma jīva sama sahaja saṃghātī //*
(1.20.1-2)

*nāma kāmataru kāla karālā / sumirata samana sakala jaga jālā /*
*rāma nāma kali abhimata dātā / hita paraloka loka pitu mātā //*

---

[100] In his section on *kuch khaṭaknevālī bāteṃ*, Ramchandra Shukla comments that this verse is not worthy of Tulsidas fame, that is, *unke gaurav ke anukūl nahiṃ hai*. See *Gosvāmi Tulsīdās* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1951), 172-173.

[101] *Rāmcaritmānas,* 1.18 – 1.28.1.

[102] Ibid., 1.19.1.

*nahiṃ kali karama na bhagati bibekū / rāma nāma avalaṃbana ekū /*
(1.27.3-4a)

Both syllables (Ra and Ma) are sweet and beautiful. They are the two eyes of the alphabet and the very life of people. Easy to recall and pleasing to all, they provide benefits in this world and provide shelter in the next. Delightful to utter, to hear and to recall, they are dear as Ram and Lakshman to Tulsidas. When separated they lose their harmony, for they are naturally connected like Brahma, the cosmic spirit and Jiva, the individual soul.

In this terrible age the Name alone is the wish-granting tree. Merely recalling the name destroys all the illusions of this world. In the age of kali, Ram's name grants all desires. The name is one's father and mother in this world and is beneficial in the next. In the age of kali, neither action, nor devotion, nor knowledge is of any use; the name is the only refuge.

The syllables Ra and Ma are thus considered sacred and Tulsidas maintains that in the corrupt age of *kali yug, karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti,* action, gnosis and devotion, are all essentially useless and that the Name is the only means to salvation. The importance of the Name is also revealed by Shiva to Parvati, when he tells her that reciting the name of Ram was equivalent to reciting the one thousand names of Vishnu, or the *Viṣṇu sahasranāma*.[103] The power of the Name is thus repeatedly identified as a means to salvation, not only with respect to Ram, but also with respect to Vishnu.

Furthermore,

*kāsīṃ marata janti avalokī / jāsu nāma bala karauṃ bisokī/*
*soī prabhu mora carācara svāmī / raghubara saba ura antarajāmī//*
*bibasahuṃ jāsu nāma nara kahahiṃ / janama aneka racita agha dahahiṃ/*
*sādara sumirana je nara karahiṃ / bhava bāridhi gopada iva tarahiṁ//*
(1.119.1-2)

When I see any creature dying in Kashi, it is by his (Ram's) name that I rid it of sorrow. He is my lord, the master of all creatures animate and inanimate, the chief among Raghus, the resident of all hearts. If his name is repeated by men in the most pitiful of states, the sins committed by them in countless births are burnt away. Those men who remember him with devotion cross the ocean of existence as if it were a mere depression made by the hoof of a cow.

Thus, Shiva himself derives his power to liberate souls in Varanasi from Ram's name. While stressing the power of the Ram *nam*, these verses also reflect

[103] Ibid., 1.19.3. The well-known verse *śrī rama rama rāmeti rame rāme manorame / sahasranāma tattulyam rama nāma varānane //* which has found its way into various devotional texts, is said to originate in Buddhakaushika's *Ramrakṣāstotra*.

the reciprocity of devotion between Ram and Shiva that is stressed throughout the text.

**Shaivism and Vaishnavism**

The next important component of Tulsidas's theology that I wish to discuss is the compatibility between devotion to Shiva and Ram. Tulsidas stresses throughout his text that Shiva and Ram are great devotees of each other and that to worship Shiva is to worship Ram and vice versa. Shiva is presented as the original composer of the narrative as well as Ram's most devout *bhakta* or devotee. This reconciliation of Shaivism and Vaishnavism can be traced to the *Agastysaṃhitā*, which presents a lineage of Ram *bhaktas* in which Shiva is second, initiated by Brahma (the first in the lineage) with the *Ram mantra*.[104] This genealogy is also presented in Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl*, where Shiva is third, after Brahma and Narada in the lineage of Ram devotees.[105] While Nabhadas is content to just mention Shiva in a list of the *dvādaś mahābhaktarāj*, or the twelve great princes among devotees, Priyadas adds three *kavitta* verses, recounting the incident in which Sati impersonates Sita in order to test Ram and is thus forced to abandon her body and take birth once more as Parvati.

The *Rāmcaritmānas* itself is a presented as a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, the primeval storytellers, as in the *Kathāsaritasāgara*. The importance of Shiva is evident in the *Bāl kāṇḍ*, which includes a lengthy section (stanzas 44-106) on the life of Shiva and Sati/Parvati as well as a theological discussion between them on Ram *bhakti* (107-120). The first section includes the myths about Sati's illusion, Daksha's sacrifice, Sati's incarnation as Parvati and the eventual marriage of Shiva and Parvati. Thus Shiva is not only a narrator of the Ram *katha*, but his tale, the Shiv *carit* is part of the larger take, the Ram *carit*.

In the second section, Shiva advocates the power of Ram's name as well as his story. As Shiva recalls the tale of Ram in order to narrate it to Parvati, Tulsidas says:

> *hara hiyaṃ rāmacarita saba āye / prema pulaka locana jala chāye //*
> *śrīraghunātha rūpa ura āvā / paramānanda amita sukha pāvā //*
> (1.111.4)

> All the deeds of Ram flashed into Shiva mind, his body bristled with love and his eyes filled with tears. The form of Raghunath was reflected in his heart and that embodiment of supreme bliss himself (Shiva) felt great joy.

Thus Shiva is portrayed as Ram's greatest devotee. The image of Ram in Shiva's heart should call to mind the famous representation of Hanuman tearing his chest open to reveal the image of Ram and Sita.[106] Shiva then reiterates Tulsidas's position on the compatibility of the transcendental (*nirgun*) and

[104] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 75-76.

[105] Nabhadas, *Śri Bhaktamāl*, 61-64.

[106] The connections between Shiva and Hanuman are explored in depth in Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanumān's Tale: The Messages of a Divine Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

phenomenal (*sagun*) aspects of God, equating Ram with *Brahman* and attributing to him the qualities of *sat, cit* and *ānanda,* truth, consciousness and bliss. Shiva also says that the world is created by Ram's *maya*, thus advocating an *advaita* position.

However, throughout the composition, Ram is also portrayed as a devotee of Shiva, establishing and worshipping the *linga* at Rameshwaram before crossing over to Lanka.[107] From the *Lankā kāṇḍ*:

> *parama ramya uttama yaha dharanī / mahimā amita jāyi nahiṃ baranī //*
> *karihahuṃ ihāṃ sambhu thāpanā / more hṛdayaṃ parama kalapanā//*
> *suni kapīsa bahu dūta paṭhāye / munibara sakala boli lai āye/*
> *liṅga thāpi bidhivata kari pūjā / siva samāna priya mohi na dūjā//*
> *siva drohi mama bhagata kahāvā / so nara sapanehuṃ mohi na pāvā/*
> *sankara bimukha bhagati caha morī / so nārakī mūḍha mati thorī//*
>
> (6.2.1-4)

> *sankarapriya mama drohī siva drohī mama dāsa/*
> *te nara karahiṃ kalapa bhari ghora naraka mahuṃ bāsa//*
>
> (6.2)

> This is an excellent and delightful spot, its immeasurable glory is beyond description. I will install (a symbol of) Shambhu here, for it is the foremost desire in my heart. Hearing this, the lord of the monkeys dispatched many messengers to invite and bring all the great sages. Having installed the *linga* and worshipped it according to tradition, he (Ram) said, "There is no one as dear to me as Shiva. An enemy of Shiva who calls himself my devotee cannot attain me even in his dreams. The stupid and dull witted one who turns away from Shiva and aspires for devotion to me is condemned to hell.
>
> Men who are devoted to Shiva and hostile to me, and those who are hostile to Shiva and are my devotees shall dwell in the most terrible of hells till the end of creation.

This reciprocal relationship of devotion is stressed by none other than Ram himself, who also often says that one cannot be devoted to him without being devoted to Shiva and vice versa. Ram devotion thus implies devotion to Shiva and Shiva devotion implies devotion to Ram. Tulsidas stresses the essential compatibility between these two figures repeatedly in his composition. This position can be traced not only to his orientation as a *smarta* Vaishnava but also to his location in Varanasi, the city of Shiva.[108]

### *Rasa* in the *Rāmcaritmānas*

[107] Lutgendorf also discusses the variants of this event in different *Rāmāyaṇas*. Ibid., 204-207.

[108] Diana Eck, "Following Rama, Worshipping Siva," in *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the regions of India, Studies in Honor of Charlotte Vaudeville*, ed. by Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991), 49-72.

The syncretism of Tulsidas with regard to *nirgun* and *sagun bhakti* as well as Shaivism and Vaishnavism are the two major focal points of his theology. I would now like to shift attention to an aspect of his theology that is less central, his position on the uses of *rasa* as a mode of *bhakti.* The theory of *rasa*, which was developed in relation to drama in texts such as the *nāṭya śāstra* of Bharata, became central to the theology of *bhakti* in Chaitanya Gaudiya tradition of Krishna worship.[109] The theology of *bhakti* as a *rasa* was developed primarily by Rupa Goswami (1489-1564 C.E.) in his influential Sanskrit work the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasinshu*. The implications of his work were felt by all the major Vaishnava *sampradays*, including the *rasik* Ramanandis, as we will see in Section II. Tulsidas also seems to have been influenced by these developments in theology. However, he tended to de-emphasize the primary and most celebrated mode of *bhakti rasa*, *śṛṅgār*, or love.

Instead he paid greater attention to the worship of Ram as a child, thus emphasizing the mode of *vātsalya*. In the *Rāmcaritmānas,* Ram's parents Kaushalya and Dasharath are the primary exemplars of such devotion. The *Bāl kāṇḍ* includes elaborate descriptions of the child Ram in the tradition of *nakh śikh* (head to toe) descriptions but rather than the erotic, he is portrayed in the aspect of performing childish exploits, or *bāl līlā*.[110] This portion of the text is heavily influenced by the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, in particular when Ram reveals his *para brahman,* or transcendental form to his mother, Kaushalya.[111] In addition both Shiva and Kak Bhushundi also declare themselves devotees of the child Ram. In the *Uttar kāṇḍ*, Kak Bhushundi explains:

> *jaba jaba rāma manuja tanu dharahiṃ / bhakta hetu līlā bahu karahiṃ//*
> *taba taba avadhapuri maiṃ jāuṃ / bālacarita biloki haraṣāūṃ/*
> *janma mahotsava dekhauṃ jāī / baraṣa pāñca tahaṃ rahahuṃ lobhāī//*
> *iṣṭadeva mama bālaka rāmā / sobhā bapuṣa koṭi sata kāmā/*
> *nija prabhu badana nihāri nihāri / locana suphala karauṃ uragāri//*
> *laghu bāyasa bapu dhari dhari hari sangā / dekhauṃ bālacarita bahurangā//*
>
> (7.75.1b-4)

> *larikāīṃ jahaṃ jahaṃ phirahiṃ tahaṃ tahaṃ sanga uḍāuṃ/*
> *jūṭhani parai ajira mahaṃ uṭhāi kari khāuṃ//*
>
> (7.75a)

> Whenever Ram appears in human form and performs his deeds for the sake of devotees, I go to Ayodhya and delight in watching his childish exploits. I go to witness the grand ceremony of his birth and spellbound, stay on for five years. The child Ram is my beloved deity whose form has the allure of one hundred million cupids. Gazing on the form of my lord,

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[109] David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā bhakti sādhanā* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

[110] *Ramcaritmānas*, 1.200.1-4.

[111] Ibid., 1.201-202.

I reward my eyes with the sight of him, O Garuda. I take the form of a small crow and stay with Hari, witnessing his many childish sports.

Wherever he moves about as a child, I flutter close by him. The crumbs that fall from his mouth onto the courtyard, I pick up and eat.

The worship of Ram as a child, in the mode of *vatsalya* is one mode of worship in the Ramanandi *sampraday* though it is not as commonplace as the mode of *shringar*.[112] However, *shringar rasa* gets rather perfunctory treatment in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, being confined to a brief description of the meeting between Ram and Sita and the gardens of Mithila. The other *rasa* that Tulsidas employs to greater effect is the sentiment of *viraha,* or separation, which he uses in describing Ram's anguish on being separated from Sita when she is abducted.

In the *Araṇya kāṇḍ*, Ram laments as though he were suffering from the pangs of separation (*birahī iva prabhu karata biṣādā*):

*lachimana dekhu bipina kai sobhā / dekhata kehi kara mana nahiṃ chobhā /*
*nāri sahita saba khaga mṛga bṛndā / mānahuṃ mori karata hahiṃ nindā //*
*hamahi dekhi mṛga nikara parāhīṃ / mṛgīṃ kahahiṃ tumha kahaṃ bhaya nāhīṃ /*
*tumha ānanda karahu mṛga jāe / kanchana mṛga khojana e āye //*
*saṃga lāi karinīṃ kari lehīṃ / mānahuṃ mohi sikhāvanu dehīṃ /*
*sāstra suciṃtita puni puni dekhiya / bhūpa susevita basa nahiṃ lekhiya //*
*rākhiya nāri jadapi ura māhīṃ / jubatī sāstra nṛpati basa nāhīṃ /*
*dekhahu tāta basanta suhāvā / priyā hīna mohi bhaya upajāvā //*
(3. 37. 2-5)

Lakshman behold the beauty of this forest, whose heart would not be moved? The birds and deer are with their mates, as if to mock me. When the bucks see me they flee, but their mates tell them they have nothing to fear. Enjoy yourselves! (they tell their mates) he has come to hunt the golden deer. The elephants take their mates along with them, as if to teach me a lesson.

The *shastras* however well studied must be examined over and over. A King however well served must never be trusted. Even though one might cherish a woman in one's heart, like the *shastras* and the king, she is never mastered. Dear brother, look how beautiful the spring is; bereft of my beloved it only frightens me.

*biraha bikala balahīna mohi jānesi nipaṭa akela /*
*sahita bipina madhukara khaga madana kīnha bagamela //*
*dekhi gayau bhrātā sahita tāsu dūta suni bāta /*

[112] On the adoption of iconography of the infant Ram in the politics of Rāmjanmabhūmī, see Anuradha Kapur, "Deity to Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram," in *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, edited by Gyanedra Pandey (New Delhi: Viking, 1993), 74-109. The slogan goes, *Ram lalla hum āyenge, mandir vahān banāyenge.*

*ḍerā kīnheu manahuṃ taba kataku hataki mana jāta //*
(3.37. a-b)

Finding me weak from the agony of separation, helpless and alone,
the god of love rushed against me assailed me with the lush forest and the birds and bees for his army.

On his spy's (the wind) report that I have been seen with my brother, the god of love has held back his advancing army as if laying siege to me.

*biṭapa bisāla latā arijhānī / bibidha bitāna diye janu tānī /*
*kadali tāla bara dhujā patākā / dekhi na moha dhīra mana jākā //*
*bibidha bhānti phūle taru nānā / janu banaita bane bahu bānā /*
*kahuṃ kahuṃ sundara biṭapa suhāye / janu bhata bilaga bilaga hoi chāye //*
*kūjata pika mānahuṃ gaja māte / ḍheka mahokha ūṃṭa bisarāte /*
*mora cakora kīra bara bājī / pārāvata marāla saba tājī //*
*tītira lāvaka padacara jūthā / barani na jayi manoja barūthā /*
*ratha giri silā dundubhī jharana / cātaka bandī guna gana baranā //*
*madhukara mukhara bheri sahanāyi / tribidha bayari basīṭhīṃ āyī /*
*caturaṃginī sena saṃga linheṃ / bicarata sabahi cunautī dīnheṃ //*
*lachimana dekhata kāma anīkā / rahahiṃ dhīra tinha kai jaga līkā /*
*ehi keṃ eka parama bala nārī / tehi teṃ ubara subhaṭa soi bhārī //*
(3.38.1-6)

Creepers entwine themselves around gigantic trees, as if spreading a variety of canopies in the sky. The plantain and palm trees stand erect like flags and standards, only the valiant at heart can remain unaffected.
The numerous trees are adorned with a variety of flowers, like warriors attired in all their regalia. The beautiful trees here and there seem like warriors camped individually. The cooing cuckoos are his rutting elephants; the herons and rooks are his camels and mules.
The cakoras and bords are his noble horses; the pigeons and swans his steed. The patridges and the quails are his infantry; this army of Madana's is beyond description. The mountains and rocks are his chariots and the waterfalls hiskettledrums; the cātaka birds are the bards that sing his praises. He buzzing bees are his trumpets and clarinets; the soft, cool and fragrant breezes have come as his ambassadors.
Taking along his four-limbed army, he goes about challenging all to battle. Lakshman! The men who count in this world are those who remain firm in the sight of Kama's army. His greatest power is a woman, only he who can escape her is mighty.

In this section of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsidas departs significantly from the mode of viraha expressed by Ram in the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Araṇya kaṇḍa sargas* 58-64*)*. In the Valmiki, Ram recalls with nostalgia the various parts of the forest Sita was fond of and questions the trees and the birds about her. He identifies her with nature as he thinks he sees her in the eyes of the deer, in the trunk of the elephant, in the boughs and creepers. He imagines he sees her hiding behind trees and rushes about like a man possessed. When he realizes he

is hallucinating, he sinks into despair and imagines all the harm that could come to her – he pictures her injured and covered in blood, a demon cutting her neck and drinking her blood. In the *Rāmcaritmānas,* the tone of Ram's despair shifts. The forest here mocks him and calls into question his manhood. He is no longer dangerous to the animals of the forest - the deer no longer flee for they know he is busy chasing an illusion. The elephants parade their mates before him, reminding him not to loose control over his wife. Women are compared to the *shastras* and kings – they are never mastered and must never be trusted. Nature mocks and also attacks. The forest becomes a vast and mighty army, pre-figuring and anticipating the battle that is to come. While such imagery is hardly new, the tone is that of self-chastisement, even shame, for being so overcome. Sita is never mentioned - concern is not for her, but for the challenge to Ram's manhood.

Thus while Tulsidas seems to be aware of the notion of *bhakti* as a *rasa*, *bhakti* as an aesthetic sentiment, he uses it sparingly and in modified form in the *Rāmcaritmānas*. While he champions the worship of Ram as a child (*vatsalya*), he downplays the erotic sentiment. Even the sentiment of separation (*viraha*) is modified to reflect the war that is to come.

**Conclusion**

It should be clear from the above discussion that it is rather difficult to distill one single theological position from the *Rāmcaritmānas*. To do so would detract from its complexity. In his composition, Tulsidas constructs an elaborate theological edifice that is able to sustain the ideologies of various philosophical traditions under the unifying principle of devotion to Ram. The Ramanandis have captured the complexity of Tulsidas's theology in a popular verse:

> *One Ram is Daśarath's son.*
> *One Ram ever resides within.*
> *One Ram is the object of devotion.*
> *One Ram lied beyond all comprehension.*[113]

The complexity of its theological structure also makes the *Rāmcaritmānas* accessible to various (and at times seemingly contradictory) interpretive traditions, as we shall see in the following section. In Section II, the themes discussed in this chapter will be discussed in relation to the commentarial tradition of the Ramanandis.

[113] Quoted and Translated by Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name*, 42.

## Chapter 3
## Review of *Rāmcaritmānas* Scholarship and Interpretation

Chapter 1 discussed hagiographical material concerning Tulsidas in the *Bhaktamāl* (seventeenth century) and its commentary, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712). While it has been argued that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was probably the most widely known text in North India before the advent of mass printing, it is to the nineteenth century that we can date the commencement of a great deal of activity around this text. In this period, the text became the focus of attention from various quarters. On the one hand, Tulsidas's composition first came to the attention of British scholar-administrators in the early nineteenth century. The consequence of this was a radical shift in the understanding of Tulsidas and the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Tulsidas was singled out as the foremost poet of the *bhakti* period and his text became interpreted as a moral, almost protestant text. On the other hand, performance traditions such as the famous *Rāmlīlā* of Ramnagar also gained patronage and popularity in this period.

The popularity of the text continued into the twentieth century when it provided the impetus for a rich and varied interpretive tradition, both radical and conservative. In the early part of the twentieth century, the text became implicated in nationalist politics. It was used to mobilize radical peasant and caste movements during this period. In the latter half of the twentieth century, it was also being used to mobilize support for right wing Hindu politics, particularly the *Rāmjanmabhūmī* issue in the late 1990s.

While this section reviews some of the major contexts in which this text has been studied and/or interpreted starting with colonial scholarship of the nineteenth century, I end this chapter by highlighting the moment just before the period of colonial interest in the text, a moment that has been largely ignored. It was in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the text became the focus of the Ramanandi *sampraday*. From within this sacred context emerged a rich tradition of textual exegesis that has remained unstudied. This chapter will thus highlight the fact that while the text has been studied in a variety of contexts, colonial, political, performance, to name a few, the sacred context remains unexamined.

### Colonial Scholarship

Modern critical scholarship on the *Rāmcaritmānas* seems to have had its genesis in the colonial/orientalist project to systematize the literary and religious traditions of India. As we will see, Tulsidas and the *Rāmcaritmānas* would both figure prominently in this project. While I began this section by invoking the enthusiastic endorsements of George Grierson and F.S. Growse, it was in fact H.H. Wilson, the renowned Sanskritist and Indologist, who was one of the first to acknowledge the importance of Tulsidas and his works to North Indian religious life.[114] Interestingly, Wilson relied primarily on the hagiography the *Bhaktamāl* to provide the biographical details of Tulsidas's life. On the subject of

[114] H.H. Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus* (1861; reprint, Calcutta: Sushil Gupta Pvt. Ltd., 1958), 32-34.

the *Rāmcaritmānas* he said very little, confining himself to the terse remark that it was "highly popular."[115] Garcin de Tassy, in one of the earliest histories of Hindi literature, included both biographical and bibliographical information on Tulsidas (again, relying on the *Bhaktamāl*) in his first volume and also provided a translation of the *Sundar kāṇḍ* in a second volume.[116] Garcin de Tassy was not convinced of the literary merits of Hindoui (Hindi), preferring instead, the literary idiom of Hindustani (Urdu).[117] It is significant that on the cover page of de Tassy's work, he quotes a characteristically laconic statement of Wilson's, "The Hindi dialects have a literature of their own and one of very great interest."[118] This testimonial to Wilson's acknowledgment of Hindi literature is no mere Gallic gallantry on de Tassy's part. Rather, it is a commentary on the virtual sovereignty of Sanskrit language and literature among Indologists that a Sanskritist's authority needed to be invoked as a testimonial.

De Tassy's caution and diffidence about vernacular literature receded and perished entirely in the work of F.S. Growse (1836-1893) and Sir George Abraham Grierson (1851-1941). In these scholars, the vernacular literature of North India and particularly Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* could not have found more steadfast champions.[119] The two aspects of the *Rāmcaritmānas* that most appealed to British scholar-civil servants such as Grierson and Growse were the accessibility of its language and its moralistic message that echoed the teachings of Christianity. I will discuss briefly the contribution of both these early scholars of the text.

Trained as a linguist at Trinity College, Dublin, George Grierson entered the Indian Civil Service in 1873, spending most of his career in the Bihar Province and the Bengal Presidency. He is most well known for his *Bihar Peasant Life* (London, 1885) and his nineteen-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (Calcutta, 1903-22), which he began after his retirement in 1898.[120] For his contributions to Indology as ethnographer, folklorist and linguist, Grierson was awarded a knighthood in 1912. Grierson's interest in Tulsidas was closely connected with

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[115] Ibid., 33.

[116] Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la Litterature Hindoui et Hindoustani* (Paris: Oriental Translation Committee of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839-47), 1:507-511, 2:215-272.

[117] Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 276.

[118] H. H. Wilson, introduction to *The Mackenzie Collection*, by Colin Mackenzie (1828; reprint, Madras: Higginbotham & Co., 1882).

[119] For Grierson's views on vernacular literature see, "On the Early Study of Indian Vernaculars in Europe," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 62 (1893), 41-50. Also see "The Popular Literature of Northern India," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 1 (1920), 87-122.

[120] See, William Pinch, "*Bhakti* and the British Empire," *Past & Present* 179 (May 2003), 172-173. For more on Grierson's life and work, see F.W. Thomas and R.L. Turner, "Obituary, George Abraham Grierson, 1851-1941," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 28 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 282-306. Also see Asha Gupta, *Dokṭar griyarsan ke sāhityetihās* (New Delhi: Atmaram & Sons, 1984) and *Madhyayugīn hindi kavi: anveśak dokṭar griyarsan* (New Delhi: Atmaram & Sons, 1984).

his interest in Hindu religions (which he tended to equate with Vaishnavism) and the vernacular literary traditions of North India.[121] With almost evangelical zeal, Grierson began to promote the study of vernacular literature as crucial to the success of the colonial enterprise and recommended its study to administrators and missionaries. In his words,

> Believe one who has tried it, that the quotation of a single verse of Tulasī Dās or of a single pithy saying of the wise old Kabir will do more to unlock the hearts and gain the trust of our eastern fellow-subjects than the most intimate familiarity with the dialectics of Śankara or with the daintiest verses of Kālidāsa.[122]

In 1886, Grierson read a paper on the Medieval Vernacular Literature of Hindustan with particular reference to Tulsidas and the *Rāmcaritmānas* at the International Congress of Orientalists at Vienna. It was, in fact, this paper that inspired Grierson to undertake the task of surveying the vernacular literature of North India.[123] This project, that Grierson viewed as a continuation of de Tassy's work, culminated in the "Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan."[124] In this work, Grierson was unabashed in his admiration for vernacular literature, which he ranked above the 'artificial' literature of Sanskrit. He saw Sanskrit literature as confined to the literati and his enthusiasm for vernacular (Hindi) literature in general and the *Rāmcaritmānas* in particular was colored by the immense value he placed on 'popular' literature.[125] In 1893 Grierson published "Notes on Tul'sī Dās" in the *Indian Antiquary*, and was in close contact with Indian scholars, particularly, Pandit Sudhakar Dvivedi, with whom he communicated regarding the dating of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[126] He also encouraged the Italian scholar L.P.

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[121] For Grierson's views on Hindu religion and language, see Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 401-408.

[122] Grierson, "Modern Hinduism and its Debt to the Nestorians," 327-328.

[123] Grierson, *Modern Vernacular Literature*, vii.

[124] Grierson excludes works in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Arabic, Persian and Urdu. The survey includes works in broadly three languages - Marwari, Hindi and Bihari - with its dialects and sub-dialects. By 'Hindustan' Grierson was referring to the area from present-day Rajasthan to Bihar, excluding therefore, Punjab and Bengal.

[125] Also see, Grierson, "The Popular Literature of Northern India," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 1 (1920): 87-88. Grierson was not using the term 'popular' literature in any pejorative sense, but in opposition to classical Sanskrit literature, which was not accessible to many. Grierson was actively involved with the collection of North Indian folklore as well, being a contemporary of R.C. Temple, William Crooke. He regretted not being able to include folk literature in his *Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, but did so in *Bihar Peasant Life* (London, 1885) and in his monumental eleven-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (Calcutta, 1903-22).

[126] Grierson, Notes on Tul'sī Dās," 93.

Tessitori to translate into English his article comparing Tulsidas's work to Valmiki's.[127]

Apart from his interest in vernacular literature, Grierson admired Tulsidas's composition as an exemplary work of religious literature, comparable to the Bible in terms of its accessibility and extensive reach. Grierson considered the message of the work entirely consistent with the principles of the Christian faith.[128] Grierson belonged to the generation scholar-administrators that saw Indian religions as compatible, not inimical to the principles of Christianity. Scholars like Grierson and John Muir (who posited biblical origins for the *Bhagavad Gītā*) adopted a comparative perspective that shaped the attitudes of the missionary arm of the British Empire in the late nineteenth century.[129] For Grierson, *bhakti* was a 'religion' that preached the doctrine of love and the *Rāmcaritmānas* the core text of this doctrine.[130] In Grierson's view, Tulsidas's Ram *bhakti* provided an admirable alternative to the eroticism of the Krishna *bhakti* traditions. "In Ram worship the love of God to man is compared to that of a father for his son, while in the case of Krishna it is compared to that of a man for a maid."[131] In Grierson's view, therefore, the theology of Ram *bhakti* in the *Rāmcaritmānas* promoted a view of Ram as a savior and father figure, a view that closely paralleled the Christian tradition.

F.S. Growse also sought to reconcile the principles of Christianity with Hindu religious practices. Educated at Oxford, Growse joined the Bengal Civil Service as an Assistant Magistrate at Manipuri in 1860. He served as the Joint Collector of Mathura District from 1872-1878, before being transferred to Delhi as Collector.[132] Growse's *Mathura: A District Memoir* (Allahabad, 1883) is an account of his days as a Joint Collector in Mathura. Growse championed the cause of Hindi in the pages of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, where he wrote in

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[127] L.P. Tessitori, "The *Rāmcharitamānasa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*," *Indian Antiquary* 41 (1912): 273-286 and 42 (1913): 1-18. Originally published "Il *Rāmcharitamānasa'* e il *Rāmāyaṇa*," *Giornale della Societa Asiatica Italiana* 24 (1911-12).

[128] Grierson argued that the doctrine of Bhakti was borrowed from the Nestorian Christians. See, "Modern Hinduism and its Debt to the Nestorians," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1907), 311-328.

[129] Pinch, "*Bhakti* and the British Empire," 174-175.

[130] For Grierson's views on *bhakti*, see "Bhakti Marga," *Encycopaedia of Religion and Ethics* ed., James Hastings, Vol 2. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 539-551. Also see *The Monotheistic Religion of Ancient India, and its Descendant, the Modern Hindu Doctrine of Faith* (Yorktown, Surrey: A. Bradford Printer, 1908). In Grierson's view, Ramanuja was a key figure in propagating the doctrine of *bhakti* borrowed from the Nestorian Christians. Ramanand then took this doctrine to North India where it was then immortalized in the poetry of Tulsi and Kabir. For an analysis of the orientalist construction of *bhakti* as a religion, see Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective. A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987).

[131] Grierson, "Modern Hinduism and its Debt to the Nestorians," 321.

[132] See Margaret H. Case, "Growse in Context," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 3 (Winter 1994): 141-152.

opposition to noted philologist John Beames's advocacy for Urdu.[133] Growse invoked the *Rāmcaritmānas* in the colonial project for the codification the Hindi language as the official language of the Colonial administration.[134] Growse remarked,

> I should be delighted to see some Pandit come forward with, sufficient zeal, patriotism, and learning to undertake such a task; a dictionary, I mean, which would comprise all the words used by Tulsi Das's Ramayan, by Chand, the bard of the late Hindu kings, by Beharee Dass, the author of the Satsayi and other classical Hindi poets.[135]

In the spirit of promoting Hindi and its literature, Growse undertook to translate Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* into English. Growse's observation "The book is in every one's hands, from the court to the cottage, and is read or heard and appreciated alike by every class of the Hindū community, whether high or low, rich or poor, young or old" reflects his admiration of the wide reach of the text and is quoted twice by Grierson.[136] Growse also viewed the *Rāmcaritmānas* as a work of religious reformation, observing, "The whole of Tulsi Dās's Rāmāyaṇa is a passionate protest against the virtual atheism of philosophical Hindū thought."[137]

Indeed while there is no denying the literary merit of Tulsidas's work, it is clear that the admiration of British administrators was partly colored by their particular distaste for the eroticism in other works of Indian religious literature. Grierson observed that the *Rāmcaritmānas* "has saved the country from the tantric obscenities of Śaivism. . .the fate which has befallen Bengal" and F.S. Growse wrote "the purity of its moral sentiments and the absolute avoidance of the slightest approach to any prurience of idea...render it a singularly unexceptionable text-book for native boys."[138] While both Grierson and Growse unquestionably made significant contributions to the scholarship on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, by translating it and promoting its wider circulation via printing, their rhapsodic outpourings cannot be dismissed as quaint relics of Victorian morality alone. The legacy of their attitudes on future scholarship on the

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[133] See See John Beames, "Outlines of a Plea for the Arabic Element in Official Hindustani," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 35 (June 1866): 1-13. And in response, F.S. Growse, "Some Objections to the Modern Style of Official Hindustani," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 35 (November 1866): 172-181.

[134] For a discussion on the colonial debate on the choice of an official language and the eventual emergence of Hindi over Urdu see, Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 146-221.

[135] F.S. Growse, "Some Objections to the Modern Style of Official Hindustani," 174. Quoted in Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 188.

[136] Quoted in Grierson, *Modern Vernacular Literature*, xx and 42. F.S. Growse, *The Ramayana,* xvii.

[137] Growse, *The Rāmāyaṇa*, xv.

[138] Grierson, "Tulasidāsa, the Great Poet of Medieval India," in *Tulasidasa: His Mind and Art*, ed. Nagendra (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1977), 2 and Growse, *The Ramayana of Tulsidas*, xvii. Quoted in Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 29.

*Rāmcaritmānas* was by no means insignificant, as we will see below. Subsequent scholarship, in the tradition of Grierson and Growse, continued to champion the text for its perceived Christian orientation; one scholar in the nineteen thirties famously dubbed the text "the bible of Northern India."[139] While the *Rāmcaritmānas* was, clearly implicated in the British colonialist/orientalist project of creating a Hindi language and its literature, this project that would soon be inherited by Hindi scholars and perpetuated in the cause of creating a national language and its literature.

**Hindi Scholarship**

The *Rāmcaritmānas* occupied an important place in the literary and critical traditions of Hindi from the late nineteenth century through the mid twentieth century.[140] Among the earliest critical works, the *Rāmcaritmānas* figured prominently in the *Śivsiṃh saroj*, an early anthology of Hindi poetry written in Hindi and published in 1878.[141] The Mishrabandhus, who published *Hindi navratna* in 1910, also accorded Tulsidas highest honors by placing him first among the nine jewels of Hindi literature.[142] Hazariprasad Dwivedi, an important literary historian of Hindi, also recognized Tulsidas as an unusually gifted poet, a populist and a great man.[143]

Tulsidas also became the model for many Hindi poets of the twentieth century. In 1914, Maithili Sharan Gupta began his composition of *Sāket*, which was intended to be a *khari bolī* rendering of Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*.[144] When he began the work, Gupta felt that a *khari boli* version of the *Rāmcaritmānas* was imperative to the consolidation of poetry in that language. By the time poem was

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[139] See John Mandeville Macfie, *The Ramayan of Tulsidas, or The Bible of Northern India* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930). Also see Jurgen Lutt, "From Krishnalila to Ramarajya: A Court Case and its Consequences for the Reformation of Hinduism", in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. by Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 142-153.

[140] For a discussion on the importance of Tulsidas and the *Rāmcaritmānas* to the Hindi Literary sphere, see Francesca Orsini, "Tulsī Dās as a Classic," in *Classics of Modern South Asian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 119-141.

[141] Śivsiṃh Semgar, *Śivsiṃh saroj* (1878; reprint, Lucknow: Tejkumar Book Depot, 1966).

[142] Mishra Bandhu, *Hindi Navratna* (1910; reprint, Hyderabad: Bharat Ganga Granthakara, 1974). The remaining eight *ratnas* were Surdas, Devdatt, Biharilal, Bhushan and Matiram Tripathi, Keshavdas and Kabir.

[143] Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Hindī sāhitya* (New Delhi: Attarchand Kapur & Sons, 1955), 219.

[144] Just as Tulsidas's indebtedness to Hanuman is narrated in various hagiographies, Maithili Sharan Gupta, in his introduction to *Sāket*, pays similar obeisance to his mentor Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi by creating a pun on the word Mahavir (which is an epithet of Hanuman):

*karte tulsīdās bhī kaise mānas nād / mahāvīr kā yadi miltā nahiṃ prasād*.
How could Tulsidas himself compose the *Mānas* if he had not received the blessings of Mahavir?

See *Sāket* (Chirgaon, Jhansi: Sahitya Sadan, 1965), 2.

completed seventeen years later in 1931, however, it told the story of Urmila, Lakshman's wife, who was left behind during the fourteen year exile. Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' was also deeply influenced by Tulsidas, authoring several critical essays on Tulsidas's theology in various leading journals, as well composing the biographical (drawing from Tulsidas hagiography) poem *Tulsīdās*.[145]

Ramchandra Shukla published his magnum opus - *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* - with a view to providing a history for Hindi literature, which was just beginning to be taught at higher levels.[146] Hindi became established as the medium of instruction in lower forms and as a subject in schools, colleges and universities in the 1920s.[147] Shukla saw the need to provide a "*kāl vibhājan*" or a descriptive timeline for the development of Hindi literature.[148] To Shukla, the *bhakti kal* (the devotional era) represented regeneration in the spirit of the 'nation,' specifically in two areas – *rājnīti* (political) and *dhārmic* (religious/moral). As Shukla saw it, the political regime of Muslims, with its iconoclastic destruction of temples and idols, was a source of shame and despair for the (Hindu) nation. Further, the predominance of Tantric practices of sects such as the Nath yogis was indicative of the spiritual degeneration of the nation. The *bhakti* era, on the other hand, was a period of moral and political revivalism, and revitalized the life of the nation, so much so that Shukla called it the *bhakti āndolan* (agitation/campaign).[149] He was thus equating it with the nationalist 'movement' or *andolan* of the twentieth century.

Shukla was also one of the first scholars to distinguish between the *sagun* and *nirgun* branches of *bhakti* poetry.[150] Locating Tulsidas firmly within the *sagun* branch of *bhakti*, Shukla argued that the poet was a promoter of *lok dharm,* or world order. This was in opposition, in Shukla's view, to the nihilistic rejection of order and hierarchy advocated by the *nirgun* poets.[151] For Shukla, Tulsidas was a unifying force for the nation, promoting reconciliation between various streams of Hindu belief – Shaivism and Vaishnavism, the paths of *jnana* and *bhakti* or knowledge and devotion, as well as between *sagun* and *nirgun bhakti*. According to Shukla, Tulsidas was an *avatar* or incarnation, of Valmiki, who harmonized *bhakti* with the traditions of *varnashrama dharma* and "saved the *dharma* of Āryas

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[145] See Orsini, "Tulsī Dās as a Classic," 130-140.

[146] Ramchandra Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (1930; reprint, Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1988), 86-106.

[147] Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91.

[148] Shukla divided his work into: *ādi kal* or *vīrgāthā kal* (Classical era or the heroic era), *pūrva madhya kal* or *bhakti kal* (Early medieval or the devotional era), *uttar madhya kal* or *rīti kal* (Late medieval or the mannerist era) and the *ādhunik kal* or *gadya kal* (Contemporary or the prose age).

[149] Shukla, *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās*, 43-45.

[150] Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective. A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987), 69-70.

[151] Shukla, *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās*, 66.

from disintegrating."[152] Among the poets of the *bhakti* era, Tulsidas, therefore, epitomized the spirit of nationalist resurgence.[153] Shukla's valorization of Tulsidas as the poet nonpareil of Hindi literature was, according to Orsini, constructed around his identification of Tulsidas as both a "Hindi hero and Hindu hero."[154]

Shukla's elevation of Tulsidas reflected his views on the appropriate idiom for the poetry of Hindu cultural assertion. He was severe in his condemnation of an anonymous poet's punning conceit that dared place Keshavdas, an exponent of erotic *riti* or mannerist poetry and author of the famous *Rasikpriyā*, in the same line as Tulsidas:

> *Sūr sūr tulsī sasi uḍugan keshavdās.*
>
> Surdas is the sun, Tulsidas the moon and Keshavdas the constellations.[155]

Shukla also echoed the Victorianism of Grierson and Growse in his attitudes towards the erotic branch of Ram devotion practiced by the *rasik* Ramanandis. According to him, "it is a great shame that a faction has been engaged in the defilement of Ram *bhakti* by clothing it in the garb of erotic sentiments."[156] Shukla primarily held two people responsible for this "distortion" – the famous *rasik* Ramanandi from Ayodhya, Mahant Ramcharandas and his disciple, Jivaram ji.[157] Severe in his condemnation of the *rasik* Ramanandis, he said, "The pure, righteous and open Ram *bhakti* that Gosvāmī spread is being thus defiled."[158]

Dispensing with Shukla's puritanical tone, Mataprasad Gupta in 1942 was the first to undertake a systematic study of Tulsidas's works in Hindi.[159] Gupta's work on Tulsidas was first presented as his dissertation (in English) towards his

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[152] Ramchandra Shukla, *Gosvāmī Tulsīdās* (1923; reprint, Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1951), 22-23.

[153] Ibid.,1-13.

[154] Francesca Orsini, "Tulsī Dās as a Classic," in *Classics of Modern South Asian Literature*, ed. by Rupert Snell and I.M.P. Raeside (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 126.

[155] Quoted in Shukla, *Gosvāmī Tulsīdās*, 175. Shukla calls him *Bhārat hṛday, bhāratī kaṇṭh bhakt-chūḍāmaṇi Gosvāmī Tulsīdās,* or, the heart of India, the voice of India, the crest jewel of devotion, Goswami Tulsidas.

[156] Shukla, *Hindi Sāhitya*, 105.

[157] Mahanat Ramcharandas's commentary *Ānand laharī* is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Jivram ji was Mahant Ramcharandas's disciple and the author of the *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl*.

[158] Shukla, *Hindi Sāhitya,* 106. Shukla used the word *khulā*, to indicate his disapproval for the secret and esoteric practices of the Ramanandis.

[159] Gupta, *Tulsīdās: Ek samālocanātmak adhyayan* (1942; reprint, Prayag: Prayag Vishvavidhyalay Hindi Parishad, 1953).

D.Litt degree from the Prayag Vishvavidhyalay. Gupta himself later became a faculty member in the Hindi department of the Prayag Vishvavidhyalay and published his dissertation work in Hindi. In his study, Gupta recognized the long history of scholarship on Tulsidas, placed the hagiographical narratives in a historical context, and undertook a systematic analysis and comparison of all Tulsidas recognized works. Mataprasad Gupt was followed by Charlotte Vaudeville, who published an important study in French tracing the literary sources of Tulsidas's text. This key work on the *Rāmcaritmānas* was translated into Hindi.[160]

The *Rāmcaritmānas* certainly has had a chequered career in the academic circles. By the mid-twentieth century, scholarship (at least in the Western academy) had turned away from the *Rāmcaritmānas* for the very same reasons that Grierson and Growse once waxed rhapsodic over it. With eroticism no longer anathema, scholars turned to the study of Krishnaite literature, perhaps, as Lutgendorf points out, in reaction to the conservatism of the past.[161] With the iconoclasm of the mid-twentieth century, some scholars began to view the *Rāmcaritmānas* as emblematic of *sagun bhakti*, particularly with its 'hegemonic' values of caste. David Lorenzen, for example, supports the view of Tulsidas as "The maximum champion of a conservative interpretation of *varṇāśramadharma* within the *saguṇī* camp."[162] On the other hand, Lorenzen valorizes the *nirgun* tradition of *bhaktas* such as Kabir, who, in his view, provided "ideological resistance" to the "dominance" and "hegemony" represented by *sagun bhakti*.[163] Although the modern critical tradition has done much for the study of this key text of *bhakti*, it tends to take the text out of its religious and ritual context. The *Rāmcaritmānas* is ultimately a sacred text that deserves to be studied within the traditions that elevate it thus.

## The *Rāmcaritmānas* in the service of the Nation

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition has played an important role in the political imagination of the sub-continent and the *Rāmcaritmānas* in particular has been pressed into the service of both radical and conservative political movements.[164] The following section will consider the role of the text in reference to the politics of Nation, Caste and Peasants.

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[160] Charlotte Vaudeville, *Étude sur les sources et la composition du Rāmāyaṇa de Tulsī Dās*, trans. J.K. Balbir (Pondicherry: Institut Français D'Indolgie, 1959).

[161] Ibid., 30.

[162] See David N. Lorenzen, "Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion," introduction to *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 14.

[163] Ibid., 13.

[164] For a discussion on role of the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative in shaping the political imagination, see Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52 (May 1993): 261-297.

## The *Rāmcaritmānas* in Print

In the previous section, I considered the place of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in the Hindi literary sphere. The role of the text in the construction of a national language and literature is also reflected in its print history. The earliest print editions of the *Rāmcaritmānas* were issued from Calcutta (1810), under the auspices of the Fort William College.[165] The text, therefore, played a significant role in the education of administrators, as a window into both the language as well as beliefs of the people of North India. It was also central to the development of literacy and education among the general populace of North India.[166]

Lutgendorf dates the 'explosion' in *Rāmcaritmānas* publishing to five decades later, around 1860.[167] The Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow, Indian Press of Allahabad, Shri Venkateshvar Steam Press of Bombay were among the earliest to publish editions of the text. The Naval Kishore Press (founded in 1858) in Lucknow issued an illustrated lithographed edition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in 1863, and another edition in 1865 as part of its endeavor to promote the sale of *bhakti* literature in Hindi.[168]

Several other prominent Indian publishing houses also became involved in the collection and editing of *Rāmcaritmānas* manuscripts, most notably, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha (founded in 1893) in Banaras. The Sabha's early searches for Hindi manuscripts resulted in the discovery of a portion of a seventeenth century manuscript of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[169] Based on this find and several other manuscripts, the Sabha first published an edition of the text in 1903 under the editorship of Shyam Sundar Das.[170] In 1923, the Sabha published the four-volume

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[165] Lutegndorf, *Life of a Text*, 61.

[166] Lutgendorf cites the example of the Vibhuti Narayan Singh (the erstwhile maharaja of Banaras) and his brothers, who were taught the Hindi alphabet by their mother from theRāmcaritmānas. The ability to read theRāmcaritmānas was also cited as an accomplishment for young marriageable women, as it was considered proof of literacy. *Life of a Text*, 63-64. For a discussion on the role of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in women's literacy, see Joyce Flueckiger, "Literacy and the Changing Concept of Text," in *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia* edited by Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies: 1991), 43-60. Also see Ramdas Lamb on the role of the text in promoting literacy among the Dalit communities of Chatisgarh, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

[167] Lutegndorf, *Life of a Text*, 61.

[168] Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: the Naval Kishore Press and the diffusion of the printed word in colonial India* (Ranikhet : Permanent Black, 2007), 391.

[169] Another search instituted in 1926 resulted in the discovery of various hagiographical material on Tulsidas. See Philip Lutgendorf, "The Quest for the Legendary Tulsīdās," in *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, edited by Winand Callewaert and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 65-85.

[170] See Christopher King, "The Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Banaras, 1893-1914: A Study in the Social and Political History of the Hindi Language," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin,

*Tulsī Granthāvali*, under the editorship of Ramchadra Shukla, Brajratna Das and Lala Bhagvan Din. A special "Tulsi edition" of the Sabha's journal, the *Nāgarī Prachāriṇī Patrikā* was published in 1974.

Hanuman Prasad Poddar, founder and editor of the Gita Press in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, was responsible for publishing the most popular modern editions of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Poddar, with the help of Anjaninandan Sharan, published the *Mānasāṃk*, a special issue of its periodical *Kalyāṇ* in 1938.[171] This edition was magnificently illustrated and also contained Poddar's verse-by-verse prose translation.[172] The Gita Press promoted itself as the publisher of important works of Hindu literature, and in this project, the *Rāmcaritmānas* was promoted as the central Hindu text. To this end, the press issued inexpensive pocket (*guṭkā*) editions of the text to make the text widely accessible.

Though the Naval Kishore Press was committed to promoting the literary traditions of both Urdu and Hindi, the founding of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in 1893 reflected a growing association of the Nagri script with religious affiliation, a project in which the *Rāmcaritmānas* was also increasingly being involved.[173] Activists in the cause of Hindu revivalism called for *Mānas pracār*, or the active dissemination of the epic. Closely involved in this project were Madan Mohan Malviya and Pandit Jvalaprasad Mishra, both of whom were connected to the *sanātan dharm* movements of the early twentieth century.[174] Malviya was a close friend of Hanuman Prasad Poddar and encouraged him in the printing of low priced editions of the text.[175] Jvala Prasad Mishra, a *Rāmāyaṇi* and compiler of an influential edition of the text was the "chief religious adviser" to the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal in 1910.[176] With the advent of print culture, therefore, the *Rāmcaritmānas* became closely implicated in the project of promoting an incipient Hindu nationalism. I will consider the impact of the *Rāmcaritmānas* on caste and peasant movements before discussing its role in the construction of right-wing Hindu politics.

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Madison, 1974), 332. Several reprints were issued in the ensuing years. The 1915 edition included a commentary by Shyam Sundar Das and the 1918 edition included a biography of Tulsidas by Benimadhavdas.

[171] On the role of the Gita Press and its publication, *Kalyāṇ* in the promotion of Hindu ideologies, see Monika Horstmann, "Towards a Universal Dharma: *Kalyāṇ* and the Tracts of the Gita Press," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, edited by Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 294-305.

[172] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 62.

[173] Ibid., 365-366.

[174] See Kenneth Jones , "Two Sanatan Dharma Leaders and Swami Vivekananda," in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, ed. by William Radice (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 224–243.

[175] Ibid., 368.

[176] Ibid., 366. Jvala Prasad Mishra's commentary was titled *Śrīmadgoswāmī Tulsīdās-jī viracit rāmāyaṇ, sañjīvanī ṭīkā sahit* and was published by Shri Venkateshwar Press in 1906.

**Caste Politics**

The role of the Ramanandis and the *Rāmcaritmānas* in the caste politics of twentieth century North India has been examined in two significant studies. Ramdas Lamb has examined the centrality of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and in particular, its elevation of Ram *nam* to the Ramnami Samaj of Chattisgarhi dalits.[177] This association was founded by a *chamar* named Parashuram, who was a great admirer of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. According to the hagiographical traditions of the Samaj, he was initiated into the worship of the Ram *nam* by an itinerant Ramanandi monk.[178] The Ramnami movement emerged in the early 1890s under the leadership of Parashuram, who advocated the potency of the name as well as the reading of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Parashuram also started the practice of tattooing Ram's name on the body as well as printing it on clothing. The *Rāmcaritmānas* also continued to play an important role in the promotion of literacy, as many Dalit communities became Ramnamis and learned to read the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The role of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in the sect has declined as the poetry of the *nirgun* poets became more popular. The *bhajan*, or hymn repertoire of the sect now contains about five to six hundred verses from the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[179] The *Rāmcaritmānas* became the inspiration for the *Viśrām sāgar* of Raghunathdas, who re-interpreted the text in light of the *nirgun* Ram *bhakti* of the Ram Snehi sect.

The Ramanandi order's liberal attitudes towards caste played a significant role in the caste politics of the early twentieth century.[180] William Pinch follows the evolution of the order into the twentieth century in the light of the resurgence of egalitarian religious movements that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[181] Pinch considers the role of religious identity (in this case, Vaishnava) as a means of upward social mobilization (from *shudra* to *kshatriya*). The Yadav, Kurmi and Kushvaha communities launched campaigns to claim *kshatriya* status on the basis of genealogical ties to Ram or Krishna.[182] The Kurmis in particular, citing their affiliation with the Awadh/Ayodhya region, claimed descent from the *kshatriya* lineage of Ram. The Kushvahas claimed *kshatriya* status by tracing their lineage to Ram's son, Kush. The *jāti* or caste reform campaigns resulted in the re-writing of caste histories based on a Vaishnava ethos popularized by the

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[177] Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

[178] For details on the development of the *samaj* and biographical/hagiographical information on Parashuram, see Ibid., 60-75.

[179] Ibid., 118.

[180] The order itself was inconsistent in its attitudes towards caste, tending towards orthodoxy in the eighteenth century and then becoming radical again in the early twentieth century.

[181] William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

[182] Pinch, *Peasant and Monks,* 81-82.

Ramanandis. Pinch, however, does not clarify the place of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in such campaigns and the constructions of such genealogies.[183]

**Peasant Politics**

As Pinch suggests, peasants and monks were integral to the movements of caste reform that swept across Gangetic North India.[184] Baba Ramchandra was an important figure in the Avadh peasant movement in the early twentieth century.[185] Baba Ramchandra mobilized the peasantry of the Avadh against the exploitative tactics of the *taluqdari* system and the administrative policies of the British. Closely allied to the Kisan Sabha, he gained a significant following based on his use of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. He soon acquired mythic status among the peasants for his deep Ram *bhakti*. He was known to carry the *Rāmcaritmānas* on his back as he traveled from village to village, refusing to part with it even while eating or sleeping.[186] Gyan Pandey, in his analysis of the Avadh peasant movement, mourns the "pervasive religious symbolism" in its initial stages (relating to Baba Ramchandra) that limited its radical potential.[187] Kapil Kumar, on the other hand, suggests that Ramchandra had a much more radical vision, particularly in reference to his connection with Gandhi, who also employed the vocabulary of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in the broader nationalist movement. Although Ramchandra declared himself an ardent supporter of Gandhi, Kumar suggests that he brought a more radical perspective to Gandhi's understanding of Ram *rajya*, modifying Gandhi's notion of trusteeship to a more radical, even Marxist vision where the people would own the land.[188]

The *Rāmcaritmānas* played an important part in Gandhi's social and political philosophy, drawing from it the imagery and vocabulary for his nationalism in which he often equated Ramraj with *swaraj*, or self-determination. Gandhi became familiar with the text during his father's illness, when a daily recitation of the text was arranged. Gandhi attributed his lifelong admiration for the work to this early exposure, remarking, "Today I regard the *Ramayana* of

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[183] The role of the Ramanandis is reflected in the order's final break with the Shri Vaishnavas in 1921 and the involvement of various Ramanandi monks in the *jati* reform movement. The 'crisis' of identity is reflected in the competing commentaries on the *Bhaktamāl* that were written in this period. See Pinch, *Peasants and Monks*, 53-61.

[184] Ibid., 4-15.

[185] See Majid H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918-22* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978). Kapil Kumar, "The *Ramcharitmanas* as a Radical Text: Baba Ram Chandra in Oudh, 1920-1950," in *Social Transformation and Creative Imagination*, edited by Sudhir Chandra (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984), 311-333. Gyan Pandey, "Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-22," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 233-287.

[186] Kumar, "The *Ramcharitmanas* as a Radical Text," 313.

[187] Pandey, "Peasant revolt," 258.

[188] Ibid., 328-329.

Tulasidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature.[189] Gandhi also advocated the power of the Ram *nam* in helping him in the practice of *brahmacarya*, or celibacy, as well as his other penances.[190]

**Right Wing Politics**

In recent times, the *Rāmcaritmānas* has come to occupy a central place in the construction of conservative right wing Hindu politics.[191] The role of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in constructing politics around the notion of *sanātan dharma* (immemorial tradition) can, in fact, be dated to the early twentieth century when the text began to be identified as the "Hindi Veda" and occupied as central place in the agenda of various *sanatani* organizations. Remarking on this identification, Lutgendorf has observed:

> As the most accessible Veda, the *Mānas* was the Sanatani scripture par excellence – a devotional work that preached reverence for cows and Brahmans; offered a veritable catalogue of sacred rivers, pilgrimage sites, and popular rituals; presented a harmonious synthesis of Vaishnavism and Shaivism; and in the minds of devotees managed at one and the same time to stand for religious egalitarianism, the maintanence of the social status quo, and (later on) even nationalism and swadeshi (the boycott of British products, especially textiles), since it offered an inspiring vision of a powerful and self-sufficient Hindu state.[192]

The elevation of the text as the "Hindi Veda" and its equation with *shruti* and *smriti* has tended to cast the text in the light of the rigid *varnashrama dharma* structures. With the rising popularity of the text, as well as the patronage extended to it by the royal houses of Varanasi and Rewa, Brahminical interest in the text grew steadily. In the 1950s, the *Rāmcaritmānas* began to be recited on the lines of a Vedic sacrifice in annual nine-day festivals in Varanasi.[193] More

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[189] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, trans., Mahadev Desai (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 32.

[190] Ibid., 317, 343.

[191] See Linda Hess, "Martializing Sacred Texts: Rām's Name and Story in Late Twentieth-Century Indian Politics," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 2 (Fall 1994): 175-206. Philip Lutgendorf, "Interpreting Ramraj: Reflections on the Ramayana, Bhakti, and Hindu Nationalism," in *Bhakti Religion in North India*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 253-287. Also see, Peter van der Veer, "The Politics of Devotion to Ram," in *Bhakti Religion in North India*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 288-305.

[192] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text,* 366-367.

[193] See Philip Lutgendorf, "Rām's story in Shiva's City: Public Arenas and Private Patronage," in *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance, and Environment, 1800-1980*, edited by Sandria B. Freitag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 34-61, "The Power of a Sacred Story: Rāmāyaṇa Recitation in Contemporary North India." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4 (Summer 1990): 115-147, and "The 'Great Sacrifice' of Rāmāyaṇa Recitation: Ritual Performance of the Rāmcaritmānas," in *Rāmāyaṇa and Rāmāyaṇas*, edited by Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1991), 185-206.

recently, the *Rāmcaritmānas* has been invoked by leaders of the *Rāmjanmabhūmī* movement that spearheaded the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992, an incident that has resulted in widespread violence that continues to grip various parts of India.[194]

**The Sacred Context: Oral and Textual Exegesis**

The performance traditions of the *Rāmcaritmānas* have been of great interest to scholars. Tulsidas himself advocated the reading and recitation of the *Rāmcaritmānas* as a form of worship.

> *mana kāmanā siddhi nara pāvā /je yeha kathā kapata taji gāvā /*
> *kahahiṃ sunahiṃ anumodana karahiṃ / te gopada iva bhavanidhi tarahiṃ //*
> (7.129.3)
>
> Men who sing this tale without any deceit attain all their heart's desires. Those who recite it, listen to it, and support it, cross the ocean of existence as if it were merely a cow's hoof-print.

The traditions of *mānas kathā* (oral exposition) and the dramatic performance tradition of the Ramlila are ritual events. [195] Although Ramlilas are performed throughout the year, the major performance occurs annually in the months of October and November, spanning anywhere from nine to thirty days and are based primarily on the *Rāmcaritmānas* text. The Ramlila of Ramnagar is most famous in this regard. While hagiographical narratives credit Tulsidas himself as the founder of this tradition, the antiquity of this performance genre has not been firmly established. The Ramnagar *lila* acquired its fame in the nineteenth century under the patronage of the Raja Udit Narayan Singh (1796-1835) and played an important role in legitimizing the rule of the Bhumihar rajas of Varanasi. The Ramlila tradition has also been central to the legitimization of many political movements, including many of the caste and peasant movements discussed above. The tradition has also been co-opted into the projection of a nationalist Hindu ideal.[196] In the 1980s, the remarkably popular television serial version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, based primarily on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, has raised

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[194] See Jonah Blank, "Ram and Ram Rajya: The Babri Masjid / Ramjanmabhumi Dispute and the Politicization of a Divinity." *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 2 (Fall 1994): 157-175.

[195] For a history of the *līlā* as a genre see, Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). On the *Rāmlīlā* of Rāmnagar, see Philip Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text.* Linda Hess and Richard Schechner, "The Ramlila of Ramnagar." *The Drama Review* 21 (September 1977): 51-82. Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods: the Ramlila at Ramnagar* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1990).

[196] Nita Kumar, "Class and Gender Politics in the *Rāmlīlā*." In *The Gods at Play: Līlā in South Asia*, edited by William S. Sax (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 156-176.

questions of state patronage of culture as well as the homogenization of a diverse tradition.[197]

**The Commentarial Tradition**

I began this chapter by identifying the nineteenth century as the period that witnessed a tremendous activity with regards to the *Rāmcaritmānas* and by identifying the expansion in colonial interest as the beginning of critical scholarship in the text. However, I also noted that beginning with colonial scholarship skips over the period that immediately preceded and predicates colonial interest in the text. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Ramanandi *sampraday* began to establish itself in the major pilgrimage spots of present day Uttar Pradesh, Ayodhya in particular. It was during this period that the *sampraday* seems to have attached itself to the text. Therefore, between the *Bhaktamāl* of the early seventeenth century (discussed in Chapter 1) and colonial scholarship of the mid-to late nineteenth century, lies an unexplored area of textual exegesis – Ramanandi commentaries on the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

While Tulsidas is not venerated as the founder of any sectarian tradition of Ram Bhakti, he is seen as the founder of various traditions of commentaries in his own work, the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The first *ṭīkā*, or commentary of the *Rāmcaritmānas* is considered to be the work of a disciple of Tulsidas's named Ramkumar Dwivedi (1603) and was a translation of the work into Sanskrit. The second complete *tika* is a Persian translation by Devidas Kayasth, a manuscript of which (dated 1804) is in the British Museum.[198] These works of translation are considered part of the commentarial tradition though they are not works of exegesis.

Some traditionalist scholars would have us believe that the *Rāmcaritmānas* has a venerable commentarial tradition, one that was inaugurated by Tulsidas himself.[199] Many have even drawn up elaborate lineage charts tracing the commentarial tradition back to Tulsidas – with many commentaries being written in Sanskrit. However, not one of these commentaries has survived. Although this certainly seems to be an "invented tradition" of the twentieth century, this is not to deny that there may have been a tradition of oral exposition or *katha*.

The earliest known Hindi exegetical commentaries were composed in the early nineteenth century, the authors of which are considered members and/or founders of distinct *tika paramparās* or commentarial traditions of *Rāmcaritmānas*.[200] Tribhuvan Nath Chaube has identified four major *tika*

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[197] See, Romila Thapar, "The Ramayana Syndrome," *Seminar* 353 (January 1988): 71-75. Also see Philip Lutgendorf, "Ramayan: The Video," *The Drama Review* 34 (Summer 1990): 127-176. Vasudha Dalmia, "Television and Tradition: Some Observations on the Serialization of the *Rāmāyaṇa*." In *Rāmāyaṇa and Rāmāyaṇas*, edited by Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1991), 207-228.

[198] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 140.

[199] Chaube, *Rāmcaritmānas kā ṭīkā sāhtitya* (Sultanpur: Sambhavana Press, 1975), 17-18.

[200] Philip Lutgendorf discusses some of the major commentarial traditions in *Life of a Text,* 137-157. Lutgendorf's account mainly concerns the oral *katha* tradition and is largely based on

*paramparas* of *Rāmcaritmānas* commentators; the first two tracing their lineage back to Tulsidas himself and the latter two being associated with sacred places – Ayodhya and Varanasi.[201] As we shall see, many of these commentators belong to the *rasik sampraday*. Though it is not yet clear whether all these commentaries reflect their *rasik* orientation, the preponderance of *rasik* Ramanandis in the *Rāmcaritmānas* commentarial tradition may as well earn them a distinct *parampara*.

**The Ayodhya Parampara**

The *tika* parampara of Ayodhya was founded by *mahant* Ramcharandas 'Karunasindhu,' (1760-1831) a Ramanandi monk and adherent of the *rasik* tradition. He was famous for his oral expositions on the Janaki Ghat in Ayodhya, a tradition continued by his disciples. His work, the *Ānand laharī* is considered the first complete Hindi commentary and was commenced in 1808 under the patronage of Raja Vishwanath Singh of Rewa.[202] The commentary was published in the late nineteenth century by Nawal Kishore Press, which was involved in the publication and dissemination of the *Rāmcaritmānas,* as discussed above. In its project to create a corpus of *bhakti* literature, the press also took the lead in publishing the devotional works of the *rasik sampraday*, first locating the manuscript of *mahant* Ramcharandas's commentary and issuing a print edition in 1882. As the first known Hindi commentary on the *Rāmcaritmānas* and certainly the first Ramanandi commentary, this work is of crucial importance. Moreover, its author, *mahant* Ramcharandas is credited with the consolidation and growth of the *rasik sampraday* in Ayodhya. This commentary will be discussed in depth in Chapters 5 and 6.

**The Tulsi *parampara***

The first lineage of commentators in the Tulsi *parampara* is that of Kishoridatt, allegedly a direct disciple of Tulsidas, and author of a commentary called *Mānas subodhinī*, which has not been traced. His most famous disciple was Pandit Shivlal Pathak (born 1756 in Gorakhpur), a contemporary of *mahant* Ramcharandas. Pathak lived in Varanasi enjoyed the patronage of Raja Udit Narayan Singh of Ramnagar as well as Raja Gopal Sharan Singh of Dumrao. He authored the *Mānas mayaṅk* (Moon of the *Mānas*), a commentary that was an

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Anjaninandan Sharan, "Mānas ke prācīn ṭīkākār," in *Kalyāṇ: Mānasāṅk*, ed. Hanuman Prasad Poddar (Gorakhpur, U.P.: Gita Press, 1938), 908-928. Tribhuvan Nath Chaube has an extensive discussion of all the major traditions in his *Rāmcaritmānas kā ṭīkā-sāhitya* (Sultanpur: Sambhavana Press, 1975). Bhagavati Prasad Singh provides details regarding the *rasik* orientation of the major commentators in *Rāmbhaktī meṃ rasik sampradāy* (Balrampur: Avadh Sahitya Mandir, 1957). The account below relies on all four works for details.

[201] For genealogical charts of all four traditions see Chaube, *Rāmcaritmānas kā ṭīkā-sāhitya*, 20-24. Lutgendorf, following Sharan, identifies two "schools" – The Tulsi parampara (of Shivlal Pathak and Ramgulam Dwivedi) and the Ayodhya parampara of Ramanandi sadhus such as Mahant Ramcharandas.

[202] *Ānand laharī* was published as the seven volume *Rāmāyaṇ Tulsīdās kṛt satīk* by Naval Kishore Press of Luknow in 1882.

outline for oral exposition and a difficult and recondite piece of scholarship. I will discuss this commentary in more detail in Chapter 7.[203]

The second lineage in the Tulsi *parampara* is that of *"būḍhe"* Ramdas, or "old" Ramdas, also allegedly, a direct disciple of Tulsidas. His most famous descendant was Pandit Ramgulam Dwivedi of Mirzapur, also a contemporary and close personal friend of *mahant* Ramcharandas. Like Shivlal Pathak, Dwivedi was also a resident of Varanasi and was connected with the court of Udit Narayan Singh. Himself a famous *Rāmāyaṇī,* or expounder of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Ramgulam Dwivedi did not author a written commentary. According to legend, this was because, Hanuman, to whom Dwivedi was greatly devoted and who gave him the gift of *katha* in the first place, forbade him to commit his exegesis to the page. He is, however, regarded as the founder of a long line of famous *katha* expounders in Varanasi. Moreover, he collected manuscripts of Tulsidas's works and also published an edition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in 1857 through the Sarasvati Press of Varanasi that held in high regard by George Grierson.[204] Dwivedi was also a *rasik* Ramanandi and was included in the 1839 work of hagiography, the *Rasikprakāś Bhaktamāl* of Jivaram 'Yugalpriya'.[205]

**Varanasi Parampara**

The Varanasi *tika* parampara was closely associated with the royal house of Ramnagar. Kashtajihva Swami "Dev", under the patronage of Raja Ishvarprasad Narayan Singh (1821-1889) authored the commentary *Rāmāyaṇ paricaryā*, to which the Raja added *Rāmāyaṇ paricaryā pariśiṣṭh*. The Raja's nephew, Baba Hariharprasad 'Sita Ramji', a *sadhu*, added an appendix, titled *Prakāś*.[206] According to Bhagavati Prasad Singh, Kashtajihva Swami was a *rasik* Ramanandi, who practiced Ram *bhakti* in the mode of *dāsya bhav*, or servitude.[207] However, there is no certainty about his sectarian affiliation.

**Other unaffiliated Commentaries**

Two other famous commentators of the early nineteenth century were Jnani Sant Singh of Amritsar and Raghunath das 'Sindhi'. Known as Panjabi-ji, he composed the *Bhāvprakāś* in the early 1820s, written in a mixed dialect of

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[203] The *Mānas mayank* was first published in 1905 by the Khadgavilas Press of Bankipur, Bihar. In 1920, the same press issued another edition that included a prose commentary by Indradev Narayan.

[204] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 145.

[205] Jivaram Yugalpriya was a disciple of Mahant Ramcharnadas. This important hagiographical work of the *rasik sampraday,* clearly modeled on Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl*, was first published in 1893 by the London Printing Press in Lucknow. Yugalpriya's disciple, Janaki Rasik Sharan wrote a commentary on the text title *Ras prabodhinī ṭīkā* in 1862.

[206] The complete edition titled *Rāmāyaṇ paricaryā pariśiṣt prakāś* was published by Khadgavilas Press (1896-98) in two volumes.

[207] Singh, *Rāmbhaktī meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 451.

Panjabi and Hindi. Raghunath das 'Sindhi' composed the immensely popular *Mānas Dīpikā*, which included a glossary and notes on mythological references.[208] The Naval Kishore press was also actively involved in the publication of several notable *Rāmcaritmānas* commentaries, both scholarly and popular. In 1866 the press issued Sukhdevlal's *Mānas haṃs bhūṣan*, Raghunath das's *Rāmāyaṇ saṭīk* in 1873 (including a glossary of difficult words), and Baijnath Kurmi's *Rāmcaritmānas bhūṣan* in 1884.[209]

There were several commentaries written in the early twentieth century, of which Anjaninandan Sharan's *Mānas Pīyūṣ* deserves particular mention. This twelve-volume work, published over several years (1925-32), was an incredibly ambitious project that collected together, in one work, the insights of the most eminent commentators of the past. It was inspired by Sharan's guru, Sitaram Sharan Bhagvanprasad 'Rupkala,' himself the author of the now standard commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* and friend of George Grierson.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, the *Rāmcaritmānas* is a much-studied text. However, the text also spawned a long and diverse tradition of exegesis that was particularly robust in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a sacred text, the *Rāmcaritmānas* inspired the rich commentarial tradition of the *rasik* Ramanandi *sampraday*. The commentarial tradition on the *Rāmcaritmānas* has received little scholarly attention. Recent scholars, most notably Philip Lutgendorf, have noted its place in oral expository traditions (*katha*) and performance traditions (Ramlila).[210] Indeed, Ramgulam Dwivedi's Ayodhya *parampara* generated commentaries for oral exposition in the *katha* and Ramlila traditions.[211]

The first serious scholars of the text in the West, however, dismissed the commentarial tradition altogether. Grierson observed, "All commentators have a great tendency to avoid difficulties, and to give to simple passages mystical meanings, which Tulsidās Dās never intended. They are unfortunately utterly wanting in critical faculty."[212] Indian literary historians, perhaps inheriting Grierson's attitude, were equally dismissive of the *rasiks*. We have seen how Ramchandra Shukla blamed *mahant* Ramcharandas for defiling the purity of Tulsidas's Ram *bhakti*. It can come as no surprise that the *rasik* tradition of exegesis was brushed aside by him.

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[208] *Bhāvprakāś* was published in 1897 by Khadgavilas Press of Bankipur, Bihar. *Mānas Dīpikā*, one the most frequently reprinted commentaries, was first published in Benares in 1853. Subsequent reprints include: 1868 in Delhi (Hasani Press), Benares in 1869 (Ganesh Yantralay; two editions), Lucknow in 1873 (Naval Kishore; two editions), Delhi in 1878 (unknown) and Benares in 1880 (unknown).

[209] Ibid., 418-422.

[210] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*.

[211] Ibid., 141.

[212] Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, 47.

Even Charlotte Vaudeville noted that the, "commentaries are usually not good and must be used carefully."[213] It is extraordinary that a scholar as thorough and meticulous as Vaudeville should dismiss outright the long commentarial tradition on the *Rāmcaritmānas*; she could not have been unaware of it. Perhaps this dismissal must be viewed in light of the misunderstanding of the function of the commentarial tradition, a misunderstanding that is certainly evident in Grierson's statement. His remarks about the lack 'critical faculty' and the avoidance of 'difficulties' echo the common plaint of Indologists concerning Sanskrit commentaries. The preponderance of *rasik* Ramanandis in the commentarial tradition may have prevented Grierson from giving it serious consideration.[214] After all, Grierson, as we saw in Chapter 3, saw the *Rāmcaritmānas* and Ram *bhakti* as an antidote to the erotic excess (as he saw it) of Krishna *bhakti*. However, it must also be noted that Grierson, curiously, worked in close collaboration both with Sitaramsharan Bhagvan Prasad Rupkala, who was a *rasik* Ramanandi of great repute and author of a commentary on the *Bhaktamāl,* as well as Lala Rai Bahadur Sita Ram, whose family seems to have belonged to the *rasik* tradition or who might himself have been associated with *rasik* Ramanandis.

Leaving his *rasik* connections to one side, Grierson perhaps did not perceive that the commentaries themselves were authored as works of *bhakti*. To understand the interpretation of the text in the context of the sectarian Vaishnava tradition, it must be considered in consonance with the extensive commentarial tradition. The view of the *Ramcaritmānas* as a conservative and puritanical work is only one construction that may be placed on the text. In order to fully understand Tulsidas's work, and its remarkable popularity and reach, it is crucial to examine the *rasik* interpretive tradition that is in such radical opposition to the received view. Such a study may also enable us to answer what it is about the text itself, if anything, that 'allows' for such radical multiplicity of interpretations.

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[213] Charlotte Vaudeville, "Tulsīdās kṛt," 151-152.

[214] Grierson would certainly have found the *rasik* orientation of the commentaries unpalatable. He could not have been unaware of this tradition, being a great friend and correspondent of Sitaramsharan Bhagvanprasad 'Rupkala.' See William Pinch, "*Bhakti* and the British Empire," *Past & Present* 179 (May 2003): 159-196.

## Section II
## The Sect: The Ramanandi *sampraday* and the Commentarial Tradition

## Chapter 4
## The Sect: The Ramanandi *sampraday*

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a tremendous interest in India's religious traditions as part of the expanding administrative apparatus of the colonial enterprise on the one hand, and the incipient nationalist movements on the other. Speaking of Hinduism in particular, H.H. Wilson once despaired that the, "…Hindu religion is a term, that has been hitherto employed in a collective sense, to designate a faith and worship of an almost endlessly diversified description."[215] The religion of the Hindus seemed to resist the attempts of the colonial administrative apparatus to contain it within definitions. Meanwhile, the attempt to characterize and define Hinduism took on another kind of urgency in the nineteenth century for the incipient nationalist movement as well. Societies such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj that sprang up in urban environments attempted reshape notions of Hinduism not only in reaction and response to colonial attitudes, but also to formulate their own theological and personal agendas. These societies, however, were founded and patronized largely by an urban class of Indian merchants and new professionals, and their attempts to understand Hinduism reveals very little about the self-definitions of the various sectarian traditions. In this chapter, I will trace the attempts at self-definition by the Ramanandi *sampraday*, the second major facet of Ram *bhakti* in North India.

**Foundations: Swami Ramanand**

The Ramanandi *sampraday* traces itself back to Swami Ramanand, a religious teacher whose historicity is unverifiable and who may have lived between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[216] According to the hagiographical tradition of the *sampraday*, which generally favor the dates 1300-1411, he was a Kanyakubja Brahmin from Prayag who was initiated into the Shri Vaishnava sect in Varanasi by his guru Swami Raghavanand. Having been initiated into the Shri sect, Ramanand was considered to be part of the spiritual lineage of the South Indian Shri Vaishnava philosopher and theologian, Ramanuja (1050-1137).

The hagiographical narratives are wildly inconsistent in the matter of Ramanand's eventual split from the Shri Vaishnava sect. According to one version, the orthodox Shri Vaishnavas denied Ramanand commensality when he returned from a pilgrimage, claiming that he could not have observed the caste rules of commensality during his journey. Ramanand is then said to have left the Shri sect and founded his own *sampraday*. In another version of this narrative, it was Ramanand's guru, Raghavanand who was denied commensality under similar circumstances, and actually excommunicated from the Shri Vaishnava community. Raghavanand is then said to have then inspired Ramanand to found

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[215] H.H. Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus* (1861; reprint, Calcutta: Sushil Gupta Pvt. Ltd., 1958), 3.

[216] The following account draws largely from the works of Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Rāmānandi Sect," in *Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious Identity and Experience in Ayodhya* (New Delhi: Oxford Univerity Press, 1997).

an independent Vaishnava *sampraday*. In other versions, either Ramanand (or Raghavanand, as the case may be) was ex-communicated from his *sampraday* for having picked up Tantric doctrines in the course of his travels.

Although there is little agreement in these narratives, they do reveal one consistent feature - that the founding of the Ramanandi sect was based on a doctrinal disagreement, whether real or imagined, with the orthodox South Indian Shri Vaishnavas. As van der Veer has pointed out, the relationship of the Ramanandis with the Shri Vaishnavas has featured both 'link' and 'separation' from an early stage.[217] On the one hand, these narratives of schism allow the Ramanandi *sampraday* to retain their position in the (respectable) lineage of the Shri Vaishnavas, and on the other, to make the claim to be the architects of a radical new order of Vaishnavism in North India that was based on the refusal to acknowledge traditional caste hierarchies.

Narratives pertaining to Ramanand and the Ramanandi *sampraday* also appear in literature that is not explicitly associated with the Ramanandi *sampraday*. The *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*, a mid-seventeenth century Persian text that compares various South Asian religions and sects mentions the Ramanandi sect as one of the *cār sampradāys* and claims that they never ate their meals before persons of other sects.[218] The *Bhaviṣya purāṇa* (4.21.52-53) claims that Ramanand went to Ayodhya to re-convert those Muslims who had been forced into accepting Islam back to Hinduism. Based on this, some scholars have claimed that Ramanand split from the Shri Vaishnava sect because they would not accept reconverted Muslims into their *sampraday*.[219] This is probably a much later variation aimed at promoting the *sampraday's* appeal among groups newly converted to Islam. In all these narratives, however, the new *sampraday* founded by Ramanand would repudiate the orthodox notions of caste and commensality and would therefore be open to members of low caste and untouchable communities, women as well as Muslims.

Peter van der Veer has described the Ramanandi *sampraday* as comprising of three distinct groups of practitioners – *tyāgīs*, *nāgas* and *rasiks*.[220] It is, however, unclear how these three groups of practitioners relate to one another, how they differ or overlap in terms of theological beliefs, or indeed how these groups came to view themselves as distinct branches or sub-sects of an over-arching Ramanandi *sampraday*. Disciples are initiated into the Ramanandi *sampraday* by a *mantra* guru, who gives the disciple the six-syllable Ram *mantra*, *Rām rāmāya namaḥ*. A disciple may then also acquire a *sādhak* guru who teaches him a specific practice or *sādhana* by which he may reach god. Such *sadhana* will vary for *tyagis, nagas* and *rasiks*.

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[217] Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth,* 89.

[218] David Shea and Anthony Troyer (trans.), *The Dabistan or School of Manners,* (Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1843), 175-197.

[219] Burghart, "Founding of the Rāmānandī Sect," 230.

[220] Peter van de Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious Experience and Identity on Ayodhya* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107-172; "The Power of Detachment: Disciplines of Body and Mind in the Ramanandi Order," *American Ethnologist* 16 (August 1989), 458-470.

The *tyagis* are renunciants, who are celibate, lead a peripatetic life and practice yoga. They are organized into families or *parivārs*, itinerant groups, known as *jamāt* or *khalsā*, and regional circles or *maṇḍals*.[221] The renunciant practices associated with the *tyagis* make it likely that these were the earliest Ramanandis. We can locate the *nagas* and the *rasiks* with greater historical accuracy. The *naga* Ramanandis are 'warrior ascetics' trained in the martial arts. The *naga* sub-sect was formed in 1713 in Vrindavan, in order to mount a defense against the increasing aggression of *dasnāmi* or Shaivaite ascetics against the Vaishnavas at prominent pilgrimage centers across North India. The Ramanandis organized themselves into armed orders under the leadership of Balanand, the *mahant* of the Ramanandi monastery in Jaipur.[222] The *nagas* are organized into *aṇis* or armies, much like the *dasnamis* and practice military training and wrestling.

The *rasiks*, who are most relevant to this dissertation, practice *madhuropāsana* (sweet devotion), centered on the temple worship of Ram and Sita as the divine couple or *yugal svarūp*. The *rasik sampraday*, the earliest organizational expression of Ram *bhakti,* seems to have emerged in the mid-sixteenth century in the cities of Raivasa and Galta in Rajasthan under the patronage of the Rajput kings of the Kacchavaha dynasty. The history of this branch of the Ramanandi *sampraday* has been traced by Monika Horstmann, in her comprehensive essay.[223] Although this *sampraday* has been known variously as the Janaki *sampraday*, Rahasya *sampraday*, Janaki vallabh *sampraday* and Siya *sampraday*, it is most commonly referred to as the rasik sampraday. '*Rasik*,' aesthete or connoisseur, is used as a term of self-identification in the earliest works of this *sampraday*, such as the sixteenth century *Dhyānmañjarī*, authored by the founder of the *sampraday*, Agradas.[224]

Profoundly influenced by the Krishnaite traditions of Braj, the highly aestheticized devotion of the *rasik* Ramanandis is conceptualized around the idyllic life of Ram and Sita as a couple along with their *sakhīs* and *sakhas* (female and male companions).[225] This mode of devotion, rooted in the theology of *bhakti*

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[221] Richard Burghart, "Wandering Ascetics of the Ramanandi Sect," *History of Religions*, 22 (May 1983), 363; and "Renunciation in the Religious Traditions of South Asia," *Man* 18 (December 1983), 647.

[222] Monika Thiel-Horstmann, "Warrior Ascetics in 18th Century Rajasthan and the Religious Policy of Jai Singh II," unpublished paper.

[223] See "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan,* ed. Lawrence A. Babb, Varsha Joshi and Michael Meister (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 141-197. The implications of the relationship between the *sampraday* and its primary patron, Maharaja Jai Singh II discussed in Monika Horstmann's essay will become the basis for my argument linking the sect with the text (the *Rāmcaritmānas*) in Chapter 5.

[224] The most authoritative study on the *rasik* Ramanandis to date is by Bhagavati Prasad Singh, *Rambhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy* (Balrampur: Avadh Sāhitya Mandir, 1957).

[225] The sixteenth century witnessed the development of a highly emotional and ecstatic form of bhakti (primarily directed towards Krishṇa) that brought a unique aesthetic of the pastoral to the devotional literature and ritual of the era. Alan Entwistle has called this process "pastoralization." The devotional aesthetic of the *rasik sampraday* emerged within this milieu. For more on pastoralization see, "The Cult of Krishna-Gopāl as a Version of Pastoral," in *Devotion*

*rasa*, involved the creation of a landscape inspired by pastoral idyll of the Krishna myth in the environs of Braj. The devotional traditions of the *rasik* Ramanandis were based in the mythical landscape of Chitrakut, Mithila and Saket.[226]

**The Ramanandi Sampraday in the seventeenth century**

The seventeenth century hagiographical work the *Bhaktamāl,* provides an early account of Ramanand from within the Vaishnava tradition.[227] As mentioned above in Chapter I, the *Bhaktamāl* was composed in the *rasik* Ramanandi monastery at Galta. Ramanand is discussed in the second half of the *Bhaktamāl*, which considers the major Vaishnava devotees of the *kali* age. According to this work, the Vaishnavas were organized into a *catuh sampraday* (four-fold *sampraday*) system comprising the Shri, Nimbarka, Vishnuswami and Madhva *sampradays*. Ramanand, according to the *Bhaktamāl*, belonged to the lineage of the Shri *sampraday*.[228]

*śrī rāmānuja paddhati pratāpa avani amṛta hvai anu saryo/*
*Devācaraja dvitīya mahāmahimā haryānanda/*
*Tasya rāghavānanda bhaye bhaktana ko mānanda//*
*Patrāvalamba pṛthvī karī va kāśī sthāyī/*
*Cāri barana āśrama sabahi ko bhakti dṛḍhāī //*
*Tinake rāmānanda pragata viśva maṇgala jiha vapu dharyo/*
*śrī rāmānuja paddhati pratāpa avani amṛta hvai anusaryo//*
(35)

The powerful and immortal doctrine of Shri Ramanuja spread through the earth. [First there was] Devacharya and next the great Hariyanand; His [disciple] was Raghavanand who respected all *bhaktas*.
[When] he made the earth dependent on his proclamations, he settled in Varanasi. He firmly made those belonging to the four *varnas* and the four *ashramas* steadfast in [Ram] *bhakti*.
From him emerged Ramanand, who took bodily form for the well being of this world. Thus, the powerful and immortal doctrine of Shri Ramanuja spread through the earth.

Nabhadas thus not only places Ramanand within the lineage of Ramanuja but also ascribes to him divine attributes as an avatar of Ram. Nabhadas then goes on in the next verse to describe Ramanand's own spiritual lineage:

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*Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the regions of India*, edited by Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991), 73-90.

[226] I discuss the re-emergence of Saket in Chapter 5.

[227] Details regarding this text have been discussed in Chapter 1.

[228] Nabhadas. *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 281-282.

*śrī rāmānanda raghunātha jyoṃ dutiya setu jaga tarana kiyo//*
*anatānanda kabīra sukhā surasurā padmāvati narahari/*
*pīpā bhāvānanda raidāsa dhanā sena surasura kī gharahari//*
*aurau śiṣya praśiṣya ekate eka ujāgara/*
*viśvamaṅgala ādhāra sarvānanda daśadhā ke āgara//*
*bahuta kāla bapudhāri kai praṇata janana kauṃ pāra diyo/*
*śrī rāmānanda raghunātha jyoṃ dutiya setu jaga tarana kiyo//*
(36)

Like the Lord of Raghus, Ramanand created a second bridge (for souls) to cross the ocean of existence.
Anatanand, Kabir, Sukhanand, Sursruranand, Padmavati, Narhari, Pipa, Bhavanand, Raidas, Dhana, Sena and Sursurananad's wife.
These disciples and their disciples in turn, each more enlightened than the other,
With the blessing of Ramanand, the source of all the world's prosperity, they all took the name "Anand" and became proficient in *dashadha bhakti*.
Bearing his form for many eons, Ramanand helped devotees to cross (the ocean of existence).
Like the Lord of Raghus, Ramanand created a second bridge (for souls) to cross the ocean of existence.

The spiritual lineage of Ramanand is inclusive and contains a Muslim weaver (Kabir), a cobbler (Raidas), a farmer (Dhana), a barber (Sena), women (Padmavati and Sursari), a married couple (Sursuranand and Sursai), a kshatriya king (Pipa), and the Brahmin Sursuranand and his wife.[229] This list, as Burghart observes, " was compiled during the period of greatest diversity within the Ramanandi sect."[230] Moreover, Nabhadas also says that these disciples were practitioners of *dashadha bhakti*, which is usually also referred to as *premāparā bhakti*, and is particular to the *rasik* tradition.[231] This only betrays Nabhadas location within the *rasik* monastery at Galta, for Kabir and Raidas are certainly not considered part of the *sagun bhakti* tradition, let alone is very specialized *rasik* branch.

In these two verses of the *Bhaktamāl*, Nabhadas unfortunately does not offer any explanation for the founding of a separate Ramanandi *sampraday*. The narratives of the formation of the *sampraday*, based on a schism from the Shri Vaishnavas, would be added later in the sub-commentaries. According to Nabhadas, while Ramanand himself belonged to the orthodox South India Shri Vaishnava lineage of Ramanuja, his own spiritual heirs were not by any means confined to the typically narrow group of twice-born male Hindus. Nabhadas does not seem to see this as an incongruity and does not attempt to reconcile these two contradictory strains in his narrative of Ramanand and the *sampraday* of which he was founder.

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[229] Ibid., 237-238.

[230] Burghart, "Founding of the Rāmānandī Sect," 237.

[231] *Dashadha* or *premapara bhakti* is a particular preoccupation of the commentators, as we will see in Chapters 6 and 7.

The Ramanandi tradition maintains that Ramanand was strictly against caste restrictions. In a phrase famously attributed to Ramanand, he is said to have urged – 'Do not inquire from anyone his caste or sect; whoever worships the Lord belongs to the Lord.' There is, however, no evidence that Ramanand actually said this, and no mention of this is made in the *Bhaktamāl*, either by Nabhadas or by the author of its eighteenth century commentary, Priyadas. Furthermore, there is little evidence that all of these 'successors' actually thought of themselves as spiritual descendants of Ramanand, particularly the more famous low caste saint-poets. For instance, with regards to Kabir, there is yet much scholarly debate on whether Kabir, who is counted amongst the most influential of North Indian saint poets, was in fact Ramanand's disciple.[232] Nonetheless, it is clear that in the early seventeenth century the Ramanandi *sampraday* was forging more open recruitment policies by including prominent low caste *bhakti* saint poets, perhaps in response to, as Burghart suggests, increased competition for recruitment of devotees.[233]

**Ramanandi *sampraday* and the Galta Conferences of the Eighteenth century**

In the early eighteenth century, the Ramanandis figured prominently in a series of events that took place in the kingdom of Jaipur in Rajasthan. Under the patronage of Maharaja Savai Jai Singh (or Jai Singh II; 1700-1743), Vaishnavite ascetics of North India congregated at Galta for a series of conferences.[234] The Ramanandis found patronage from the Kacchavaha dynasty in the state of Amer (Eastern Rajasthan) in the early sixteenth century and the Galta seat of the Ramanandis was constructed during the seventeenth century.[235] The Galta conference and the resulting shifts in Ramanandi identity certainly have to be viewed within the context of Savai Jai Singh's own agenda. Jai Singh, according to Horstmann, "wished to enforce his own vision of Hindu kingship and pursued in his state a project of defining and organizing Hindu religion, its institutions and representatives."[236] To this end, he revived the practice of performing ancient Vedic sacrifices, restored the observance of *smarta* Vaishnava ritual and sought to integrate Vaishnava *bhakti sampradays* into his vision. The Galta conferences were meant to enforce Jai Singh's vision of a pan-North Indian Vaishnavism. Jai Singh's policies therefore, sought to impact Vaishnava

[232] Charlotte Vaudeville, on the one hand, was doubtful whether Kabir was ever Ramanand's disciple. See *Kabir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 110-117. On the other hand, Purushottam Agarwal continues to take issue with her assessment. See "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others," in *Ancient to Modern: Religion, Power and Community in India*, ed. by Ishita Baneree-Dube and Saurabh Dube (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 135-170.

[233] Burghart, "Founding of the Rāmānandī Sect," 243.

[234] For an account of this conference, see Burghart, "Founding of the Rāmānandī Sect," 239-241; Pinch, *Peasants and Monks,* 53-54; Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth,* 98-99.

[235] Monika Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galta," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan*, eds. Lawrence A. Babb et al. (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002), 147.

[236] Ibid., 159.

*sampradays* all across North India, and certainly did so in the case of the Ramanandis.[237]

In 1726, Jai Singh proposed to organize the Vaishnava *sampradays* of North India strictly under the *catuh sampraday* schematic. In 1734, at another conference, the Ramanandi *sampraday*'s position in the *catuh sampraday* was redefined. Previously, the Ramanandis claimed a connection to, if not, membership in the Shri Vaishnava sect through the spiritual link between Ramanand and Ramanuja. At this conference, however, the Ramanandis displaced the Shri sect and came to be recognized as one of the original members of the *catuh sampraday*. Recognition as a Vaishnava was now to be determined by affiliation with one of fifty-two gates (*dvāra*), or spiritual clans (established by a spiritual descendant of the founders of the four sects – Ramanand, Vishnuswami, Nimbarka and Madhva) into which the four sects were now divided. According to Burghart, "All members of the four main Vaishnavite sects traced their spiritual descent back to a founder of a spiritual clan. Anyone who could not trace his descent back to the founder of a spiritual clan was not a member of any of the four sects of the *catuh sampraday*."[238] The importance of the Ramanandi *sampraday* became evident as thirty-six of the fifty-two gates were founded by Ramanandi ascetics, twelve by Nimbarkis and four by Madhva and Vishnuswami. The thirty-six gates belonging to the Ramanandi *sampraday* referred to the spiritual genealogy of descendants set up in Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl*. However, not all the twelve disciples of Ramanand, as described in the *Bhaktamāl,* were allowed to be the founders of spiritual clans. Only male twice-born Hindus were now recognized as having founded the thirty-six Ramanandi clans. According to Burghart, "The servant, untouchable, and female disciples of Ramanand were still recognized as having been Ramanandi ascetics, but by virtue of their not being recognized as the founder of a spiritual clan, they lost their role as transmitter or preceptor of the tradition."[239]

The consequence of the Galta conferences was, therefore, to produce further shades of ambiguity in the self-identity of the Ramanandis. The *sampraday* established some autonomy for itself from the Southern Vaishnavas but without entirely denying the spiritual link with Ramanuja. It is not clear whether this autonomy was envisioned by Jai Singh in his attempt to create a *sampraday* system exclusive to North India (though the founders of the four *sampradays* belonged to South India) or even why this was deemed necessary. The *sampraday* also reverted to orthodoxy (which would be in keeping with the Southern sects ideology) in denying women, untouchable and low caste Hindus and non-Hindus a place in the spiritual lineage as preceptors, but at the same time, not denying them admittance altogether. Burghart suggests that this shift towards orthodoxy "enabled the Ramanandi ascetics to compete more effectively

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[237] The Chaitanyas transformed themselves into the Madhva-Chaitanyas as a result of Jai Singh's strict enforcement of the *catuh-sampraday* system. Ibid., 160.
[238] Burghart, "Founding of the Rāmānandī Sect," 239.

[239] Ibid., 240.

for the patronage of householders and, in particular for the patronage of the Hindu king."[240]

By the time of the Galta conferences, therefore, the Ramanandi *sampraday* has passed through three of four stages into which Burghart divides their history. In the first stage, the nascent Ramanandi *sampraday* claimed a relationship with an older and established sect of the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas. In the second stage, it opened itself to people of low castes, members of either gender as well as to followers of other faiths. In the third stage, under pressure from Jai Singh, the *sampraday* reverted back to orthodoxy by downplaying those who had been included under the open recruitment policies of the previous stage. In the fourth stage, according to Burghart, "the more influential factions within the sect excluded 'alien' spiritual antecedents of Rāmānand from the sect."[241]

The important scholarship of Richard Burghart and Monika Horstmann cover the period leading up to the Galta conferences in the eighteenth century. William Pinch then picks up the narrative in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by connecting the Ramanadi *sampraday* to the push for upward mobility among the peasants and lower castes of North India. This is the fourth stage that Richard Burghart also identified. Both Pinch as well as Peter van der Veer highlight the early twentieth century as the key moment in the history of the Ramanandi *sampraday*.[242]

**Twentieth Century redefinitions**

After the reorganization of the Ramanandi *sampraday* in the eighteenth century, the next major shift within the *sampraday* occurred in the early twentieth century. This shift was centered on the question of whether Ramanand was ever a part of the lineage of South Indian theologian Ramanuja. An influential faction of Ramanandis led a movement to purge Ramanuja from the spiritual genealogies of the *sampraday*, and thus, recast Ramanand as the primary and independent authority.[243]

This movement was led by Bhagavad Das (who be called Bhagavadacharya after the 1921 Ujjain Kumbh mela), an orphan of uncertain caste who lived in Bihar. Bhagavad Das experienced the inequities of caste orthodoxy early when his Brahmin teacher at the orphanage refused to teach him Sanskrit on the grounds that he was of a low caste. He continued his studies under another teacher, and came to Ayodhya where he was initiated into the Ramanandi *sampraday*. He was persuaded not to take initiation from a South Indian Shri Vaishnavite (as he initially wanted to) as that would deny him commensality with other Ramanandis.

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[240] Ibid., 243.

[241] Ibid., 243.

[242] See Pinch, *Peasants and Monks* and Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth.*

[243] For more detailed accounts of this dispute see Pinch, *Peasants and Monks,* 61-70 and van der Veer, *Gods on Earth,* 101-105.

Bhagavad Das's resentment towards the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas was compounded by the visit of Anantacharya, the abbot from the Totadri math in South India, to Ayodhya. Anantacharya insulted the Ramanandi monks by showing little respect for their tutelary deity (Ram) and refusing to accept the *caraṇāmṛt* (the water with which the feet of the idol is washed and redistributed as *prasad*). He insulted Ramanandi beliefs and refused to acknowledge that Ramanand or Raghavanad had ever belonged to the Shri Vaishnava sect. This visit was followed by a visit from another Shri Vaishnava monk from Prakalmath in Mysore. His behavior, though not as egregious as Anantacharya's, also provoked the Ramanandis. Although he did not disrespect the idols, he refused all commensality with the Ramanandi monks.[244]

Compounding this tension, the Sanskrit teacher in the *catuh sampraday Vedanta Vidyalaya*, a Shri Vaishnava from South India, refused to teach anyone who had not been initiated as a Shri Vaishnava. He also claimed that the Shri Vaishnava mantra was more powerful than the Ramanandi mantra. These events culminated in the formation of the *Śrī Rāmānandī Vaishnava Mahāmaṇḍal*, founded by Bhagavad Das to purge Ramanuja from Ramanandi genealogies. Bhagavad Das even forged a fake genealogy that excluded Ramanuja and was 'found' among the works of a direct disciple of Ramanand.[245]

At the first Kumbh Mela (held at Ujjain in 1921) following these disputes, a *śāstrārtha* (a theological/philosophical debate conducted in Sanskrit) was organized between the Ramanujis and the Ramanandis. The content of the debate itself seems rather trivial - the Ramanujis contended that there was no insult to Ram (or Krishna) in their works, while the Ramanandis, represented by Bhagavad Das, contended that these books contained no praise of them either. The jury, comprising of ascetics sympathetic to the Ramanandi cause declared a Ramanandi victory. Thereafter, the Ramanandi *sampraday* was declared independent of the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas.[246] Those who refused to give up allegiance to the Shri Vaishnavas were called Ramanujis, as opposed to the newly liberated and 'pure' Ramanandis.

This schism resulted in several consequences for ritual behavior. The Shri Vaishnavas of the South were no longer given preference in procession orders at the Kumbh mela. The traditional practice whereby the Shri Vaishnavas were carried by Ramanandi monks of Brahmin birth to the river in palanquins was abandoned. The Ramanandis also dropped the practice of attaching the term *dās* (slave) to their names, and adopted the Shri Vaishnava suffix of *ācārya* (master/preceptor) – Bhagavad Das thus became Bhagavadacharya. The Ramanandis also adopted the ochre robes of the Shri Vaishnavas, giving up their white robes.[247] The events of the 1921 Kumbh-mela helped pave the way for a new vision of North Indian Vaishnavism, one that had asserted its independence from the 'original' Shri Vaishnavas.

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[244] Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 102-103.

[245] Ibid., 103.

[246] Ibid., 104.

[247] Ibid., 104.

These developments in the early twentieth century were reflected in the growing literature on the Ramanandis. The history of this *sampraday* began to be written, not only by western indologists, but also by Indian scholars. Ramanandi monks themselves began to incorporate Ramanandi history in non-sectarian Vaishnava works. The section below will consider some of these works.

**Twentieth Century Scholarship on the Ramanandis**

As discussed in the section above, one of the earliest written records on the Ramanandis is to be found in Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl* (~1600). Although the author Nabhadas was himself a Ramanandi, the *Bhaktamāl* is considered an important non-sectarian work of Vaishnava hagiography. However, the connection between this work and Ramanandi *sampraday* is certainly not of minor significance. In the early twentieth century, an influential commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* was authored by a Ramanandi monk named Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad 'Rupkala'.[248] This commentary is considered to be both scholarly and authoritative as well as a celebration of the Ramanandi *sampraday*.[249] Rupkala expands on Nabhadas's account of Ramanand by providing details of his birth, initiation and the circumstances that led to the founding of a separate *sampraday*.

According to Bhagwan Prasad Rupkala's account, Ramanand was born as Ramadatta in 1300 in Prayag in a Kanyakubja Brahmin family.[250] Showing great promise as child, he was sent to Varanasi, where he began he began his studies under the tutelage of a *smarta* Shaivite (a *dandi vidvan*). One day, he encountered Swami Raghavanad who predicted that his death was imminent. Ramadatta's own guru confirmed this and advised him to throw himself at the mercy of Raghavanand as he himself could offer no solution. Following this advice, Ramadatta was initiated by Raghavanand, given the Ram mantra, and renamed Ramanand. He then travelled to various holy places across India. According to Rupkala, When Ramanand's fellow initiates refused him entry into the *sampraday* after his travels and his alleged violation of caste commensality rules, he founded his own *sampraday* – the Ramawat or Ramanandi sampraday - on the advice of his guru, Swami Raghavananda.

In Bhagwan Prasad Rupkala's sub-commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, this account is included immediately after Nabhadas's brief verse placing Ramanand in the lineage of Ramanuja. This hagiographical account of Ramanand supplements Nabhadas's brief description and more importantly, supplies the details of the conflict that led to the founding of the Ramanandi *sampraday*, the basis of which was a disagreement centered around the rigidity of Shri Vaishnava caste rules. Writing in the early twentieth century (the commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* was published over a six year period from 1903-1909), Bhagwan Prasad's commentary came at a time when the Ramanandi *sampraday* was going

[248] For more on Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad 'Rupkala' see Vijay Pinch. "Bhakti and the British Empire," *Past & Present* No.179 (May 2003), 159-196.

[249] William Pinch, "Reinventing Rāmānand: Caste and History in Gangetic India," in *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 30, no.3 (July, 1996), 561.

[250] Nabhadas. *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 288-291.

through its latest crisis in identity. The debate, which centered on the question of whether Ramanand ever belonged to the lineage of Ramanuja, is reflected in Bhagwan Prasad's commentary. By emphasizing the orthodoxy and rigidity of the Southern Shri Vaishnavas, he paved the way for the final schism between the Ramanandis and the Ramanujis. According to Horstmann, "Rupkala [Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad] was the great champion of a Ramanandi tradition purged of Ramanuja as it was endorsed by the agreement of Ujjain in 1921."[251] In his sub-commentary, Bhagwan Prasad also included a lineage of the Ramanandi *sampraday* – the *Śrī Ram mantrarāj paramparā* – in which Ramanuja is markedly absent. Bhagwan Prasad was also, however, writing in dialogue with the prominent historians and indologists of his time. Interestingly, in an otherwise largely hagiographic narrative, Bhagwan Prasad cites the authority of scholars such as Dr. W.W. Hunter, for instance, to lend credibility to proposed historical dates for Ramanand (1300-1411).[252]

Two prominent indologists – J.N. Farquhar and George A. Grierson - both of who took an interest in the religion and vernacular literature of Northern India also wrote on the Ramanandis. J.N. Farquhar, a missionary and indologist, attended the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad in 1918, where his attention was drawn to the Ramanandis as being the most numerous next to the Dasnamis (Shaivites).[253] In a famous article published in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic* Society, Farquhar dismissed the connection between Ramanand and Ramanuja based on various differences in ritual and practice. He did, however, believe in the Southern origins of the Ramanandi sect. Based on the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Agastya saṃhita* (Sanskrit works composed in the South and referring to Ram worship), he claimed that Ramanand belonged to a long extinct sect of Ram worshippers from the South, making him the only scholar to propose a southern origin for Ramanand. Farquhar also dismissed the claim that Ramanand ever propagated an anti-caste doctrine.

In a response to this article in 1921, Rai Bahadur Lala Sita Ram, protested these claims vigorously. He claimed that Ramanand "never failed to acknowledge that his teachings were derived from Ramanuja, for the latter's name is daily pronounced by every pious Ramanandi in the *guru-shishya-parampara.*"[254] Sita Ram was a regular correspondent of George Grierson, who, in 1918 had also published an article on the Ramanandis.[255] Grierson corresponded with Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad, and drew much of his information from this sub-commentary on the *Bhaktamāl.* Grierson endorsed Bhagwan Prasad's view that Ramanand was from North India (Prayag in Allahabad), and having

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[251] Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galta," 174.

[252] Nabhadas, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 288.

[253] J.N. Farquhar, "The Historical Position of Rāmānanda," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1920), 185-192. See also *An Outline of the Religious Literature in India* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), 323-328.

[254] Sita Ram, "The Historical Position of Rāmānanda," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1920), 240.

[255] George A. Grierson, "Rāmānandīs, Ramawats," *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* ed. by James Hastings, vol. X (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 569-572.

been initiated into the Shri Vaishnava sect, left to found his own sect owing to his liberal views on caste rules.

As Pinch suggests, this scholarly disagreement must be read in the context of the debates within the Ramanandi community. According to Pinch, "Grierson and Farquhar's representations suggest that the sampradāy discord of 1918-1921 was producing scholarly disagreement in the pages of indological research in London."[256] Farquhar's refutation of the connection between Ramanand and Ramanuja was being opposed on two levels. Lala Sita Ram was defending the *sampraday*'s connection to an ancient and hence, authoritative tradition. Grierson, on the other hand, championed Ramanand as a 'reformer' who was responsible for spreading Ramanuja's doctrine of *bhakti*, but without reference to caste.[257]

**Historical Consensus?**

Although any historical consensus on Ramanand remains as elusive as ever, the points of interest in long and complicated history and historiography of the Ramanandi sect are its relationship with the South Indian Shri Vaishnava sect and the *sampraday*'s attitude towards caste relations, both of which are related. As we have seen, the relationship of the Ramanandis with the established orthodoxy of the Vaishnava *sampraday*s is a vexed one. In the early seventeenth century, the Vaishnava hagiographical work *Bhaktamāl* places Ramanand and his *sampraday* within the Shri sect and hence in the lineage of Ramanuja. The *sampraday* also adopted unrestrictive recruitment policies as evidenced from the inclusion of untouchables and women in the genealogical records found in the *Bhaktamāl*. At the turn of the eighteenth century, at the Galta conferences, the *sampraday*'s relationship to the Shri Vaishnavas becomes more ambiguous. Although the Ramanandis continued to trace their origins to Ramanuja, they declare themselves one of the original members of the Vaishnava *catuh sampraday*, displacing the Shri sect. At this conference, the *sampraday* shifts its position on caste as "all Rāmānandī ascetics…who traced their spiritual descent from the servant, untouchable, and female disciples of Rāmānand now found themselves outside the Rāmānandī sect."[258] By the twentieth century, however, the Ramanandis were no longer eager to trace their origins back to the orthodox South Indian Vaishnavas. In 1921, at a meeting of Ramanandi ascetics, the connection with the South Indian sect was formally severed. The South Indian philosopher Ramanuja was purged from the genealogies of the *sampraday*. Today the Ramanandi *sampraday* ostensibly repudiates caste distinctions in its recruitment, though the main priests are almost always high caste Brahmins.

Various scholars have examined these shifts in Ramanandi identity. Richard Burghart's pioneering essay examines the shifts in the *sampraday*'s identification with and distancing from the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas through an anthropological study of genealogical records. Burghart's

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[256] William Pinch, "Reinventing Rāmānand: Caste and History in Gangetic India," *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (July 1996), 553.

[257] George A. Grierson, *Two Indian Reformers* (Yorktown: Surrey, 1906), 3.

[258] Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Rāmānandi Sect," 241.

examination of these records leads him to the conclusion that Ramanand probably never founded the Ramanandi *sampraday*. He also provides a fairly functional explanation for the shifts in Ramanandi identity, which were, according to Burghart, a result of the competition for the limited resources of devotees and disciples, pilgrimage routes and pilgrimage centers and political patronage - a competition in which the Ramanandis emerged victorious.[259] In reaching this conclusion, Burghart is content to dismiss the final break with the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas as an exclusion of "'alien' spiritual antecedents" from the sect.[260] Monika Horstmann extends Burghart's work in her scholarship on the Ramanandis of Galta in Rajasthan. Her concern is not to provide any conclusive proof of whether or not Ramanand founded a *sampraday*. She delves deeper into the changes that Jai Singh's policy of "religious reform" initiated within the *sampraday* as well as the shifting links between the Ramanandis and Ramanujis from this period onward.[261]

Peter van der Veer's *Gods on Earth* is an ethnographic study of two groups of religious specialists – Brahmins and Ramanandis - in an important North Indian pilgrimage center – the city of Ayodhya. Van der Veer examines the construction of Ramanandi religious identity within the context of this pilgrimage center in the historical period that spans the pre-British, British and post-independence eras. Historically, this study follows Hans Bakker's important study of Ayodhya in pre-modern India.[262] Van der Veer concludes that the Ramanandi *sampraday* resists any fixity of definition and remains an "open category socially as well as theologically, since this gives them the best chance of survival."[263] Van der Veer then concurs with Burghart that the alliance with the 'older' and allegedly 'original' South Indian sect was a strategic invention by the Ramanandis in search of respectability in an environment that tended towards doctrinal and caste orthodoxy. He also suggests that the schism in 1921 was not based entirely on caste, as several Ramanandi abbots of low castes, such as Kurmi and Barhai castes, chose to retain their links with the Ramanujis.[264]

In *Peasants and Monks in British India,* William Pinch follows the evolution of the Ramanandi *sampraday* into the twentieth century with particular reference to the social and political aspirations of the *sampraday*. Pinch's study is an important contribution to the study of religious identity as a means of upward social mobilization and suggests that the twentieth century schism in the Ramanandi *sampraday* be seen in the light of the resurgence of egalitarian religious movements that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pinch maintains that the question of the relevance of caste to the *sampraday* was indeed

[259] Burghart, "Founding of the Rāmānandi Sect," 246.

[260] Ibid., 243.

[261] Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galta."

[262] Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya* (Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 1986).

[263] Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 182.

[264] Ibid., 106.

central to the debates around Ramanand's life. In a later article, Pinch maintains that:

> Given the details of Ramanand's contested life, an opinion in 1918-1921 on the question of Ramanuja as a spiritual antecedent of Ramanand could only be articulated with reference to caste strictures. Hence, the radicals who held that Ramanand was completely independent of Ramanuja could therefore be expected to be disdainful of caste restrictions, whereas those who held that Ramanand was expelled from the Rāmānuji order could be expected to support caste segregation in monastic life.[265]

The initial articulation of affiliation with the Shri Vaishnavas and the subsequent severance of these links have largely been analyzed in the context of attitudes towards caste. However, the narratives of schism, from Ramanand's initial (and unverifiable) expulsion to the voluntary severance of ties with the Ramanujis in the early twentieth century, lie along a fault-line that divides not only the restrictive and orthodox from the radical and inclusive but also the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas from the North Indian Vaishnava *sampraday*.[266]

The history and historiography of the Ramanandi *sampraday* has another dimension that has been little studied. The history of the Ramanandi *sampraday* unfolds along with the history of North Indian Vaishnavism. The early seventeenth century text, the *Bhaktamāl* places the Ramanandi *sampraday* within the Shri sect of the *catuh sampraday*. The second half of this text begins by laying out the organization of all North Indian Vaishnavas under the schematic of the four *sampradays*.[267] These consist of the Shri sect (founded by Ramanuja), the Rudra sect (founded by Vishnuswami), the Sanakadi sect (founded by Nimbarka) and the Brahman sect (founded by Madhva).[268] It is important to note that the founders of all these sects came from South India. Nimbarka was from the region of Andhra Pradesh who moved to Vrindavan sometime before the sixteenth century and propagated the worship of Radha and Krishna. Madhva came from the Udipi region of Kanara where the community founded by him continues to worship Vishnu and Krishna. Very little is known about Vishnuswami except that he was from South India and founded a sect that has been long extinct. Nabhadas, writing the most significant hagiographical work of North Indian Vaishnavism, therefore, constructs a system in which all North Indian Vaishnavas must look to South India for their spiritual preceptors. The early Ramanandis did precisely this by tracing their lineage to Ramanuja, and in

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[265] William Pinch, "Reinventing Rāmānand," 567.

[266] This split is also reflected in the mantras of both *sampradays*. The Shri Vaishnava Narayana mantra (*oṃ nārāyaṇṇāya namaḥ*) is considered Brahminical and exclusive, whereas the Ram mantra (*rām rāmāya namaḥ*) is more inclusive, as it can be given to anyone, regardless of caste.

[267] See chappays 28 and 29 in Nabhadas, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 257-258.

[268] These sects are usually referred to by the names of their founders, for example, the Vishnuswami, Nimbarka and Madhva *sampradays*. Though Shri *sampraday* and Ramanuji *sampraday* are also interchangeable, I use the term Shri and Ramanuji to refer to the sect before and after the 1918-1920 split. The South Indian sect is called the Shri Vaishnnava sect.

so doing were by no means unique. The Vallabha community of Pushti margis claimed to be the spiritual heirs of the extinct Vishnuswami sect. Vallabhacharya (1479-1531) claimed to be a direct disciple of Vishnuswami. The Chaitanya Gaudiya community of Bengal traced their lineage to the Madhva *sampraday*.[269]

Not much is known about the origin of Nabhadas's notion of the *catuh sampraday*. Farquhar claims that the theory of the four-fold *sampradays* took shape around 1500 in North India.[270] Unfortunately, he provides no evidence for this claim. A reference to the *catuh sampraday* can also be found in the *Padma Purana*. This also does not tell us much, as there several recensions of this text, and each extremely difficult to date. Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl* then created a tradition of North Indian Vaishnavism and it is evident the North Indian Vaishnavites looked south in their search for respectability.

The Galta conferences of the eighteenth century reinforced the notion of the *catuh sampraday* and sought to restore orthodoxy to the sects. Though the Ramanandis displaced the Shri sect in the four-fold system, they continued to look to Ramanuja as their spiritual preceptor. The establishment of the fifty-two gates also delineated how one could be a Vaishnava in North India – the role of transmitters was now exclusively restricted to men of the twice-born castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya). Pinch suggests that this conference must serve as the context in which the first commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* was authored (The *Bhaktirasabodhini* of Priyadas in 1712).[271] In the twentieth century, Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad's commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* anticipated the controversy that would finally lead to the purging of Ramanuja from the Ramanandi genealogical records. The Ramanandis have always been intimately related to the tradition of scholarship on the *Bhaktamāl.* Indeed the author, Nabhadas, was himself a Ramanandi, although this connection is not deemed to be of much significance. However, the importance of the *Bhaktamāl* in Ramanandi historiography cannot be overstated. It was by adding to this text, in a process of 'accretion,' that the *sampraday* sought to define what it meant to be a Vaishnava in North Indian and legitimize its own shifting identity within this definition.

In creating an independent identity for the Ramanandis in the 1920s, Bhagavadacharya authored a new hagiography of Ramanand - *Śrīmad Rāmānand Digvijaya*. This work aimed to clarify the textual inconsistencies in Ramanand's life going back to Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl*. Interestingly, this work was composed both in Sanskrit and Hindi, indicating that Bhagavadacharya laid claim to both the classical and vernacular traditions. Among the works attributed to Ramanand (which have not been authenticated), the two most famous are in Sanskrit – *Vaiṣṇavamatābjabhāskar* and *Rāmācarcaṇ paddhati.* In the early twentieth century, however, several Hindi works also begin to be associated with Ramanand.[272] Farquhar, in his 1920 article claimed that, "Rāmānanda practically

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[269] Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth,* 97-98.

[270] J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature,* 327.

[271] Pinch, *Peasants and Monks,* 54.

[272] See Pitambar Datt Barthwal, ed., *Rāmānand ki Hindi Rachnaen* (Kashi: Nagari Pracharani Sabha, 1955) and Bhagawati Prasad Singh, *Rāmbhakti mein Rasik Sampraday* (Balrampur: Avadh Sahitya Mandir, 1957), 63-64.

gave up the use of Sanskrit altogether."[273] Though writing in a vernacular language does not necessarily preclude the knowledge and use of Sanskrit, the concern over language is significant and forms a major aspect of the search for Ramanandi identity in the twentieth century. The use of the vernacular and the rejection of caste are generally considered two major aspects of North Indian *bhakti* movements, and hence, ascribing these features to Ramanand becomes strategic in the twentieth century.

**Conclusion**

The complex history of the Ramanandi *sampraday* thus reveals an ambiguous and uncertain relationship not only with caste, but also with language and the 'older' tradition of the South Indian Shri Vaishnavas. Indeed, the Ramanandi struggle with caste and their relationship with the Shri Vaishnavas were often connected, as seen in the period between 1918 and 1920. Talal Asad, arguing against the purely anthropological conception of religion as advocated by Clifford Geertz, urged that study of religion should "begin by asking what are the historical conditions (movements, classes, institutions, ideologies) necessary for the existence of particular religious practices and discourses."[274] The long and complicated developments in the Ramanandi *sampraday* must however, not be viewed solely in the context of the social and political history of North India. The Ramanandi *sampraday* does not merely reflect changes in the history, but plays a major role in creating the religious history of North Indian Vaishnavism. For as we have seen, from the eighteenth-century onwards, the Ramanandis have played a significant role in defining what it meant to be Hindu and Vaishnava in North India.

What is left out of this narrative is the specific role played by the *rasik* Ramanandis and their appropriation of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Following from Monika Horstmann's work on the Ramanandis of Galta, in the next chapter, I trace the movement of the *sampraday* eastward to Ayodhya, where, I argue that the *sampraday* finally links itself to the *Rāmcaritmānas*. This link is clearly evident in the new tradition of textual exegesis that emerges from the early nineteenth century.

[273] Farquhar, "The Historical Position of Rāmānanda," 192.

[274] Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* 18 (June 1983), 252.

## Chapter 5
## The Commentarial Tradition
## Theology of scared space in the *Ānand laharī*

The *Ānand laharī* is the first in a line of commentaries that form what is known as the Ayodhya *tika* parampara (commentarial tradition) on the *Ramcaritmānas*, for, both within the Ramanandi *sampraday* and by scholars of the *Ramcaritmānas*, the *Ānand laharī* is seen as being irrevocably linked to Ayodhya.[275] In this chapter, I suggest that the connection to Ayodhya has two-fold significance. In an elaborately formulated section of the *Ānand laharī*, the commentator describes an ascensional journey, a pilgrimage of sorts, through various heavens to an eternal Ayodhya located at the pinnacle of a complex soteriological hierarchy. At the temporal level, this move to Ayodhya can be read in the context of the lateral shift in the locus of the *rasik sampraday's* power and influence eastward from Rajasthan, a process that unfolded gradually over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the *Ānand laharī*, which seems to have emerged in consequence of this shift, the eastward move to Ayodhya in the temporal realm is cast as a literary and soteriological move toward a mythic realm. This section, thus, explores the linkages between the literary and historical moves (ascensional and lateral moves), as also between the eternal and earthly Ayodhyas as imagined in the Ram *rasik* tradition.

I begin with a brief description of the importance of sacred space as it emerged in the context of the Krishna *bhakti* movements of the sixteenth century in order to understand the convergences and divergences of the Ram tradition. I briefly trace the position of Ayodhya in the history of Ram *bhakti* before discussing its eclipse in the very period in which the Ramanandi *sampraday* emerged. I then discuss the historical circumstances that made possible the re-emergence of Ayodhya as an important center of Ram *bhakti* in the eighteenth century and trace the movement of the *rasik sampraday*, from Galta in Rajasthan toward Ayodhya. This chapter thus picks up the narrative in the period after the Galta conferences of the early eighteenth century discussed in Chapter 4.[276] I suggest that the eastward move of the *rasik sampraday* culminates in Ayodhya with the co-option of Tulsidas into its hagiographical literature and with the co-option of the *Rāmcaritmānas* into the *rasik* canon through the composition of the first Ramanandi commentary on the text, the *Ānand laharī*. I thus focus particularly on the commentarial passages in the *Ānand laharī* that connect the earthly and eternal Ayodhyas in an attempt to claim and establish Ayodhya as a *rasik* space.

### Sacred space in the *bhakti* tradition:

[275] I am referring here to scholars such as Anjaninandan Sharan, Bhagawati Prasad Singh and Tribhuvan Nath Chaube, whose overviews of the *Rāmcaritmānas* commentarial tradition were discussed in Chapter 3.

[276] As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, the narrative I pick up follows the research of Monika Horstmann on the Ramanandis of Galta. See "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan,* ed. Lawrence A. Babb, Varsha Joshi and Michael Meister (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 141-197.

The reverence of '*dhām'* (in its meaning as site or place) emerged as a significant component in the devotional paradigm of the medieval Vaishnava *bhakti sampradays*. While the reverence of sacred spaces or *tīrthas*, is an ancient practice common to various Hindu traditions and central to the ritual of pilgrimage, the rise of *sagun bhakti* movements in the sixteenth century brought fresh impetus to the location and sacralization of space.[277]

The earliest Vaishnava *sampradays* (which were centered on the worship of Krishna) displayed a heightened preoccupation with physically locating mythical sites that had thus far existed only *literarily* in the landscape of North India. From the early sixteenth century onward Vaishnavites of all the major sectarian affiliations (Nimbarkis, Gaudiyas and Vallabhans) began to converge in the area known as Braj or the *vraja-maṇḍala* made famous in the tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*.[278] This area included famous pilgrimage sites like Govardhan, Mathura and Vrindavan, as well as new sites based on the mythology of Krishna's adventures as a young cowherd – shrines, rocks, ponds, tanks, trees and so on. Sectarian literature, modeled on the *māhātmya* tradition, documented the location of these sites as a tale of loss and recovery and created new rituals of pilgrimage such as the *ban yātra* or the *caurāsī kos parikrama*.[279] These new pilgrimage rituals, based on the theology of the Vaishnava *sampradays*, aimed to recreate the spiritual/aesthetic experience of *bhakti* by leading pilgrims through the various sites in which Krishna was said to have performed his *lila*.[280] What emerged, therefore, was a spiritual counterpart to the modern tradition of literary tourism that leads visitors through various sites mentioned in works of fiction ranging from Dickens's David Copperfield to Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code.

Against this backdrop of heightened activity in Braj, as the Vaishnava *sampradays* representing devotion to Krishna were pre-occupied with "re-discovering" sites connected to the mythology of the *Bhagavata purāṇa* and inventing new traditions of pilgrimage, the other major strand of Vaishnavism - Ram *bhakti* - took a very divergent route. The only *sampraday* representing devotion to Ram in North India established itself not in Ayodhya, the primary site connected to the legend of Ram, but in a site with little connection to Ram, known as Galta in Rajasthan.

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[277] These sacred spaces have been enumerated in several ways - the seven *mokṣa-puris* or liberation-granting cities (Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika and Dvaraka), the four *dhāmas* or divine abodes marking the four cardinal points (Badrinath, Puri, Rameshvaram and Dvaraka), the one hundred and eight *śakti-pīṭhas* or "seats" of the goddess, and so on.

[278] The settlement of the Braj area and the establishment of ashrams and shrines was at its height during the reign of Akbar and with the patronage of Hindu aristocrats in his service.

[279] Charlotte Vaudeville, "Braj, Lost and Found," in *Myths, Saints and Legends in Medieval India*, compiled and introduced by Vasudha Dalmia (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47-71.

[280] See Alan Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987) and David and Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgungā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

**Ayodhya in the Ram tradition**

As the capital city of the Ikṣvāku dynasty, Ayodhya's connection to the legend of Ram was made famous in Valmiki's Sanskrit epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Hans Bakker, in his exhaustive study of the history of Ayodhya and its relation to the development of the "cult of Ram" argues that the city described in the Sanskrit epic was probably an imaginary construct.[281] The site that is known as Ayodhya today developed as an urban settlement as early as the sixth century B.C.E. and was known as Saket in the earliest Buddhist and Jain literary sources. Bakker provides archaeological and textual evidence to show that the identification of the Ayodhya of Valmiki's epic and Saket did not occur until the fifth century C.E., when the Gupta ruler Vikramaditya (also known as Skandagupta), who was fond of comparing himself to Ram, moved his capital from Pataliputra to Saket.[282] The name Saket gradually fell into disuse and the site became known as Ayodhya.

After the decline of the Gupta dynasty, Ayodhya seems to have languished in obscurity until the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The identification of the city with the legend of Ram however ensured that it never quite disappeared like other great cities of the early period did. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Ayodhya's fortunes revived once more under the patronage of a newly rising empires in North India that supported Hindu traditions. The next period of significance in the history of Ayodhya occurred in the eleventh century when the Gahadavalas usurped power from the Rashtrakutas in the wake of the Ghaznavid raids on North India. According to Bakker, there is evidence to show that, during the reign of the Gahadavalas, at least five Vishnu temples were constructed that survived until the time of Aurangzeb. He also mentions the existence of five Vishnu icons that can be dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. Bakker's archaeological and iconographic evidence, therefore, confirms that Vaishnavism was firmly established in Ayodhya during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[283]

From the eleventh and twelfth centuries onward, the history of Ayodhya was tied closely to the development of the cult of Ram within Vaishnavism for it was during this period that Ram emerged as the foremost *avatar*, or incarnation of Vishnu.[284] This development was accompanied by the composition of texts such as the *Rāma pūrva tāpanīya Upaniṣad*, the *Rāma rakṣā stotra*, and the *Agastyasaṃhitā*.[285] The early literature of the Ram cult indicates that the

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[281] "Cult of Ram" is Bakker's phrase. *Ayodhyā* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 1: 2-11.

[282] Bakker points out this "rediscovery" of Ayodhya by the Gupta king Vikramaditya remains a crucial part of modern narratives of Ayodhya's history. For instance, see Lala Sita Ram, *Ayodhya kā itihās* (Prayag: Hindustani Academy, 1932).

[283] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 1: 51-55.

[284] Bakker suggests that this emergence of Ram as the foremost avatar of Vishnu occurred in the historical context of rise of Muslim power in North India. Also see Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52 (May 1993): 261-297.

ascendance of Ram devotion within Vaishnavism first emerged in an elite Brahmanical context.

In the period between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, when North India was under the Delhi Sultanate and subsequently the Mughals, Ayodhya's importance as a center of pilgrimage seems to have remained undiminished, as Bakker has demonstrated through his meticulous study of the various recensions of the *Ayodhyā-māhātmya*.[286] During this period, however, no new temples or other religious structures were constructed and no significant sectarian tradition representing Ram devotion emerged. However, in the sixteenth century, Ayodhya did play host to the most famous poet of the Ram devotional tradition. In 1574, Tulsidas began to compose his masterpiece the *Ramcharitmanas* in Ayodhya.

**The Ramanandi *sampraday*: Galta to Ayodhya**

Meanwhile, the cult of Ram, its elite origins not withstanding, was absorbed into the wave of emotional devotionalism that became characteristic of popular religious experience in North India around the fifteenth century. The composition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in 1574 represented one facet of this tradition. The *rasik* Ramanandi *sampraday*, which represented the other facet also originated in the mid-sixteenth century in Galta, near present day Jaipur in Rajasthan. These two facets remained distinct until circumstances made it necessary for the *rasiks* to move eastward toward Ayodhya.

The *rasik* tradition remained rooted in Rajasthan until the eighteenth century when circumstances became favorable for the *rasik* community to expand its influence eastward towards Ayodhya. The Ramanandis were beginning to suffer increasing interference from their primary patron in Rajasthan, Maharaja Jai Singh II of Amber (r. 1700-1743), who was intent on a program of reform for the Vaishnava orders in his kingdom.[287] In order to align himself with the classical Vedic tradition, which required that any priest performing rituals on behalf of the king be householders, he began to require that the celibate members of the Ramanandi sect marry. Such interference seems to have provided the primary impetus for the shift away from Rajasthan and would have been a significant reason for the Ramanandis to seek patronage elsewhere. Moreover, by the second half of the eighteenth century the political landscape of North India was profoundly altered.

The etiolated Mughal Empire had made way for the rise of various regional kingdoms, opening up new avenues of patronage across the Gangetic plain of North India. The successors to Mughal power in the region around Ayodhya were Shi'ite noblemen or nawabs. One of the first moves they made on

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[285] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 1: 67. Also see Chapter 2 for the influence of these works on Tulsidass theology.

[286] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, Part 2. The *Ayodhyāmāhātmya* belongs to a genre of Sanskrit literature – tīrthamāhātmyas - that eulogize sacred places. Thus, the *Ayodhyamāhātmya* is a eulogy of Ayodhya.

[287] See Chapter 4.

taking control of the region was to move their court away from Ayodhya, first to Faizabad (in 1740) and then to Lucknow (in 1775). While many contemporary accounts (both sectarian and scholarly) choose to view this move as the 'liberation' of Ayodhya from Muslim control, it was, in fact, the generous patronage of the Nawabs that made possible the expansion of various Hindu groups in Ayodhya. It was during this period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the Ramanandi sect began to enter and settle in Ayodhya by establishing many of their key institutions in the city.[288] This is a crucial moment in the history of the Ram devotional tradition, as this is when the Ram sectarian tradition links itself to the poet Tulsidas and his devotional text, the *Ramcharitmanas*.

The earliest Ramanandi institutions in Ayodhya were the *akhāṛās* (literally, fighting divisions) of the *nagas* (Vaishnava warrior ascetics, who were also known as Bairagis).[289] This branch of the Ramananda *sampraday* was institutionalized in the eighteenth century to counter the threat of Shaivite warrior ascetics (also known as Dasnamis or Gosains).[290] Although the Dasnamis were already a presence in Ayodhya, controlling major trade routes and forming a significant force in the armies of the Nawabs, they seem to have been eventually displaced by the Ramanandi *nagas* after a pitched battle in Ayodhya.[291] Bhagavati Prasad Singh quotes a description of this battle from the *Śrī Maharaj Carit* of Raghunathdas[292] in his work:

> *vahī samaya sammata jo gāvā / rāma janma avasara jaba āvā /*
> *Jure loga kosalapura jāī / barani ko sakai bhīra bahutāī//*
> *Tahaṃ veṣa sanyāsa apārā / āyudha dhare bīra barriyārā /*
> *Jatā vibhūtī dhare saba aṅgā / anī apāra subhaṭa rana rangā //*
> *Bairāgin sana baira bigārā / byartha baira bina kiye bicārā /*
>
> At that time of which I tell, on the occasion of Rama navami, people gathered at Ayodhya. The crowd was indescribable. There also came many sanyasis, wielding weapons and ready for a fight. With matted locks and ash-smeared bodies, they had many factions in battle. They picked a fight with the Bairagis, a vain fight without any reason.

The 'defeat' of the Dasnamis also constitutes a significant episode in sectarian narratives of the Ramanandis.[293] The Ramanandis were particularly interested in a site called Hanumangarhi or the Citadel of Hanuman. This was

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[288] See, for instance, Siṃh, *Rambhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 132.

[289] For a list see Ibid., 133-134.

[290] See Chapter 4 for details.

[291] See van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 130-151.

[293] This excerpt from the *Śrī Maharāj carit* (n.d.) can be found in Singh, *Ram bhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 119-120. The author of this hagiography Raghunathdas was the guru of *mahant* Ramcharandas, author of the *Ānand laharī*. Raghunathdas was also the disciple of *mahant* Ramprasad, who established Bada Sthan *rasik* site in Ayodhya.

allegedly the site on which the monkey deity Hanuman stood guard over the city. As the biggest Hindu sect in Ayodhya, the Ramanandis began to receive the patronage of the Shiite Nawabs.

Hanumangarhi, was one of the earliest and most important naga Ramanandi sites, to benefit from the patronage of the Nawabs. The land for the temple at the site of Hanumangarhi was granted by Shuja ud' daula, and the temple built with Asaf ud' daula's financial support. Asaf ud' daula's support was secured through his diwan, or minister, Maharaj Tikayat Rai, an influential Kayasth and member of the Nawabi administration who patronized several Ramanandi causes.[294] Thus, with the 'liberation' of Ayodhya in the eigheenth century from Shaiva control, and by securing the patronage of the Nawabs, the nagas had paved the path for the settlement of Ayodhya by the *rasiks*.

Bada Sthan, one of the earliest *rasik* institutions in Ayodhya, was built in the eighteenth century, as was the Kanak Bhavan temple. While the *rasiks* had begun to establish their presence in Ayodhya in the eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that the *sampraday* was able to secure its position firmly enough to emerge as a dominant force in the religious life of the city. Kanak Bhavan, which, along with Hanumangarhi, dominates religious life in Ayodhya today, remained a small temple until it received the patronage of the Maharaja of Orrcha in the nineteenth century.

### *Rasik* Hagiographies

Before I move on to discuss the emergence of the commentarial tradtion that forms the link between the Ramanandis and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, I would like to take a small digression via another genre of literature that also helped to make this link possible - hagiographies.

The first text I will consider is the *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl*. This is a *rasik* Ramanandi hagiography modeled on the *Bhakatamāl* of Nabhadas. This text claims to discuss the devotees left out of Nabhadas's text (*śrī nābhā jī kṛt bhaktamāl se anukta bhaktoṃ kā jīvan caritra*). Its author was Jivaram Yugalpriya (d. 1857) who was the disciple of *mahant* Ramchanrandas, the author of the first commentary discussed to be in this dissertation, the *Ānand laharī*. Both figures, teacher and disciple were considered prominent propagators of *rasik bhakti* in Ayodhya and were reviled by later scholars like Ramchandra Shukla, who were uncomfortable with *rasik* practices.[295] The *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl* was composed in 1839 and is one of the first *rasik* hagiographies to claim a link between Tulsidas and the *sampraday*.

> *sūr surānandajī ke śiṣya śrī gopāldās baḍe avdhūt / tinke suśiṣya raghunāthdāsjī mahān rām rās dhyānī jin jānyo rūp sār haiṃ/ tinke vimal narahri dās ras rās*

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[294] See Singh, *Ram bhakti*, 133. For more on the Nawabs of Avadh see Richard B. Barnett, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British 1720-1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
[295] See Chapter 3.

*jinke vidit kūvajī ke bal adhār hai / kūvājī ke chote gur bhāī śrī gosāīṃ jin rāmāyan gāthā gāī mahimā apār haiṃ/*
(verse 104)

Sursuranandji's disciple Shri Gopaldas was a great devotee. His disciple Raghunathdas was a great devotee of the essence of Ram. His disciple was Naraharidas, who was the teacher of Kuvaji. Gosvami Tulsidas, famous author of the *Rāmāyaṇ* is thus the younger brother of Kuvaji.

This verse thus takes advantage of Tulsidas's invocation to his guru as "nar rūpa hari" in order to link him as the disciple of a *rasik* Ramanandi named Narharidas. It also connects him (through his guru) to another famous *rasik* Ramanandi, Kuvaji.[296] Another *rasik* hagiography from the nineteenth century is the *Rām Rasikāvalī* of Raja Raghu Raj Singh (1846). The author of this work was Maharaj Raghuraj Singh of Rewa, the son of Maharaj Vishwanath Singh, patron of *mahant* Ramcharandas. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to trace this work, but a verse from this text regarding Tulsidas is quoted by George Grierson[297]:

*kachu dina kari kāsī meṃ bāsā / gaye avadha pura tulasi dāsā //*
*tahāṃ aneka kīnhau satasangā / nisi dina range rāma rati rangā //*
*sukhada rāma naumī jaba āī / chaita māsa ati ānanda pāī //*
*sambata soraha sai ekatīsā / sādara sumari bhānu kula īsā /*
*bāsara bhauma sucita cita chāyana / kiya ārambha tulasi rāmāyaṇa //*

After dwelling for a space in Benares, Tul'sī dās went to Ayodhya. There he associated with many holy men, and joying in the (pure) raptures of Rāma passed his days and drenched himself in the love of Ram day and night. When the happy Rām-navami came, and when he experienced the delights of the month of Chaitra, in samvat 1631, reverently did he call to mind the Lord of Solar Race, and, with care, on Tuesday, he commenced the soul-fulfilling Tulasī Rāmāyaṇ.[298]

This verse, which describes the commencement of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, is quoted by Grierson in order to confirm the date on which Tulsidas started to compose his work. However, what is more pertinent to my argument is that *rasik* hagiographies are slowly over the course of the nineteenth century, beginning to include Tulsidas, the details of his life, and the circumstances on which he composed the *Rāmcaritmānas*, into their hagiographies.

One more text that emerges from within the *rasik* tradition and that deserves mention is controversial *Gosāīṃ carit* (late nineteenth century or early twentieth century) of Bhavanidas, a disciple of *mahant* Ramprasad

[296] See Chapter 1. The verse in which Tulsidas calles his guru "nara rūpa hari" is *Ramcaritmānas* 1.5.

[297] Grierson, "Notes on Tul'si Das," 90.

[298] This traslation is Grierson's.

Bindukacharya of Ayodhya. This text, which was "discovered" in 1926 during the Nagari Pracharini Sabha's search for Tulsidas manuscripts, was the cause of much controversy because of the claim that it had been written by a contemporary of Tulsidas. This claim was effectively refuted and the text shown to be a late nineteenth or early twentieth century composition.[299] Thus, Tulsidas and his most famous composition were being drawn into the *rasik* Ramanandi tradition and texts are being composed, and even fabricated, to support the claim that Tulsidas himslef was a *rasik* Ramanandi.

**Moment of Arrival: Ayodhya, *mahant* Ramcharandas and the *Ānand lahirī***

*Mahant* Ramcharandas (1760-1831 C.E.) is recognized as a key figure, if not *the* key figure in the consolidation of the *rasik sampraday*'s authority in Ayodhya. The *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl*, which was authored by Ramcharandas's disciple Jivaram Yugalpriya, has this to say about him:

> *śrī rāmcaraṇ siyarām rasik rasikan me āgara /*
> *bibidha grantha bharidaye sarasa śṛngāra ujāgara //*
> *śrī tulasi śṛngāra gupta rasa dāsya bakhānī /*
> *yahī cot rahi gaī prāpti meṃ rasa bilagānī //*
> *soī āni bapu rasa dharyo agra svāmi ke yatha lahe /*
> *ṭīkā raci nija grantha ke pragaṭa rāsa rasa nirbahe //* [300]
>
> (verse 38)

> Shri Ramcharan connoisseur of Sita and Ram was the foremost of *rasiks*.
> He filled many texts with the light of the lovely essence of Shringar.
> Tulsidas spoke of servitude but kept shringar rasa hidden.
> Disturbed that in the completion of his work he forgot this rasa,
> He incarnated himself once more, just as Agradas
> He wrote a commentary to his own work, in which he brought out the essence of rasa.

Jivaram Yugalpriya celebrates Ramcharandas as being the foremost among the *rasiks* of his time. He also adds that Ramcharandas was, in fact, Tulsidas himself, returned to bring out the essence that he left out in his composition of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. More details on his life are added in the commentary to the *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl*, the *Rasik subodhinī ṭīkā* of Janaki Rasik Sharan (n.d.).

Ramcharandas was born in the Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh in a Kanyakubja Brahmin family.[301] He was educated at home and entered into the

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[299] See Philip Lutgendorf, "The Quest for the Legendary Tulsidas," in *According to Tradition: Hagiographical writing in India*. (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994): 65-85. Also see Kishorilal Gupta, *Gosāīṃ carit* (Varanasi: Vani Vitan Prakashan, 1965).

[300] Jivaram Yugalpriya, *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl* (Lucknow: London Printing Press, 1863), 40.

service of the local king, for whom he acted as clerk. According to the *Rasik subodhinī ṭīkā*, he was once so engrossed in the contemplation of Ram that he forgot to report to work. When he finally did so, Ramcharandas went to apologize for his tardiness. However, he was amazed to discover that his tasks for the day had already been completed.[302] Realizing at once that this was none other than Ram's grace, he resigned his post with the king and went to Ayodhya, where he met with the influential *rasik* Ramanandi Ramprasad Bindukacharya, the founder of Bada Sthan, and his disciple, Raghunathprasad.[303] On Ramprasad Bindukacharya's advice, he was initiated into the *rasik sampraday* as Raghunathprasad's disciple.

Soon after, his family followed him to Ayodhya and urged him to return to his old life, also petitioning his guru. Although Raghunathprasad granted him persmission to leave, Ramcharandas did not return to his old life. He devised a plan to get his family to return without him. When lunch was served, he began to eat the left overs from the plates of the Ramanandi sadhus. Disgusted by his behavior, his family members disowned him for violating caste commensality rules and left without him. Ramcharandas was thus left to pursue his life as a *rasik* Ramanandi.[304]

Following his initiation into the *rasik sampraday*, Ramcharandas visited the major centers of *rasik* devotion – Chitrakut, Mithila and Raivasa – in order to receive instruction in the tenets and principles of *rasik* devotion. He returned, however, to Ayodhya, where he established his own *gaddī,* or seat at Janaki Ghat, where he became famous for his *Rāmcaritmānas* katha[305] and was known popularly as '*Karuṇāsindhu'* (ocean of mercy). He enjoyed the patronage of Asaf'ud daula (r. 1775-1797), the Shi'ite nawab of Awadh who granted him the land around Janaki Ghat, and also that of Maharaj Vishvanath Pratap Singh (1789-1854) of Rewa.[306] An initiate of the *rasik sampraday*[307], Vishvanath Pratap Singh is said to have funded twelve pandits to assist *mahant* Ramcharandas as scribes during the composition of the *Ānand laharī*.[308]

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[301] The biographical details of Ramcharandas have also been drawn from Anjaninandan Sharan, "Sharan, "Mānas ke prācīn ṭīkākār," in *Kalyāṇ: Mānasāṅk*, ed. Hanuman Prasad Poddar (Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh: Gita Press, 1938), 908-928, Singh, *Rām bhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 420-422 and Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 140-142.

[302] Jivaram Yugalpriya, *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl*, 41.

[303] Raghunathprasad was the author of Śrī *Maharāj carit*.

[304] Singh, *Rām bhakti meṃ rasik sampraday*, 412.

[305] Oral exposition of the *Ramcaritmānas*.

[306] The Rewa court seems to have played an important role in the patronage of *rasik* literature in the nineteenth century. Vishvanath Singh's Maharaj Raghu raj Singh was the author of the rasik hagiography *Rām rasikāvalī*. See above.

[307] For details on Maharaja Vishvanath Pratap Singh, see Singh, *Rambhakti*, 431-438.

[308] Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 140.

*Mahant* Ramcharandas was the author of several works of theology and devotion in the *rasik* tradition, such as *Aṣṭayām sevāvidhī* (n.d.), *Rām navaratnasarasaṅgrah (*n.d.), *Siyārām rasmañjarī* (n.d.) and so on. Ramcharandas was also the guru of three famous *rasik* Ramanandis, Jivaram Yugalpriya, who authored the first *rasik* hagiography based on the *Bhaktamāl*, the *Rasik prakāś bhaktamāl* has been discussed, Janakraj Kishorisharan "Rasikali," and Haridas. Ramcharandas was also a close friend of Pandit Ramgulam Dwivedi of Varanasi, whose contribution to the commentarial tradtion was discussed in Chapter 3. They became such good friends that they made a pact to leave this earth at the same moment. According to the legends surrounding Ramcharandas, three days before his death in 1831 he organized a continuous recitiation Ram's name on Ram ghat in Ayodhya. On the evening of the third day a messenger arrved from Ramgulam Dwivedi with a note reminding him of their pact. Shortly after receiving the note, which he was expecting, he died.[309]

Ramcharandas is of course most renowned, for his commentary on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Ānand lahirī* (also known as the *Rāmānand lahirī*). He began the commentary around 1808 and completed it by 1827. However, the commentary was published by Naval Kishore Press only in the late nineteenth century during a period that witnessed an upsurge in the publication of both the text of the *Ramcaritmānas* as well as its commentaries.[310] According to Ulrike Stark, the Naval Kishore Press (founded in 1858) in Lucknow, which was committed to promoting the literary traditions of both Urdu and Hindi, took the lead in publishing the devotional works of the *rasik* order. The press was responsible for locating *mahant* Ramcharandas's manuscript in the private library of a *rasik* theologian in Ayodhya and issuing the first edition in 1882. The commentary, which was issued in seven volumes as *Rāmāyaṇ Tulsīdās kṛt saṭīk*, had a print run of 1200 copies and was sold at Rs. 7. A second edition was issued in 1888 and a third edition, both hardback and paperback followed in 1889.[311]

The commentary is clearly modeled on a tradition of oral explication. Not all of the verses from Tulsidas's text are commented upon, but they are all translated into Hindi. The *Bāl kāṇḍ* forms the bulk of the commentary with many of the crucial commentarial passages occurring in this section. In the history of *Ramcaritmānas* commentaries, the *Ānand lahirī* occupies a unique place. It was long considered the first commentary on the *Ramcaritmānas* and although this view has since been challenged, the *Ānand lahirī* is indubitably the first known Hindi exegetical commentary on the *Ramcaritmānas*.[312] Though it is considered a

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[309] See Singh, *Rām bhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 420.

[310] Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007), 395-396. Although, this work went through several print runs in the nineteenth century, I was unable to locate a published copy. I am working from a copy of the manuscript of the commentary obtained in the Sarasvati Mahal library at Ramnagar.

[311] Ibid., 399.

[312] The first *tika* or commentary of the *Rāmcaritmānas* is considered to be the work of a disciple of Tulsidas's named Ramkumar Dvivedi in 1603 and was a translation of the work into Sanskrit. Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 140.

Hindi commentary, the language of the *Ānand laharī* is not *khari boli* Hindi, rather, it is Braj bhasha prose with a smattering of Avadhi. The commentary has been called '*panditāu'* or pedantic because of the preponderance of quotations from Sanskrit texts for which the author provides no translation.[313] The question of language, in particular the language of the Rāmcaritmānas, is dealt with in some detail in the *Ānand laharī*. This question is also related to the need for a commentary in the first place.

In the opening sections of the *Ānand laharī*, Ramcharandas lays the ground for the writing of his commentary. He begins by first reflecting on why Tulsidas chose to write the *Rāmcaritmānas* in *bhasha* (Avadhi) and not in Sanskrit. Ramcharandas devotes considerable attention to this question of language, which created so much trouble for Tulsidas as we saw in Chapter 1.

According to Ramcharandas:

> *Jab kalijug prāpti bhayo tab oyi ācārajan vicār kīna kī sarva jīv malīn hoī gaye haiṃ tav rūp dhari kai kali meṃ savke sulabh hetu mahātmā śrī tulsidas ādi rūp dharikai bhāṣā prabandha kiyo so bhāṣā bharatkhāṇḍ bhari rahī hai/*[314]
>
> During the time of kali, the great acharyas, or teachers reflected that all the creatures of the world had become corrupt. Then these great sages incarnated themselves taking the form of Tulsidas and others and wrote works in Bhasha for everyone's ease. Their language has now spread all over Bharatkhand.
>
> *anek vānī te bhajan haiṃ /dev vānī nāg vānī prakṛt vānī meṃ / bangla des udais des tailang des mārvār des panjāb des vraj des / śrī ayodhyā des / aise anek des bhāṣā haiṃ / aise sarva dīp sarva khaṇḍ meṃ hai āpnī āpnī vānī / tāteṃ anek bhānti te savai bhajan karte haiṃ/*
>
> There are hyms (to Ram) in many languages, the language of the gods, the langage of the nagas and common language. Moreover there are various regions such as Bangla des, Udais des, Tailang des, Marwar des, Panjab des, Vraj des and Shri Ayodha des. So there are many regional languages. So every island and every region has its own language. Thus everyone prays in through different means.[315]

Ramcharandas first argues that during the kali age the great sages composed their work in Bhasha for the benefit of the living creatures and their language became well-known all across Bharatkhand. He then also adds that there are several languages within Bharatkhand, all of which are valid for the praise of Ram.

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[313] The Sanskrit works most frequently quoted in the commentary are the *Sadāśivasaṃhitā,* the Valmiki *Ramāyaṇa*, the *Adhyātma Ramāyaṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gītā* among others.

[314] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 2.
[315] Ibid., fol. 42.

Furthermore, commenting on the section when Tulsidas says that he heard the tale from his guru, Ramcharandas conjectures:

*yāte bhāṣa karat hauṃ ki guranh kai kahī tatva bhūli na jāi tāte likhi let haiṃ/*[316]

I (Tulsidas) write in Bhasha so that I do not forget the essence of what my guru taught, so I write it down.

Thus, Ramcharandas argues that Tulsidas's work was composed in the vernacular for ease of understanding in the corrupt age of kali. He then goes on to add a detailed explanation of why the choice of language as a medium for instruction does not affect the message itself. He argues that, just as water contained in a golden pot, *suvarṇa ko pātra*, is no different from water contained in a clay pot, *mṛtikā ko pātra,* so too the teaching of the great sages, whether it be in Sanskrit or in the vernacular, conveys the same message. According to him, the *Rāmcaritmānas* contains the essence of the Vedas, and whether that essence is contained in a golden pot, *suvarṇa ko pātra*, or in a clay pot, *mṛtikā ko pātra*, the its meaning remains unchanged. Here the golden pot refers to Sanskrit and the clay pot to *bhasha*. Moreover he goes on to add that:

*pari koi ghat meṃ much lagāikai nahiṃ jal pīvai hai tahāṃ avare pātra meṃ jal karikai pīvata haiṃ tāte maiṃ tulsikṛt bhāṣā ko vārtik karata hauṃ sūkṣma te/*

But, no one drinks water directly from the pot. They transfer it to another vessel before drinking. Thus, I compose a commentary to Tulsi's Bhasha work, in order to make (its meaning) clear.

He thus justifies his commentary by arguing that yet another medium, in form of his commentary, is required to transmit Tulsidas's message to the devotees of Ram. *Mahant* Ramcharandas classifies his commentary as a *vārtik*, which is an explanatory work that glosses what is *ukta* or said, *anukta*, or unsaid (hidden), and *durukta*, poorly said in the original work. As a *rasik* Ramanandi, Ramcharandas's commentary seeks to reveal the hidden *rasik* orientation of the *Ramcaritmānas* and hence, the *Ānand laharī* primarily focuses on the *anukta*. Each section of the commentary is styled as a *taraṅg*, or a wave, capturing and echoing the imagery of the *Ramcaritmānas* as a lake.

Furthermore, he asks:

*jo koi kahai kī bhāṣā ko puni bhāṣā tilak kā karna / pīsne ko kā pīsnā /* [317]

There are people who ask, "why a Bhasha commentary on a Bhasha work?" What is there left to grind meaning out of?

[316] Ibid., fol. 85.
[317] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, f. 1.

*āpne anubhav te sabhī artha karte haiṃ āpnī mati ke anusār artha maiṃ bhī karat hauṃ/*
*savai nija artha karaiṃ tāme ānanda bhareṃ rāmcaraṇ vārtik meṃ artha pradhan hai/*

Everyone understands (the texts) according to his or her individual experience, and I too understand this text according to my intellect. Everyone has their own understanding and joy (in the text), but Ramcharandas's interpretation is foremost.

He thus goes on to anticipate any objection to his commentary by simply stating that he holds the key to understanding the text. The attention he pays to the question of language – the venacular language of Tulsidas's work and the need for a vernacular commentary on it – seems to suggest that the question of being authoritative in the vernacular had not disappeared even in the early nineteenth century. Indeed the question of Tulsidas's work being a translation of a Sanskrit text came up in the early twentieth century, as we saw in Chapter 3.

**Sacred Geography in the *Ānand lahirī***

*Mahant* Ramcharandas also devotes a significant portion of the *Ānand laharī* to the discussion of sacred geography. He describes the standard Puranic cosmography with the seven islands, or the *sapta dvīpa*, the major one being Jambudvipa.[318] Jambudvipa contains many areas, with Bharatkhand being the most important. In the discussion of language, Ramcharandas mentions that Tulsidas and other sages compose *bhasha* texts that become famous throughtout "Bharatkhand." Bharatkhand is then singled out for special favor from Ram:

*nar nārāyaṇ saṃpūrṇ brahmāṇd ko pālan karte haiṃ pari jambūdvīp ko adhik pālan karte haiṃ/ tāpar bharatkhaṇḍ ho viśeṣ pālan karte haiṃ / jaise koi rāja apne samast rāj ko pālan karat hai par āpan sahar ko rakṣā bahut karat hai / aru mahal kī rakṣā viśeṣ karatu hai / taise rāmnām sarva jīv ko rakṣak hai pari je ved vetta haiṃ tinkī adhik rakṣā karatu hai / par je jan keval rām hī nām hṛday meṃ vasāve haiṃ tinko nām rakṣak hai viśeṣ pālan karatu hai*

Nar and Narayan protect the entire universe. But they take special care of Jambudvip. On Jambudvip they take special care of Bharatkhand. Just as a king takes care of his entire kingdom, but takes special care of his own city and even more special care of his palace. In the same way, the name of Ram protects all living creatures, but it takes special care of those who know the Vedas. But it protects most carefully those who only nurture the name of Ram in their hearts.

Within Bharatkhand, he goes on to enumerate specific regions, singling out Kosal des, Maithil des, Magah des, Bangal des, Udais des, Tailang des,

[318] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, folds. 262-266.

Malbar des, Malva des, Marwa des, and Gujrat des.[319] The location of greatest interest to Ramcharandas, Ayodhya, is located within Kosal des.

First in a line of commentaries that constitute the Ayodhya *parampara*, the *Ānand lahirī*, in one significant section, reflects, at length, on its location, which is depicted as the culmination of an elaborate cosmic and soteriological journey.[320] If considered in the proper historical context, embedded in this ostensibly conventional account is the anxiety of a sectarian order that is trying to consolidate its presence in a new and unfamiliar location. In the section of the *Ānand lahirī* discussed below, *Mahant* Ramcharandas reveals not only the anxieties of the *rasiks* but also offers a resolution.

The commentary on Ayodhya proceeds from the following *chaupais* in the *Bāl kāṇḍ* that mark the formal beginning of the Ram *katha* in Tulsidas's *Ramcaritmānas*.

> *sādara sivahi nai aba māthā / baranuṃ bisada rāma guna gāthā /*
> *samvata soraha sau ikatīsā / karauṃ kathā hari pada dhari sīsā //*
> *naumi bhauma bāra madhumāmsā / avadhpurī yaha carita prakāsā /*
> *jehi dina rāma janama śruti gāvahiṃ / tīratha sakala tahāṃ cali āvahiṃ //*
>
> (1.33.2-3)

> Bowing my head reverently to Shiva, I begin to tell the saga of Ram's virtues. Placing my head at Hari's feet, I begin this tale in the samvat year 1631. On Tuesday, in the ninth day of the lunar month of Chaitra, this tale is revealed in the city of Ayodhya, where, the Shrutis say, on the day of Ram's birth, all the sacred places gather.

These introductory chaupaīs prompt *Mahant* Ramcharandas to ask, "*puni ayodhyā kaisī hai*?" or "how might Ayodhya be understood?" He answers his question by saying, *ayodhya Rām dhāmdā hai*. Ayodhya is the means of obtaining Ram's *dham,* which is then glossed in both its meanings – body and abode. First dham is glossed as *svarūp*, that is, form or body.[321] Therefore, Ayodhya is a means of obtaining Ram's form or body. In its second meaning, dham is glossed as abode. Ayodhya, therefore, is a means of obtaining Ram's abode. This would imply, Ramcharandas continues, that *ayodhya ayodhya kī hī dātavya hai*, that is, Ayodhya is the means of obtaining Ayodhya itself. Acknowledging the enigmatical nature of this statement, Ramcharandas explains that *this* Ayodhya which is in *this* universe is the abode of Ram's *mādhuryalīlā* (sweet play), and the Ayodhya that is beyond the universe is the abode of Ram's *bhog aiśvaryalīlā* (majestic play of pleasure). According to Ramcharandas, both Ayodhyas are the

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[319] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 283.

[320] Inevitably this passage contains lengthy and conventional descriptions of the *saptalokas* (seven worlds) and the *tattvāvaraṇ*, as (layers of matter). Although the ascent to the heavenly Ayodhya (or Saket) is constructed in great detail and with careful deliberation, I will confine myself to an abridged account here before moving on to the crucial passages concerning the heavenly Ayodhya or Saket.

[321] *Svarup* can also be translated as 'nature,' but body would be more appropriate here.

same, both are *akhaṇḍ* (limitless) and *ekras* (of one flavor). In terms of *tattva* or essence, *svarup* or form, *nam* or name, and *nityatā* or eternality, they are completely identical. The only difference lies in the kind of *lila* – *madhurya* or *bhog aishvarya* – that is performed in the site.[322] According to Ramcharandas, therefore, there are two Ayodhyas – *yah* (this) Ayodhya in the temporal realm and *vah* (that) Ayodhya in the eternal realm, and *this* Ayodhya is the means of obtaining *that* Ayodhya, otherwise known as Saket.

The commentary proceeds to expand on *that* Ayodhya, beyond the universe, beginning with the conventional listing of the seven worlds. According to Ramcharandas, *koi granth meṃ yah kahā hai*, that is, "in some texts it is said that" there are seven worlds – *bhūlok*, *bhuvalok*, *svahalok*, *mahatlok*, *janalok*, *tapalok* and *satyalok*. Having dispensed with this conventional listing, Ramcharandas lists the seven worlds as described in the *Sadāśivasaṃhitā*.[323] According to this work, the lokas are understood to occur in the following order: *mahatlok*, *janalok*, *tapalok*, *satyalok*, *kaumāralok*, *umāloka* and *śivalok*. Next Ramcharandas goes on to describe the *brahmāṇḍa tattvāvaraṇ* or the layers of matter that comprise the universe. In order, these are listed as *mahi* or earth, *jal* or water, *agni* or fire, *pavan* or air, *ākāś,* or ether, *ahaṃkār* or ego, and *mahat* or intellect.

Ramcharandas then turns to the soteriological relevance of this cataloguing for the ordinary devotee. According to him there are various levels of mukti, or release, the lowest being a place in any of the seven lokas. This level of salvation is for those who pursue the path of karma (*karmakāṇḍīs*) and calls for the performance of specific duties of *varnashrama dharma* (duties of caste and the various stages of life). Ramcharandas is gently dismissive of such salvation, for according to him, *in karman ko yaha phalai hai kaisahu hoi kai karai*, that is, "such karma has this alone as its reward, regardless of how it is performed." Ramcharandas then proceeds to reveal the next level of salvation, which results in the transcending of the *sthūla śarīr* or the gross body, and *sūkṣma śarīr* or the subtle body. The *sthula sharir* is transcended when the five senses are conquered.[324] The *sukshma sharir* is transcended when the seventeen *tattvas* are conquered.[325] The next stage of salvation is *turīya* or the state of pure consciousness, which is attained with the realization that man's nature is eternally pure, that he is consciousness, and most importantly, that he is always Ram's servant.

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[322] To support his assertion, Ramcaraṇdās quotes from the *Sadāśivasamhita:*
*bhogasthānaṃ parāyodhyā līlāsthānaṃ tu iyaṃ bhuvi /*
*bhogalīlāpati Ramo niraṃkuśavibhūtikaḥ //*

The place of pleasure is the highest (or other) Ayodhya and the place of play is in this world. Rama, the lord of pleasure and of play is a sovereign power.

[323] This work seems to have canonical significance for the rasik Ramanandis.

[324] These are: *gandha*, *ras*, *rūp*, *sparśa* and *śabda* (smell, taste, sight, touch and hearing).

[325] These include the five *jñānendriyas* (organs of sense), the five *karmendriyas* (organs of action), the five *prāṇ*as (winds), and *manas* (heart) and *buddhi* (intellect).

Thus far, the commentarial passage, meant to address a question about the eternal Ayodhya, has turned out to be a cataloguing of the heavens and the various paths to salvation. At this stage, however, as Ramcharandas enters the final frontiers of this cosmic hierarchy, the narrative takes on an urgency and excitement. At a distance of one thousand *yojanas*[326] above *mahat tattva* is *Maha Vishnulok*. This is the realm of the *sahasra śīṛṣā puruṣaḥ*, the thousand headed *puruṣa* or cosmic man, the original cause of the entire universe. This *Maha* Vishnu is but the form of Ram's infinite divine qualities. Those who are devoted exclusively to this *Maha* Vishnu cross the various worlds to enter his realm. Above this is *Maha Shambhulok*, the abode of Maha Shambhu, who is in the form of the *ādijyoti* or the primordial flame, which is nothing but the splendor of Ram's body. Those who are devoted to him attain *kaivalya mukti*, or perfect emancipation in this world. Above this is *Vasudevlok* where *caturvyūha bhagvān*, the condensed energy of Ram, resides.[327] The devotees of *chaturvyuha bhagvan* also attain *kaivalya mukti*.

Finally, above *Vasudevlok*, we get to the realm in which Ram dwells with Sita and their companions and devotees, the realm that is the goal of *rasik* practioners.

> *puni tāke par asaṅkhya ūnco golok hai so anant jojan vistār hai so śrī rāmcandra ko des hai/ dṛṣṭānt jaise nagar ke madhya meṃ rājā ko mahat mahal hai dṛṣṭānt ko ek des hai/ taise tāko madhya mem śrī ayodhyā hai/ tāme das āvaran haiṃ jo bhītar ko āvarn haiṃ/ so savav kotin jojan vistār haiṃ/*[328]
>
> Then above that (*Vasudevlok*) at an infinite distance and inifintely vast is Golok, the country or realm of Shri Ram. As an example, just as a king has his vast palce in the middle of the city, it is all still the same kingdom. So too in the middle of this realm is Shri Ayodhya. The city is made of of ten layers, each of which is ten million *yojanas* vast.

Thus, at the center of *Golok*, which Ramcharandas describes as *ram ko des* (Ram's kingdom or country), is Ayodhya. Lest we should doubt the sovereignty of Ram over this entire realm, confused perhaps by the association of Goloka with Krishna, Ramcharandas reassures the reader with an example. He observes that although a king resides in a palace in the middle of his city, he still retains sovereignty over his entire kingdom. In the same manner, Ram is the sovereign of all of Goloka, although he resides at its center, in Ayodhya.

On its periphery, the city is protected by four gates in the four cardinal directions, each fronted by a forest – *Aśokavan* in south and in the west, *Vrindāvan* in the east, and *Anandavan* in the north. To the north is the river Sarayu and to the south is Vrija Ganga. The southern gate is guarded by Hanuman, the eastern gate by Vibhishan, the western gate Sugriv and the northern by Angad. All four

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[326] A *yojana* is a measure of distance, approximately eight to nine miles.

[327] The four *vyuhas* or emanations of Vishnu, according to Shri Vaishnava theology, are Vasudeva, Samkarshana, Aniruddha and Pradyumna.

[328] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 102.

are accompanied by attendants who are young boys in the guise of Ram and Lakshman. The city itself is made up of ten layers. The first nine layers of the city (working from the outside in) hold the temples of *sakhas*, or friends and the *dāsas* or servants. In the tenth and innermost layer of this city are the temples to the *sakhīs*, or female companions. In Ramcharandas's words:

> *puni śrī ayodhyā ko dasvoṃ āvaran jo haiṃ antar tāke madhya meṃ paramdivya brahmasvarūp kalpataru hai chatrākār hai, ratna may peḍ skandh ḍār pāt phūl phal saṃpūrn param divya cinmay śrīrām kṛpārūp haiṃ / tāke tar maṇḍap brahm-may hai, tāke tar vedikā hai, param divya ratnanh may hai, tāke par siṇghāsan hai kotinh sūrya ke prakās ko harat hai/ tā siṇghāsan par hazār dal ko kamal hai ratnamayī / tāke par duī mudrā hai agni mudrā puni candra mudrā / tāke madhya meṃ śrī sītā rām virājmān haiṃ /*[329]
>
> In the middle (of the tenth and innermost layer) is the celestial and divine wish-granting tree that is shaped like an umbrella. This jeweled tree, its trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit all bear the form of the celestial and pure Ram, the embodiment of grace. Under the tree there is a celestial pavilion on top of which is a celestial and bejeweled altar. On this altar is a throne the splendor of which puts to shame a thousand suns. On this throne is a bejeweled and thousand-petaled lotus that bears two signs, that of the fire and the moon. Seated on this throne is the divine couple Sita and Ram.[330]
>
> *tahāṃ je śrī sītā rām upāsak haiṃ paramānanya upāy sūnya prapatti haim te sātau lok ke āvaran aru satau tattva ke āvaran bhedikai te mahāviṣṇu ke lok ko prāpti bhaye / mahāviṣṇu ati ādar saṃjukt mahāśambhu ke lok ko prāpti pahuṃcāye / tav mahāśaṃbhu ne ati ādar te vāsudevlok ko prāpti kiye / tahāṃ ati ādar saṃjukt golok ko prāpti bhaye, vṛjā pār bhaye tahāṃ śrī hanumān paramācārya tinko mile tav tin-ne ati ādar te śrīlakṣman ityādik bhrātā pārṣadanh saṃjukt jahāṃ śrī sītā-rām virājmān haiṃ tahāṃ ko prāpti kiye tav śrī sītā-rām prasann vhaike tinko milat bhaye / tav śrī jānakījī kī ājñā te jaisī bhāvnā ihāṃ karat hai tāhi seva ko prāpti bhaye /*[331]
>
> Devotees of Shri Sita Ram who practice self-surrender and are with recourse to no other higher power (for salvation) cross the seven worlds and the seven layers of matter and reach Maha Vishnulok. Maha Vishnu, with great respect, takes the devotee to Maha

[329] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 103.

[330] As an aside Ramcharandas notes that the *Agastyasaṃhitā* mentions three mudras or signs – *agni* or fire, *surya* or the sun, and *candra*, the moon.

[331] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 103.

> Shambhulok. Maha Shambhu, with great respect, takes him to Vasudevlok, from where he taken, with respect, to Goloka. Crossing the Vrija Ganga, he is met by Hanuman, the highest teacher, who, with great respect and in the company of Shri Lakshman his brothers and other attendants, takes him to the place where Shri Sita Ram are seated. Pleased, Shri Sita Ram meet him and with Shri Janakiji's permission he is granted the same mode of service (to the divine couple) that he practiced here on earth.

This is *mahant* Ramcharandas's vision of the eternal Ayodhya - at the center of Goloka and at the pinnacle of a cosmic and soteriological hierarchy. His vision does not refute or reject the tenets of *varnashrama dharma*. However, the salvation that follows from the practice of its duties and responsibilities is relegated to a lower order. The highest form of *mukti* is a place in the heavenly Ayodhya and this is attained only through the practice of *prapatti* or self-surrender. It is important to note that Ramcharndas does not use the simple vocabulary of *bhakti* but the technical terminology of Shri Vaishnava theology.[332] Moreover, a place in the heavenly Ayodhya is attained but gradually, at the culmination of an obligatory and reverential passage, a pilgrimage, through the realms of Maha Vishnu, Maha Shambhu and Vasudev (Narayana). Ramcharandas is thus acknowledging the older Vaishnava and Shaiva constructions of the supreme deity. Ultimately however, they are subsumed under devotion to Ram, as Vishnu and Shiva are seen as but manifestations of Ram. The presiding deity of each realm directs the deserving devotee forward to Goloka. Here, the devotee is passed into the care of Hanuman, who escorts him into the presence of the divine couple. And here, in this empyrean, he is ushered into a magnificent, but essentially domestic sphere. The rewards of this realm are also domestic - a place of service that mirrors the mode of service that was performed in the mortal realm as a *rasik* practitioner. Service to the divine couple becomes its own reward. Salvation for the *rasik* who has practiced self-surrender means that the practice or sadhana that he undertook in the mortal realm through meditation is finally translated into reality and that he becomes a participant in the eternal lila of Ram and Sita. The heavenly Ayodhya, in Ramcharandas's commentary is, therefore, primarily a *rasik* space for the *rasik* devotee.

**A Brief Textual Pedigree**

The significance of Ramcharandas's vision of the divine couple in an eternal Ayodhya becomes apparent when it is examined in the context of some earlier works to which the commentary is indebted. The texts in question are, the

[332] The Ramanandi link to the Shri Vaishnavas has been seen as an attempt to acquire a respectable spiritual lineage. Indeed, the *sampraday* itself has been ambivalent about this connection, with a final schism occurring in the early twentieth century (see Chapter 4). However, as evident from the importance of *prapatti* in *rasik* soteriology, the connection to the Shri Vaishnavas might have had theological ramifications that are as yet unexplored. According to Bhagavati Prasad Singh, the *rasiks* rank *prapatti* only second to acharyabhiman (respect for the teacher) as a means of obtaining salvation. *Rambhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 194-197.

*Agastyasaṃhitā*, the *Sadāśivasaṃhiṭā* and the *Dhyānmañjarī* (and indirectly, the *Bhuṣuṇḍi Ramāyaṇa*). Of these, Ramcharandas is most clearly indebted to the *Sadāśivasaṃhitā*, a work that is no longer extant. Parts of the text, however, survive as quotations in *rasik* literature, particularly in the works of *mahant* Ramcharandas. Canonical for the *rasiks*, the *Sadāśivasaṃhitā* was, in all probability, modeled on the *Agastyasaṃhitā*, which dates to the twelfth century, the earliest period in the development of Ram *bhakti* as discussed above.[333] The *Agastyasaṃhitā* (in the *pāñcarātra* tradition) contains a description of Ram and Sita seated on a lotus on a throne under a tree, in the context of *antaḥ-pūjā*, when a devotee is meditating on the vision Ram and Sita in his heart.[334] This theme of the throne-lotus-tree is replicated in the *Sadāśivasaṃhitā*, which places the vision in Saket. The commentarial passages presented above seem to rely entirely on that work and are bhasha translations of its Sanskrit verses.

This vision of the *yugal svarup* is a feature of *rasik* literature from an early date, first appearing in the sixteenth century *rasik* work the *Dhyānmañjarī* of Agradas. This work contains the very same vision of the couple, with the tree-throne-lotus theme reprised, and also includes *śikh-nakh* description of Ram and Sita.[335] Although the *Dhyānmañjarī* is also a description of a meditative vision, in this case, one that is exclusive to *rasiks*, it places the vision in a different setting - in the Pramodvan (pleasure groves) of Avadh. Therefore, there is an elaborate description of the Pramodvan and of the Sarayu, which flows nearby and is envisioned as a ladder to Vaikuntha, a heaven for the meritorious. According to McGregor, the descriptions of Pramodvan were drawn from the *Bhuṣunḍī Rāmāyaṇa*, which, in turn, aimed at replicating the sacred topography of Braj; so, Pramodvan mirrored Vrindavan, Sarayu, the Yamuna, and so on. As for Ayodhya, or Avadhpuri as it is referred to in the *Dhyānmañjarī*, although it is seen as a supernatural realm, it is also described in conventional terms, with opulent and jewel encrusted lanes, halls, bazaars and gateways, all of which display banners honoring Ram.

Bakker has shown that in the fifth century the Gupta kings encouraged the identification of the old Saket with the Ayodhya that had been made famous as the capital of the *Ikshvaku* dynasty. This identification was championed in the literature of this period, such as in the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kalidasa among others. Centuries later, this identification was to become valuable to the Ramanandis. In the sixteenth century, the *Dhyānmañjarī* takes the vision of the *yugal svarp* from the *pancaratra* tradition of the *Agastya saṃhitā* and places it in the Pramodvan of Avadh, reflecting perhaps the quest for a mythical space that would be the site of the *madhurya lila* of Ram and Sita. This was a site that would parallel, if not rival,

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[333] The *Agastyasaṃhitā* (11th or 12th century) is a *pancharatra* samhita, a Vaishnava metrical treatise of ritual and liturgy.

[334] Bakker, Ayodhya, 1: 98-99.

[335] McGregor, R.S. "The Dhyān-mañjarī of Agradās," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Deitrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 237-244. Apart from the *Sadāśivasaṃhitā*, R.S. McGregor has demonstrated that the *Dhyānmañjarī* relied on the *Bhus,un,d,i Ramāyan,a*, another text key to the rasik tradition, as also the *Rās-pañcādhyāyī* of Nanddās, an important work of Kṛṣṇaite devotion.

the spaces of Vrindavan and Golok that had so captured the imagination of much of North India through the Krishna devotional traditions.

In the early nineteenth century the identification of Ayodhya with Saket was invoked once more by *mahant* Ramcharandas, who played a central role in the consolidation of the *rasik sampraday*'s presence in the city. In his commentary on the *Ramcaritmānas*, Ramcharandas abandons the setting of the Pramodvan[336] and places the vision of *yugal svarup*, at the center of an eternal Ayodhya (Saket) that is firmly located at the pinnacle of an elaborate cosmic and soteriological hierarchy. Ramcharandas provides no further description of this eternal Ayodhya, for the eternal Ayodhya *is* the *yugal svarup*. The commentary seems to have come full circle to the original assertion that *ayodhyā rām dhāmdā hai*, that is, Ayodhya is the means of obtaining Ram's form or abode. Ramcharandas has shown that *this* Ayodhya, in the temporal realm is the means of obtaining Ram's form and abode, which are one and the same. Furthermore, Ramcharandas does not elaborate on *this* Ayodhya, in the temporal realm. Unlike the *Dhyānmañjarī*, which has conventionalized descriptions of the city, the *Ānand laharī*, although composed *in situ*, does not provide any "realistic" description of Ayodhya. Ramcharandas is content to say:

> *sav prakār te purī manohari hai aru sakal siddhi samprūran maṅgal tehi kai dātā hai/*[337]
>
> The city is beautiful in every way and grants every accomplishment and fortune.

As a temporal city, Ayodhya is important to Ramcharandas only as a conduit to the eternal Ayodhya. In *mahant* Ramcharandas's own words:

> *tahāṃ yah śrī ayodhya je sevan karai yah kāl meṃ aru vah śrī ayodhya kī vāsnā karai to tinko vah śrī ayodhya prāptī hotu hai/*
>
> Those who aspire to *that* Ayodhya while serving *this* Ayodhya here and now will indeed attain *that* Ayodhya.

Furthermore, he goes on to elaborate in greater detail on the soteriological importance of the temporal Ayodhya:

> *ayodhyā meṃ sarīr chūṭai tau puni sansār meṃ na āve / je śrī ayodhyā meṃ jīv vaste haiṃ /aru koi bhī bhajan karte haiṃ sukarm karte haiṃ / tinkī sarīr jav chūṭṭī hai tav jākī jaisī bhāvna bhayī so taisī mukti ko prāpti bhayo śrī rāmcandrajū ke samīp sārūp mukti ko prāpti hote haiṃ…*[338]

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[336] The pleasure groves do remain on the outer peripheries of the cosmic city.
[337] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 105.

[338] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 104.

If a person dies in Ayodhya, he does not take birth in the world again. Those who reside in Ayodhya, worshipping in whatever way and performing good deeds, when such people die, they attain the *mukti* that they desire. They attain proximity to Shri Ram as well as the same form as him.[339]

*aru je ayodhyā meṃ pāp karte haiṃ tinkī sarīr jav chūṭti hai tav te kīṭ pataṅg pasu ityādik joni meṃ janamte haiṃ / pari śrī ayodhyā meṃ jav tinkī sarir chūṭtī hai tav te sālokya mukti ko prāpti hote haiṃ / kāhe te kī pāp punya ko phal bhogya manuṣya tan ko hai apar joni meṃ nahī hai / tāte je manuṣya ayodhyā meṃ vasi karikai pāp karte haiṃ te caurāsī ke daṇḍ se chūtikai aru narak daṇḍ te chūtikai śrī ayodhyā ko prāpti hote haiṃ / aru je anya ke jīv koyī jog te śrī ayodhyā meṃ ādhahū nimiṣ nivās kari gaye haiṃ / jav unkī sarīr kahūṃ chūṭī tav vai śrī ayodhyā meṃ janma lete haiṃ karmānusār manuṣya kīṭ pataṅg pasu ityādik joni meṃ janma lete haiṃ / tav śrī ayodhyā meṃ sarīr chōḍikai śrī rām dhām jo śrī ayodhyā tahāṃ ko prāpti hote haiṃ/*[340]

And when those who commit sins in Ayodhya die, they take birth in the wombs of insects, birds, animals and so on. But, if they (those who commite sins in Ayodhya) die in Ayodhya, they attain *sālokya mukti*, or proximity to Shri Ram. This is because the fruits of sin and goodness must be borne by the human body not in other forms. Thus, those who live in Ayodhya and commit sins escape the punishment of the relentless cycles of birth and death and escape the punishment of hell and attain the realm of Ayodhya (the heavenly Ayodhya, or Saket). And those other creatures who die in any place, but who have by some means managed to reside in Ayodhya even for half a minute, such creatures are reborn in Ayodhya in the wombs of humans, insects, birds or animals, according to their acculumated karma. They when they die in Ayodhya, they attain proximity to Shri Ram in his abode, (the heavenly) Ayodhya.

In these two passages Ramcharandas goes into great detail regarding the soteriological power of Ayodhya. In the first passage, even those who are not particularly devoted to Ram, but who reside in Ayodhya attain the *mukti* that grants them proximity to his presence. For human beings who commit sin in Ayodhya, but die elsewhere, the punishment is to be reborn in the form of animals, birds, insects or other creatures of even lower order. But those who commit sin in Ayodhya and die in Ayodhya are luckier. They aren't reborn at all, and escape the punishment of rebirth and hell and are ven granted entry into the heavenly abode of Ram. Any living creature that spends even half a minute in Ayodhya is eventually reborn in the city. That presumably that gives it an opportunity to die in Ayodhya, thus, releasing it from the cycle of birth and

[339] There are five type of *mukti*, or release (salvation) in the Vaishnava tradition. 1. *sārupya mukti* – attaiing the same form as the Lord, 2. *sālokya mukti* – attaining residence in the same abode of the Lord, 3. *sārṣṭi* – attaining the same opulence as the Lord, 4. *sāmīpya* – attaining intimacy or close proximity with the Lord and finally, the highest form 5. *sāyujya mukti*- merging with the Lord.

[340] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 104-105.

death. This passage, though, excruciating in detail, demonstrates that Ramcharandas is using his commentary on the *Rāmcaritmānas* to not only make a powerful case for *rasik* presence in Ayodhya, but also to assert the *rasiks'* prerogative over the city.

**Conclusion**

The Ramanandi move east towards the Gangetic basin unfolded gradually over the course of the eighteenth century and was invariably accompanied by the "re-discovery" and reclamation of various sacred sites connected to the mythology of Ram and Sita – sites such as Chitrakut, Mithila (Janakpur).[341] It is no accident that these sites – Chitrakut and Mithila - are central to the *rasik* imagination, for the eastward move from Rajasthan was largely spearheaded by the *rasik sampraday*, at least in the last and most successful phase in the late eighteenth century.[342] Of course, Ayodhya didn't need to be "re-discovered" in the same way that say, Janakpur did. However, the passage I have presented in this chapter would suggest that it did need to be invested with new meaning. In his commentary, the *Ānand laharī*, *mahant* Ramcharandas reveals the anxieties of the *rasik sampraday* at the crucial historical moment when the *sampraday* was staking its claim to Ayodhya. In the *Ānand laharī*, Ayodhya, in both its forms (eternal and temporal), is represented not just as a sacred space but a *rasik* space. *That* Ayodhya (Saket) is sacralized as highest heaven, realm of salvation and the goal and home of all *rasik* practitioners. *This* earthly Ayodhya is sacred not only as witness to Ram's *madhuryalila*, but also as a conduit to *that* heavenly Saket. Therefore, Ayodhya/Saket is the highest desideratum for *rasiks*, both in this world and the other. The spiritual/ascensional pilgrimage through a cosmic hierarchy not only echoes but also validates the historical/lateral move of the *rasik sampraday*. *Mahant* Ramcharandas's elaborately constructed section in the *Ānand lahirī* is really a powerful justification for the *rasik* presence in Ayodhya as the move to *yah* (this) Ayodhya is legitimized in its depiction as a move to *vah* (that) Ayodhya.

While the author of this work lavishes his considerable attention on this eternal realm, the Ramanandis were equally interested in the temporal Ayodhya as was made clear earlier in the discussion. For it was is in this very period, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that the sect began to take over the landscape of the city, establishing its key institutions and religious structures. These two moves were thus made simultaneously, the imagination of a transcendental Ayodhya and the reconfiguration of the temporal Ayodhya.

The purpose of this chapter was to consider one section of the *Ānand laharī* in light of its historical context – the *rasik sampraday* staking its claim to Ayodhya. The significance of the *Ānand laharī*, however, might lie in the fact that the

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[341] On the 're-discovery' of Janakpur, the alleged place of Sītā's birth see Richard Burghart, "The Discovery of an Object of Meditation: Sūr Kiśor and the Reappearance of Janakpur," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982,* edited by Moinka Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 53-63.

[342] As I have discussed above, the nāgā Ramanandis were the first to establish their major institutions in Ayodhya early in the eighteenth century.

claiming of Ayodhya as a *rasik* space is ultimately contingent on the claiming of the *Ramcaritmānas* as a *rasik* text, for it is of no small significance that this claim was made in a commentary on the *Ramcaritmānas*, a text that has long been considered the theological core of the Ramanandi *sampraday*. If Tulsidas's composition is indeed fundamental to Ramanandi theology, as the first commentary on the work, the *Ānand laharī,* composed in the early nineteenth century, is very late. In the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the *rasiks* produced several works of poetry and theology and there is little evidence that the *Ramcaritmānas* figured either in the literature or the religious practices of the *sampraday*. While Tulsidas and the *Ramcaritmānas* could not have been entirely unknown in Rajasthan in this period[343], has its impact on the Ramanandis, and in particular, the *rasik sampraday*, been projected backwards? That the composition of the first Ramanandi commentary on the *Ramcaritmānas* coincided with the shift of the *rasik sampraday* from its centers in Rajasthan to Ayodhya can be no accident.[344] Undoubtedly, the *Ramcaritmānas* played a significant role both in the expansion of the *rasik sampraday* into Ayodhya in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as its subsequent legitimization as the most significant Ram *bhakti* order in North India. The *Ānand lahirī* and other nineteenth century commentaries are crucial to furthering our understanding of the relationship between the *Ramcaritmānas* and the Ramanandi *sampraday*.

[343] One of the earliest references to Tulsidas's and his composition can be found in Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāla* (c. 1600). Nabhadas was associated with the Galta monastery in Rajasthan as discussed in Chapter 1.

[344] The connection between the *rasik sampraday's* move to Ayodhya and the *Ramcaritmānas* is also evident in the hagiographical work, the *Rasik praskāś bhaktamāl* (1839), authored by Jivaram Yugalpriya. A preliminary reading of this text shows that as the locus of the *rasik sampraday* shifts from Rajasthan to Ayodhya in the eighteenth century, invariably, the *rasik* devotees featured in the hagiography becomes associated with the activity of *Mānas* katha, or oral exposition of the *Ramcaritmānas*.

## Chapter 6
## Theology of *bhakti* in the *Ānand laharī*

In Chapter 5 I discussed the theology of sacred space, in particular, the sacralization of Ayodhya as a *rasik* space in the Ramanandi tradition. In this chapter, I will discuss the theology of *bhakti* that is explicated in the *Ānand laharī.* The presentation of the Ramanandi theology of *bhakti* in the *Ānand laharī* begins with an explanation of the relationship between Ram and Vishnu (Narayana). The verse in the *Rāmcaritmānas* that Ramcharandas explains the context of is an invocation:

> *nīla saroruha syāma taruna aruna bārija nayana /*
> *karau so mama uru dhāma sadā chīrasāgara sayana//* (1.3)
>
> May the Lord who sleeps on the ocean of milk, who is dark as a blue lotus, with eyes like fully blossomed red lotuses, make my heart his abode.

Now Ramcharandas:

> *śrī gosāīṃ tulsīdāsjū śrī rāmcandra ke upāsak haiṃ / kṣīr sāī śṛīmannārayaṇ ko kyoṃ kahā mere hṛday meṃ vās karai /*
> *tahāṃ yah tātparya hai/*
>
> *yah brahmāṇḍ kos jo hai/ tehi meṃ jo param puruṣ paramātmā jāko bhūmā puruṣ kahī/ so avidhyā vidyā jo dvai prakār kī māyā tehi te parai puruṣ haiṃ/*
> *so kaun/ śrī rāmcandra /*
>
> *so keval bhaktānugrahārth avatīrṇ bhaye/ prakti maṇḍal meṃ tinko carit aparampār hai/ śruti smṛti śeṣ śarada śiv brahmādik devtā siddh muni savko agam haiṃ/ śrīmadrāmcarit sampūrṇ jāniveko /tahāṃ kśīr sāgar jo bhagvān haiṃ so śrī rāmcarit nīkī prakār sampūraṇ paramparā pūrvak jānte haiṃ/*
>
> *kṣīr sāī jo bhagvān haiṃ so śṛī rāmcandrajū ke dvitīya vigrah haiṃ/ yah jo sansār hai māyā may haī so kārya rūp hai kṣīr sāī śrīmannārayaṇ kāraṇ rūp haiṃ/*
> *śrīmadrāmcandra kārya kāraṇ te pare haiṃ/*[345]

> Shri Goswami Tulsidas is a devotee of Ram. Why then does he ask the lord who sleeps on the ocean of milk, Shri Narayan to dwell in his heart? The meaning is this.
>
> In this universe, the highest being, the highest lord who is called the Lord of the earth, who is beyond the two types of illusions, knowledge and ignorance, is none other than Shri Ramcandra.

[345] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 7.

He incarnates himself solely for the sake of his devotees. His deeds in the world are matchless. The *shrutis*, the *smritis*, Sesha, Sharada, Shiva Bhrahma and other gods, wise men and sages, all find it hard to know and comprehend fully the deeds of Ram. The lord asleep on the ocean of milk knows these deeds of Ram fully and according to tradition.
The lord asleep on the ocean of milk is but the second form of Shri Ram. This world is full of illusion, maya and is the effect. The lord asleep on the ocean of milk, Shri Narayana is the cause.

Shri Ram is beyond cause and effect.

Thus, Ramcharandas puts to rest any question of Ram being a lesser deity than Narayana, or Vishnu. In his gloss on Tulsidas's verse, he explains that Ram is the supreme deity, the lord beyond cause and effect. His deeds on this earth (Ram *carit*) are so profound that not even Shiva or Brahma, nor the Vedas can know and understand them. They are only known to Narayana, who is but a form of Ram. This is why Tulsidas, who is about to commence narrating the deeds of Ram, invokes his blessings, by asking him dwell in his heart.

Further, Ramcharandas also tackles the question of *sagun* and *nirgun* forms of Ram, as well as Tulsidas's valorization of Ram's name as a mediating, if not a superior force.[346] Tulsidas's assertion in the in the *Bāl kāṇḍ* is his primary text:

*ubhaya agama juga sugama nāma teṃ / kaheūṃ nāmu baḍa brahma bibekū /*
(1.23.3a)

Though both (*nirgun* and *sagun* forms of Ram) are by themselves hard to reach, they are easily attained through the Name. I say, therefore, that the Name is greater than Brahman (*nirgun*) and Ram (*sagun*).

Ramcharandas is not too comfortable with this, he explains with the example of the sun and its rays:

*jaise ravi aru ravi ko samūh tej / tahāṃ ravi śabd aru ravi tej aru ravi kī mūrti ek hī hai/ aru bhinna bhī hai/ taise śrī rām svarūp parabrahm aur rāmrūp vyāpak brahm aru rām nām ek hī haiṃ kathan mātra bhinna hai tattva ek hī hai /*[347]

Take the sun and its entire light. The sun, and the light of the sun, and the form of the sun are all the same. They are also different. In the same way, Ram as *para brahma*, the ultimate lord, and Ram as *vyāpak brahma*, the all-pervading lord and Ram's name are all the same. The words are different but the essence is the same.

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[346] Tulsidas's views on *sagun* and *nirgun* forms of Ram and the Ram *nam* were addressed in Chapter 2.

[347] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 74.

Ramcharandas, as a rasik Ramanandi doesn't hold the Name to be higher than Ram's *nirgun* and *sagun* form. He softens Tulsidas's position by claiming equality for all three forms of Ram, *sagun*, *nirgun* and *nam*. Yet, his preference for the *sagun* form is apparent for he describes Shri Dasharath's son Ram as follows:

> *jāko ati lāvaṇya sundar svarūp caraṇ mukh ityādi prati aṅg aṅg meṃ paramhaṃs śuk sanakādi ityādi munīśvar rame haiṃ/*[348]
>
> It is Dasharath's son Ram, the one with extraordinarily beauty and charm in his form, feet and face, in whose every limb the great Shuka, Sanakadi and other sages are engrossed.

Furthermore, Ramcharandas reverses Tulsidas's assertion to claim that it is Ram's Name that is the more difficult to attain:[349]

> *rām nām nirūpan ati agam hai / jo maiṃ guranh karikai pāyo hai tame kiṃcit saṃgyā janāi diyo hai kāhe te ati gop hai pravīn upāsak jānahiṃge/ tāte bahut nahiṃ kaheuṃ/ aru nām nirūpan kisū ke kahive jogya nahiṃ hai ati apār hai maiṃ mati mand kā kahūṃ/*
>
> The awareness of Ram's name is very difficult. What I have understood is through my guru, who imparted some understanding because it is a great secret and only accomplished practitioners can know it. That is why I cannot explain it fully. Also, not everyone is fit to understand the secrets of Ram's name, as it is unique. What can I, of modest intellect, say about it?
>
> *pari jo śrī rām upāsak dhanurvāṇ ādi pañc saṃskār saṃjukt paramānanya hohiṃge tisko yah nām nirūpan kī param tattva bhāsaigī/ aru unhī ko phalībhūt hoigo jo satguranh ke āśray hoi man kram vacan te mān dūri karikai tav nām nirūpan prāpti hoigo/*
>
> But those who are Ram's devotees and who have undergone the five steps of initiation such as the bow and arrow rite, who have surrendered themselves completely to Ram, they can understand the supreme essence of Ram's name. Ram's name is only within reach of those who have taken refuge with a true guru and who, through words, deeds and thoughts, have abandoned all pride. Only then can the Name be understood.

In these passages Ramcharandas makes clear that the Name, which Tulsidas proclaimed as being the easiest means to Ram, is actually the most difficult form of devotion. He confesses that whatever little he knows about it has been taught to him by his guru. And as he does not have a complete

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[348] Ibid., 74.

[349] Ibid., 76-77.

understanding of this recondite knowledge, he cannot explain it in his commentary. This, of course, is a rhetorical protestation and is not to be taken literally. Ramcharandas is suggesting that such knowledge is too esoteric to be thus imparted. Moreover, he adds, that not everyone can receive such knowledge. To do so, one must have undergone the *pañcasaṃskār*, five-step initiation or purification rites that are particular to the *rasik* Ramanandi *sampraday*.

Moreover, for Ramcharandas, a Ram *bhakt*, or Ram devotee, was, by definition an initiate into the Ramanandi *sampraday*:

> *bhakt kahāi rām ke… jo guranh karikai pāyo hai paramesvar ko nām āyudh kaṇṭhī bhagavat saṃbandh nām aiso pañc saṃskār jukt paramesvar ke koi svarūp ko bhakt hoi tau vah prānī ko sarīr mahattīrth rup bhayo hai /*[350]
>
> Devotees of Ram are those who have found a guru and have received the supreme lord's name, weapons, garland, a new personal name relating to the lord. Those having been thus initiated with the five rites and who have chosen a form to which they devote themselves, their bodies themselves become tirthas or sacred places.

The rites of the five-step initiation process into the *rasik sampraday* share many common features with those of the other Vaishnava sects.[351] Although many of these rites are common across the various Vaishnava *sampradays*, each does make its own modification and there might be variations within a *sampraday* as well. Before the five rites are administered, the prospective initiate must find a guru who will guide him through the process and whose teaching will determine the course of his devotion.

The *rasik* rites are as follows. The first step is *mudrā saṃskār* or the rite of imparting the 'signs' of Ram bhakti. In the case of the *rasiks*, these consist of five signs: *dhanuṣ* or the bow, *bāṇ*, or the arrows, *nām* or the name (in the case of the *rasiks*, it is the joint name of the divine couple Sitaram), the *candrikā* or, the symbol of the discus and the *mudrikā*, or the symbol of the conch. During the rite of initiation, the initiate is holds the bow in his left hand, the arrows in his right hand, the name and the symbol of the conch are imprinted on his chest, and the symbol of the discus on his forehead. In this rite, the bow and arrow are symbols of Ram, the conch and discus of Sita and the *nam* a symbol of the joint entity or the *yugal svarup*.

The second rite is the *tilak* and this rite is very important to the *rasiks*. Bhagavati Prasad Singh claims that the *tilak* is as important to the *rasik* as vermillion powder is to the married Hindu woman![352] The *tilak* is the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra* or the perpendicular sign painted onto the forehead, usually in sandal paste. There are many variations that are possible, depending on the

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[350] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 80.

[351] Singh, *Rambhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 180-186.

[352] Ibid., 181.

lineage and many of these *tilaks* can be quite elaborate.[353] *Mahant* Ramchanrandas's tilak was yellow, with a red dot in the center as well as the sign of the discus (the *chandrika*) between the two lines. The most holy *tilak* is considered to be one drawn with the soil from Chitrakut.

The third rite is the *nām saṃskār*, in which the initiate is given a new name by his guru. After this rite, he loses all his worldly affiliations, and becomes part of Ram's family. The names given to new initiates might typically end with '*dās,*' or servant, hence, Ramcharandas. Some *rasiks* abhor this appellation and use *sharaṇ*, refuge or *maṇi*, jewel, or *sakhā*, friend.[354]

The fourth rite is the *mantra saṃskār* or the imparting of the Ram mantra. The mantra that the *rasiks* use is the *śrī rām ṣadākśar mantra*, or the six-syllabic Ram mantra - *rām rāmāya namaḥ*. This mantra is whispered into the right ear of the initiate by his guru during the process of initiation. This mantra is also known as the *mantrarāj*, the king among mantras, or the *bījamantra* or the seed mantra. The *rasiks* also include two other mantras, and hence this rite is also called the imparting of the *rahasyatraya* or the three secrets.[355] It is during this rite that the initiate is also given the mode in which he is to practice Ram devotion. There are nine modes in the *rasik* Ramanandi tradition. 1. *pitā-putra bhāv*, or the relationship between father and son, 2. *rakśya-rakṣak bhāv,* or the relationship between the protector and the protected, 3. *śeṣa-śeṣī bhāv*, or the relationship between the principal and the subsidiary, 4. *bhartā-bhārya bhāv*, or the relationship between husband and wife, 5. *jñeya-jñātra bhāv*, or the relationship between the Knower and the object of knowledge, 6. *svāmī-sevak bhāv*, or the relationship between master and servant, 7. *ādhār-ādheya bhāv*, or the relationship between the supporter and supported, 8. *ātma-śarīr bhāv*, or the relationship between the soul and the body and finally, 9. *bhoktā-bhogya bhāvī,* or the relationship between the enjoyer and enjoyed.[356]

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[353] For a general study of Vaishnava sectarian marks, see Alan Entwistle, *Vaiṣṇava Tilakas: Sectarian marks worn by worshippers of Viṣṇu*, Vrindavan: Vrindavan Research Institute, 2003.

[354] Hence, for example, Sitaram 'sharan' Bhagvan Prasad Rupkala. Also recall from Chapter 4 that in the early 1920s Bhagavad Das dropped the suffix "das" and became Bhagavad "acharya" in a political move to indicate the equal status of Ramanandis and Ramanujis.

[355] The other two mantras of the *rasik sampraday* are the *śaraṇāgati mantra*, or the mantra of refuge:

> *śrī rāmacandracaraṇau śaraṇaṃ prapadye*
> I take refuge at the feet of Shri Ram.

The third mantra is whispered into the initiate's ear in order to assure him that he has been accepted by Ram:

> *sakṛdevaprapannāya tavāsmīti ca yācate/*
> *abhaya sarvabhūtebhyo dadāmyetad vratam mama//*
> It is my vow to protect from all living creatures anyone that surrenders to me even once or seeks my protection saying, "I am yours."

[356] Singh, *Rām bhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 184. Singh unfortunately does not elaborate on what each mode entails. This list of nine modes in the *rasik* Ramanandi tradition follows the Shri Vaishnava list enumerated by Pillai Lokacharya – 1. *pitā-putra sambandha,* 2. *rakśya-rakṣak sambandha,* 3. *śeṣa-śeṣī sambandha*, 4. *bhartā-bhārya sambandha*, 5. *jñeya-jñātra sambandha*, 6. *sva-sevak sambandha*, 7. *ādhār-ādheya sambandha* 8. *śarīra-śarīrī sambandha*, 9. *bhoktā-bhogya sambandha*.

The last rite is the *mālā saṃskār* in which the guru garlands the initiate with the *kaṇṭhī* or garland made of Tulsi beads. In each of these rites described above, which have much in common with the rites of the other Vaishnava sects, the *rasiks* introduce the modification of including Sita, so that the initiation is made with devotion to the *yugal svarup*, Sita Ram. To undergo these five rites of initiation is clearly a serious undertaking, and therefore, Ramcharandas is making clear that the secret of Ram's name is only accessible to those Ram devotees who make this commitment. Tulsidas by contrast, considered the Name to be the easiest and highest form of devotion to Ram. For Ramcharandas, as a *rasik*, the easiest and most beautiful form of *bhakti* is the adoration of the *sagun* form of Ram.

Before moving on to discuss the specific details of the *sagun bhakti* that Ramcharandas describes, a few words must also be said about his position regarding Shaivism. Stressing the compatibility between devotion to Ram and devotion to Shiva, was a major feature of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Ramcharandas, in his nineteenth century commentary, does not seem to be too concerned with this aspect of Tulsidas's theology and does not devote too much attention to it. He does note in passing that:

> *hari bhagavat aur har bhāgavat kī kathā abhed hai /tehi kathā meṃ bhakti gyān sukarma tīnauṃ milike tahāṃ ektā hai /*[357]
>
> The stories of Hari the lord and Hara the servant of the Lord are not different. In this story there is a unity of devotion, knowledge and good actions.
>
> Further,
>
> *nām aprādh / śiv viṣṇu meṃ bhed karai / śiv viṣṇu meṃ bhed nahiṃ hai/*[358]
> The sin of name attaches to one who differentiates between Shiva and Vishnu. There is no difference between Shiva nd Vishnu.

In the first instance, the *katha* or story being referred to hear is the "Sati *moh*," or the illusion of Sati, which is narrated at length in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[359] Tulsidas devotes a significant portion of the *Bāl kāṇḍ* to this story. What is interesting here is that Hara, or Shiva is called a *Bhāgavata*, or a follower of the Lord Hari, but there is no reciprocity of devotion that Tulsidas takes care to

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[357] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fols. 26-27.

[358] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 87.

[359] *Rāmcaritmānas* 1. 50-103. This section describes how Sati is confused about how Ram, the supreme lord, can be rendered helpless by the loss of his wife. Even though Shiva explains to her that his actions on earth are for the benefit of his devotees, Sati decides to test Ram. Taking on Sita's form, she approaches Ram and Lakshman as they roam through forests searching for Sita. Ram and Lakshman are of course fully aware that she is in fact Sati. When she returns to Shiva, he refuses to accept her. This results in Sati giving up her body and being reborn as Parvati.

stress. However, Ramcharandas goes on to say that to differentiate between Shiva and Vishnu is a sin, *aprādh*, for there is no difference between the two. Shiva is also credited for propagating the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki and for being a great devotee of Ram *nam*. This, according to Ramcharandas, happened when Valmiki first took his composition to Shiva:

> *śrīmadrāmāyaṇ ek vālmik jī kīnhyo hai tav śiv ke pās le gaye / śivjū ko sunāvne lage tahāṃ yah khabri trailok meṃ hot bhayi ki śrīmadrāmāyaṇ kailās par hot hai tahāṃ….tīnahūṃ lok ke mahā mahān jan kailās ko āvte bhaye/ mahādev paramānand param harṣ ko prāpti bhaye / savke rāmākār vṛtti bhayi / tav savke yah ikṣā bhayi kī śrīmadrāmāyaṇ hamhūṃ ko milai /tav mahādev se sav hī prārthnā kīn / tav mahādev prasanna samet satkoti rāmāyaṇ kinha /* [360]
>
> The Ramayan was composed by Valmiki who took it to Shiva. This news spread across the three worlds that the Ramayan was being told on Kailash. Then all the great people of the three worlds all came to Kailash. (Listening to the tale) Shiva experienced great bliss and great happiness. The entire audience took on the form of Shri Ram. Then everyone desired that they too should have the Ramayana, so they petitioned Shiva. With great pleasure Shiva made one hundred crore Ramayanas.

In this passage Ramcharandas gives Shiva the credit for creating the numerous Ramayanas for the sake of all the creatures of the world. He then distributed these Ramayanas among the inhabitants of the heavens, the earth and the netherworld. When he had finished there were only the two syllables of Ram's name left over - Ra and Ma. These asked for himself and stored in his heart (*vākī rahi gayo dui akṣar rāmnām so māhādev savte māgi līnha hṛday meṃ vicāri kai*). Thus Ramcharandas echoes Tulsidas's assertion that Shiva is Ram's greatest devotee.

Further on however, he seems to adopt a disparaging tone toward the philosophy of *advaita*, referring to its followers with the well-known insult "*māyāvādī*," or the illusionists.[361] On the other hand, Ramcharandas relies on several Shaiva and even *advaita* texts in his commentary, often quoting from the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Śaiva tantra* and other such texts as authoritative proof for his exegetical comments on the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

Ramcharandas also makes references to various sects and philosophical positions throughout his commentary. In the commentary on the "sati *moh*" section, where Shiva is explaining to Sati the essential oneness of Ram in his *nirgun* and *sagun* forms, Ramcharandas adds:

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[360] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 80.

[361] Ibid., fol. 44.

*yah parkaran mahādev bhinn bhinn karikai kahā aru advait dvait viśiṣṭhādvait sav kahā / mahādev kī param vicitra vānī sunikai umā paramānand ko prāpti bhayi/*[362]

Shiva explained this in various ways. He also explained *advaita*, *dvaita* and *vishishtadvaita* to her. Hearing Shiva's wonderful speech, Uma attained great bliss.

Further on,

*dvādaśākṣar vāsudev mantra…sav mat ko bodh karai hai / advaita mat viśiṣṭādvaita mat dvaita mat dvaitādvaita mat /* [363]

The twelve-syllable Vasudev mantra enlightens all the schools. *Advait*, *vishishtadvait*, *dvait* and *dvaitadvait*.

In both the verses quoted above, Ramcharandas chooses to identify the major philosphical schools of *advaita*, *vishishadvaita* and so on, but does not identify the *sampradays* by name. We have to assume that he is referring to Vaishnava *sampradays* as the twelve-syllable Vasudev mantra (*oṃ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*) would only be appropriate to them. Whether or not he sees *advaita* as also being a Vaishnava school of philosophy is unclear. Unfortunately, he does not refer to any other sectarian groups by name.

Though Ramcharandas meticulously lists the various regions of Bharat-khand (Bangla *des* and so on), he is not equally methodical when it comes to the identification of the various religious and sectarian groups. Of course, the groups most relevant to his commentary are the Vaishnavas, and he does use that term of designation (*vaishnav*) most frequently throughout his commentary. In a few rare instances Vaishnav is interchangeable with the word "*harijan*." Ramcharandas also identifies the *rasiks*, not as a *sampraday*, but in speaking of specific devotees. For example, he speaks of Hanuman as being the "*param rasik*," or the foremost *rasik* devotee.[364] In addition, he too, like Tulsidas, seems to be situated within a *smarta* Vaishnava context, for he makes reference to *panchayatan* and *panchang puja* on more than one occasion. For instance, while describing the duties of a householder, he says:

*gṛhast ko karma /…..aru pancadevtā kī pūjan kare viṣnu śiv devī gaṇeś sūrya pūjikai viṣnu te muktimānge /*[365]

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[362] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 234.

[363] Ibid., 238.

[364] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 3. Hanuman in the *rasik sampraday* is considered to be one of the *sakhis* of Sita. In his *sakhi* form, his name is Charushila. See van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 162.

[365] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 84.

A householder must (among various other duties) worship the five deities, Vishnu, Shiva, Devi, Ganesh and Surya. But he must ask Vishnu alone for *moksha*.

So while the *panchayatan* model is to be maintained, one's real goal of *moksha* is in the hands of Vishnu alone, hence, it to him that devotion is to be directed. At one point he also speaks of *mlecchas* as opposed to Vaishnavs.[366] The most frequent term, of course, is *bhakt* (devotee).

**The form of *bhakti* in the *Ānand laharī***

Ramcharandas's approach to *bhakti* is complex and is contained throughout the text of the commentary. In the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsidas stressed the superiority of the path of *bhakti* over the paths of action, *karma* and knowledge, *jnan*. He then took a cocilatory position vis-a-via *nirgun* and *sagun bhakti*, offering the Ram *nam* as the ideal mediator. Ramcharandas, however, has the complicated task of revealing the "hidden" *rasik* orientation of the *Rāmcaritmānas* by incorporating its theology into the text. He begins by situating himself within the standard *varnashrama dharma* model:

*kali kāl varan āśram dharm / varan / brāhman kṣatrī vaiśya sūdra /*
*brāhmaṇ ko karma dharma /*
*sam dṛṣti / puni dam / puni sauc trikāl snān ādik / puni sānti nindā stuti sahi jānā / puni gyān /*[367]

In the age of kali varnashrama dharma is as follows. The *Varnas* are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras.
The duties and rites of the Brahmans include fairness, calmness, also ablutions, bathing three times a day and so on. Also to bear calmly any harsh words, and knowledge.

*puni kṣatri ke karma / khaḍag dān tap meṃ sūr / tejsī / sav koi dare / dhīrajmān /*
*sav prakār te sāvdhān / śāstra vettā śāstra vidhi nīti karnā /*
*vaiśya dharma / kṛṣī vānijya gau ko sevan /*
*sūdra tīnihū varaṇ kī seva kare/* [368]

The duty of *Kshatriyas* is to be skilled at sword fighting, giving alms, and sacrificing. They should possess grandeur and be feared by everyone, brave, always prepared, to know the *shastras* and dispense justice according to the *shastras*.
The duty of *Vaishyas* is cultivate the land and to serve the cow.

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[366] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 27.

[367] Ibid., 84.

[368] Ibd., 84.

The duty of *Shudras* is to serve the first three *varnas*.

*ete sarva karma dharma jog vairāgya gyān bhakti in savan ko vivek kalijug meṃ nahiṃ vhai sakai hai/*[369] (85)

All these rites, duties, *yoga*, dispassion, knowledge, and devotion cannot be attained in this age of *kali*.

Thus, he launches his major theological position by stating the inadequacy of the *varanashrama dharma* model for the age of kali. Not only are *karma* and *dharma* inadequate, so are the traditional means of attaining *moksha*, *yoga*, *vairagya*, *jnana* and even *bhakti*. Ramcharandas then goes on to describe the various modes of *bhakti* that may be practiced.

*bhakti ke nirūpan vividh prakār ke haiṃ/ bhakti kahi seva/*
*parā bhakti vāre / prem lakṣana vāre / nāmākār vṛtti vāre / mānsī vāre /*
*dhyān karne vāre / navdhā bhakti vāre / ityādik bhakt jan haiṃ /*[370]

There are different ways of enumerating bhakti. *bhakti* is service. There are those who practice para bhakti, prem lakshana bhakti, those who worship the name and form, those tho use their intellect, those who meditate, navadha bhakti. All these are devotees.

While Ramcharandas is careful not to disparage any form devotion, according all practitioners the designation of devotee or '*bhakta*,' this passage also lays the foundation for his particular type of *bhakti* that he offers as the only solution to the ills of the *kali* age:

*bhakti navadhā premāparāmay śrī rāmāyaṇ hai / keval bhakti ras rūp rāmāyaṇ hai / puni ras do prakār ke haiṃ/ ek komal / ek kaṭhor / jaise pakk phal sahatūt sev ityādi / bāl juvā vṛddh sabke khāve meṃ āve haiṃ aru nāriyal kīgarī kaṭhor rasmai hai / jāko dānt hoi so cavai /*

*bhakti tīni prakār hai / ek karm miśrā bhakti / ek gyān miśrā bhakti / ek kevalbhakti premāparā / karm miśrā gyān miśrā bhakti kaṭhor hai savte na sadhai / aru keval bhakti savko adhikār hai / keval rām nām kehnā rām āśray rahnā śrīmadrāmāyaṇ vicār arha nisi karnā avar sarva tyāg so bhakti savko sulabh hai/*[371]

The *Rāmāyaṇ* is full *navadha* and *premapara bhakti*. Only the *Rāmāyaṇ* contains the essence of *bhakti*. There are two kinds of essence – one is gentle and one is harsh. Just as ripe fruit ssuch as blackberries, apples and

[369] Ibid., fol. 85.

[370] Ibid., fol. 112.

[371] Ibid., fol. 47.

so on can be eaten by children, youth and the aged and the coconut cannot as it has a harsh experior. Only those with teeth can chew.

*Bhakti* is of three types. One in *bhakti* mixed with action. One is *bhakti* mixed with knowledge and the last is only premapara bhakti. *Bhakti* mixed with action and knowledge is harsh, it cannot be practiced byeveryone. (*Premapara*) *bhakti* on the other hand is open to all. Just saying Ram's name, seeking his protection and contemplating on the Rāmāyaṇ having abandoned all else is easy for all.

Here Ramcharandas distinguishes between *bhakti* mixed with action and knowledge and *premapara bhakti*. The former, according to him is as harsh as the shell of a coconut and therefore, difficult to consume or practice. He compares *premapara bhakti* to fruit like apples and blackberries, easy to chew for people of all ages. Before discussing *premapara bhakti*, Ramcharandas also describes *prem lakshana bhakti*, which he is careful to distinguish from both *navadha* and *premapara bhakti*. He does so by enumerating the characteristic behavior of devotees engaged in such a mode.

*jo prem lakṣaṇā bhakti hai so varanve jogya nahīṃ hai / pari jab sant kahne lage tab teṃ gadgad vānī vhai jātī hai/ romānc ṭhāṭhe hote haiṃ/ kabhī vaiṭhī jāte haiṃ/ kabhī khaḍe vhai jāte haiṃ / kabhī nirlajya vhai ke nāci uṭhte haiṃ / kabhī stambha vhai ke kampāyamān hote haiṃ/ kabhi roi dete haiṃ / kabhi ṭhaṭhāike hasi dete haiṃ/ kabhi prem bhare gāi uṭhte haiṃ /kabhi svarūpākār vṛtti parā bhakti ko prāpti vhaike apanpau se mast bhūli jāte haiṃ / puni svāmī koi ikṣā te caitanya vhai jāte haiṃ / ityādi anek dasā hotī hai/tāke prem lakṣaṇā bhakt kahī/* [372]

*Prem lakshana bhakti* is not worthy of description. As the saints speak speech becomes incoherent and one's hair stands on edge. Sometimes they (who are *prem lakshana* devotees) stand, sometimes they sit, sometimes without any shame they start dancing, sometimes they are frozen and start to tremble, sometimes they cry, sometimes they laugh suddenly, sometimes they break out in loving song, sometimes they become one with the form of god and forget themselves. They know immediately if the lord wants anything. These and many more are the states of *prem lakshana bhakti*.

It is not entirely clear what position Ramcharandas takes towards such behavior or how he distinguishes between this mode and *premapara bhakti*, for many of the behaviors described here are also common to *premapara*. However, Prem lakshana *bhakti* does seem to be accorded a lower status than both *navadha* and *premapara bhakti*, which are the two most important modes to Ramcharandas.

*puni bhakti/*
*śravan kīrtan / smaran / pādsevan / arcan / vandanā dāsya sakhya/ ātma samarpan/*

[372] *Ānand laharī, Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 107.

*e navadha bhakti aru premāparā e dui sutantra bhakti haiṃ sādhan rahit haiṃ/ keval rām kṛpā rūp haiṃ /*[373]

*premāparā bhakti*
*śrī rāmcandra kī seva meṃ haiṃ aru prem karikai aru seva meṃ apar anga ke bhūṣan paṭ ityādik apar ang meṃ pahirāvte haiṃ / avre bhojan cāhī avre bhojandet haiṃ /so premāparā bhakti/*

*jahāṃ sav bhakti meṃ śrī rāmcandra prasanna haiṃ pari premāparā meṃ viseṣ prasanna haiṃ/*[374]

*Bhakti* is hearing, remembering, serving the feet, worshipping the image, prayer, servitude, friendship and total self-surrender.
This is navadha Bhakti, this and *premapara bhakti* are independent and without means. They can only be attained through Ram's grace.

*Premapara bhakti* practitioners serve Shri Ram. Being in love with him, they adorn him with jewels and clothing. If he wants more food, they bring him more food. This is *premapara bhakti*.

Shri Ram is pleased by all forms of *bhakti*, but he is especially pleased with *premapara bhakti*.

Ramchanrandas thus follows that standardized *Bhāgavata purāṇa* enumeration of *navadha bhakti*. In Chapter 2 we saw that Tulsidas modified this list in the *Rāmcaritmānas. Premapara bhakti* is considered to be the tenth mode, making the total ten. This is generally known as *dasadhā bhakti* or ten stages of *bhakti* among Vaishnavas, though Ramcharandas does not refer to it as such.[375]

The practice of *premapara bhakti* is closely then tied to the theory of *rasa*. Ramcharandas prepares the groundwork in the following passage:

*navras śrīrāmjū te utpatti haiṃ/*
*śṛṅgār / janakpur meṃ/*
*hāsya / sūpanikhāko nāk kāṭte/*
*karuṇā / jav śrī lakṣmaṇjū ke sakti lagi vibhīṣaṇ par jav sakti calī /*
*raudra / khar dūṣan kī juddha meṃ /*
*adbhut / jav kāk bhuṣuṇḍi ko dikhāye haiṃ / aru kauśalya ko dikhāye haiṃ/*
*vaibhatsa / jav nāg phās meṃ sva ikṣit bandhe/*
*bhayānak / jav set bāndhe rāvaṇ ko bhay bhayī/*
*vīr / rāvan ke sangrām meṃ/*

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[373] Ibid., fol. 85.

[374] Ibid., fol. 127.

[375] *Dashadha bhakti* is explained in greater detail by Shivlal Pathak in his commentary, the *Mānas mayaṅk*. I will discuss this in Chapter 7.

*puni sānt / jav rājyābhiṣek bhayo/*[376]

The nine *rasas* are created by Ram. *Shringar*, the essence of love, was generated in Janakpur.[377] *Hasya*, the essence of laughter, when he severed Shurpanakha's nose. *Karuna*, the essence of compassion, was gernerated when Lakshman and Vibhishan were wounded during battle. *Raudra*, the essence of fury, during Ram's battle with Khara and Dushana. *Adbhut*, the essence of wonder, when Ram revealed his cosmic form to Kak Bhushundi and Kaushalya. *Vaibhatsa*, the essence of disgust, when Ram allowed himself to be ensnared by the Naga missile. *Bhayanak*, the essence of horror, was generated in Ravana when Ram constructed the bridge to Lanka. *Vir*, the essence of heroism, in the battle with Ravana. Finally, *shanta*, the essence of peace, was generated during his consecration as king.

Thus all nine *rasas* have their origin in the deeds of Ram. These *rasas* form the basis for the practice of Ram devotion in the *rasik* tradition. Ramcharandas's commentary then goes on to illustrate how these *rasas* are employed as devotional attitudes toward Ram. This explanation occurs in the commentary on the section of the *Bal kāṇḍ* that describes the bow-breaking ceremony in Mithila. Tulsidas's text is as follows:

*rājkuvaṃr tehi avasara āye / manahuṃ manoharatā tana chāye/*
*guna sāgara nāgara bara bīra / sundara syāmala gaura sarīrā//*
*rāja samāja birājata rūre / uḍagana mahuṃ janu juga bidhu pūre/*
*jinha keṃ rahī bhāvanā jaisī / prabhu mūrati tinha dekhī taisī//*
(1.241.1-2)

The princes arrived there, the very personifications of beauty, oceans of good qualities, cultured and the best among the brave, they were beautiful in form, one dark and one fair. In the gathering of princes, they shone bright like two full moon among a constellation of stars. Each then beheld the Lord according to his own perception.

These verses in the *Rāmcaritmānas* present the ideal base from which Ramcharandas can makes his most crucial intervention into Tulsidas's text in order to uncover its "hidden" *rasik* orientation. Tulsidas himself claims that each person in the assembly of kings beholds Ram according to his or her perception. Ramcharandas uses this very claim in order to show how each person does so in terms of the theology of *rasas* particular to the *rasik* tradition.[378]

*kaise dou bhāī haiṃ param divya gunan aru nāgar kahī śreṣṭ sarvopar pravīn haiṃ aru param bal param vīrtā tinh sabke sāgar haiṃ / puni kaise haiṃ ati*

[376] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fol. 110.

[377] Presumably during Ram's meeting with Sita.

[378] *Ānand laharī*, *Bāl kāṇḍ*, fols. 341-355.

*sundar syām gaur sarīr haiṃ/ rājan ke samāj meṃ dou kuṃvar kaise virājte haiṃ/ janu anekanh uḍugan ke madhya meṃ dui vidhu nirdoṣ nirmal pūrṇ virājte haiṃ/ jete sarva maṇḍali ke me rahe rājā ityādik/ aru sav pur vāsī te sav milikai śrī raghunāth jī ko dekhte haiṃ/ jinke jas bhāvna rahī tinko taise ras rūp mūrti dekhāvte bhaye/*

The two brothers are divine, and highly skilled and are the oceans of strength and heroism. They are exceedingly beautiful with dark and fair skin. The two brothers in the assembly of kings are like two flawless, beautiful and full moons in the midst of a constellation of stars. The assembly consists of all the kings of the universe and all the inhabitants of the city. They all gaze upon the Lord of the Raghus. And he displayed his form according to their mode of devotion to him.

Ramcharandas then goes on to say that the kings of the assembly perceive Ram as the embodiment of *Vir rasa*, the essence of heroism. The *sthāyi bhāv*, or the foundational emotion associated with this essence is *harṣ*, joy in the knowledge of attaining the Lord. The *kuṭil*, or wicked kings in the assembly perceive Ram as the essence of terror (*bhayanak rasa*). Wickedness is described as those kings who are crooked in their actions, words and thoughts and whose actions diverge from the *shastras*. The *sthayi bhav* for this mode of perception is *bhīti*, fear. The kings in the assembly who are actually demons in disguise perceive Ram as the essence of *raudra*, or fury. His every limb is frightful to them. The *sthayi bhav* of this mode is *krodh*, or anger.

The male inhabitants of the city perceive Ram as the essence of *sakhya*, or friendship. The *sthayi bhav* of this essence is bliss. The female inhabitants of Janakpur perceive Ram as the essence of love, and this is the most significant mode of perception:

*janakpur kī nārī je haiṃ te harṣi kai lajja nivāran kari kai nij nij ruci anurūp dou bhāyin ko viloktī haiṃ/ janu śṛṅgār ras param anūp mūrti kahi mūrtimān vhaikai sohat haiṃ/ tahāṃ janakpur kī nārī meṃ tīni bhed haiṃ / mugdhā madhyā prauḍhā e tīhihūṃ nij nij ruci dekhtī haiṃ / tahāṃ agyāt gyāt mugdhā śṛṅgār kī mūrti dekhtī haiṃ keval cakṣu saṃbhog ke sukh ko prāpti haiṃ / teyi ko sthāyi ānand/ puni madhya je haiṃ te śrī raghunāthjī ko dekhtī haiṃ janu param śṛṅgār kī mūrti / param śṛṅgār ko sthāyi rati aru paraspar saṃbhog kī cāhna/ puni prauḍhā je haiṃ te śrī raghunāthjī param anūp mūrti ko dekhtī haiṃ jahaṃ śṛṅgārhūṃ kī upma nahīm dai jāi/ tahāṃ man saṃbhog pradhān hai/ aru prīti sthāyi bhāv hai/*

The women of Janakpur with great joy and with shyness perceive the two brothers according to their preference. They appear to them as the personification of the essence of love. There are three kinds of women in Janakpur. The inexperienced (in love), the partly experienced and the fully experienced woman. The inexperienced women perceive Ram as the essence of love and only acquire the joy of beholding him with their eyes. The *sthayi bhav* is joy. The partly experienced women behold Ram the as the epitome of love's embodiment. They desire perpetual union with him

and the *sthayi bhav* is desire. The experienced women behold a unique form of Ram, which cannot be described. They desire mental union with Ram and the *sthayi bhav* is love.

Ramcharandas then continues to explain that the wise men in the assembly perceive Ram as the essence of wonder, *adbhuta rasa*. They also perceive his *virāṭ rūp*, or cosmic form. This is the same form that Ram reveals to Kak Bhushundi and to Kaushalya in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[379] The relatives of king Janak consider Ram to be their son-in-law and perceive him with a mixture of Vatsalya and *sakhya*, the essence of parental and friendly love. The *sthayi bhav* is *vilās*, or liveliness and joy. The women of king Janak's family perceive Ram through the essence of *Vatsalya*, the *sthayi bhav* of which is nurture. The yogis of the assembly perceive Ram as the essence of peace, *shanta rasa*. The *sthayi bhav* for this mode is *jnan*, knowledge and *brahmānand*, bliss in the knowledge of Brahman. Hari *bhaktas* in the assembly perceive both Ram and Lakshman as through the mode of *dasya rasa*, or servitude.

Ramcharandas then dwells at some length on the Sita's perception of Ram:

*aru śrī raghunāthji ko jehi bhāvnā jānakī ji dekhtī haiṃ / so saneha such akathanīya hai / ihāṃ karuṇā ras rūp sūcit hota hai / tehi ko sthāyi bhāv śuddha dayā / jehi bhāv te śrī janakī jī śrī rāmlāl ko dekhtī haiṃ so sad kavin ke hṛday meṃ anubhavit hota hai / pari kahi nahīṃ sakte/ kavani prakār kaheṃ / kāhe te kī rāmlāl vekheṃ jānakī jī ko śṛṅgār bhāv avalokan paraspar tahaṃ kavin ko karm man vānī agocar hai kavi kaise kaheṃ/*

The mode with which Sita perceives Ram cannot be described in words. Here the *karuna rasa* of compassion is indicated. The *sthayi bhav* of this emotion is pity. The mode through which Sita perceives Ram can only be experienced by the true poets, it cannot be described. How can they describe it? Sita sees Ram as the essence of love, this emotion is beyond actions, thoughts and words. So how can the poets describe it?

These extended descriptions of Ram's form through the various modes of *bhakti* in the audience is one of the central passages in the *Ānand laharī*. It contains the most sustained description of *rasik* theology. Through the perception of the entire assembly in Janakpur, Ramcharandas demonstrates how each *rasa* is employed in the relationship between Ram and the audience.

Furthermore, the attitude employed in the worship of Ram, the *rasa*, also determines the king of *mukti* that the devotee aspires to. This commentarial passage appears in the *Laṅkā kāṇḍ* following the defeat of Ravan. As all the heavenly deities appear to felicitate and praise Ram, Dasharath also appears. According to Tulsidas,

*tehi avasara dasaratha tahaṃ āye / tanaya biloki nayana jala chāye /*
*…*

[379] The perception of Ram as a child was discussed in Chapter 2.

*raghupati prathama prema anumānā / citayi pitahi dīnheu drḍha gyānā/*
*tāte umā mocha nahiṃ pāyo / dasaratha bheda bhagati mana lāyo//*
*sagunopāsaka mocha na lehīṃ / tinha kahuṃ rāma bhagati nija dehīṃ/*
*bāra bāra kari prabhuhi pranāmā / dasaratha haraṣi gaye suradhāmā//*
(6.1a, 3-4)

At that time, Dasharath arrived there and seeing his son, his eyes filled with tears…
The Lord of Raghus realized that his father bore him the same love as he had before and looking at his father, he imparted to him firm knowledge. O Uma, this is why Dasharath did not obtain *moksha*, as he had set his heart on *bhakti* while maintaining a separate identity. Devotees of the *sagun* form reject *moksha* for Ram grants them devotion to his own person. Bowing to the Lord over and over again, Dasharath joyfully returned to the abode of heaven.

The commentary of Ramcharandas proceeds from these lines that explain why Dasharath is still residing in heaven and has not obtained final release or *moksha.* While Tulsidas's explanation is that he is a devotee of the *sagun* form of Ram, Ramcharandas goes on to elaborate further.

*tahāṃ yeka bhed bhakti haiy ek abhed bhakti hai/ koi jñān ko abhed kahte haiṃ/…*
*sānt ras viṣeṃ āruṭh hoikai śrī rāmcandrajī se sāmānya aiśvarya pañca mukti cahte haiṃ / kintu śṛṅgār ras viṣeṃ āruṭh vhaikai śri rāmcandrajī se barābari ras bhāv bhogya cāhate haiṃ / so bhī pañcam mukti hai aru koi sakhya ras viṣeṃ āruṭh vhaikai sārūpya mukti hoikai barābari ras krīḍā bhogya hetu param pad śrīrām mokṣa cāhate haiṃ / yah tīnau abhed bhakti bhāv karikai param pad ko prāpti hote haiṃ / koi dāsya ras viṣe abhed mānte haiṃ śrī raghunāthji ke alaṃkār hoikai aṅg sevan bhāv karikai param pad cāhate haiṃ /*[380]

*Bhed bhakti* is one and *abhed bhakti* is one. Some say that the path of knowledge is *abhed,* non-different. Those who have adopted the mode of *shanta rasa* (literally, mounted on *shanta rasa)* desire the ordinary glorious five forms of mukti. However, those who adopt *shringar rasa* desire equality with Ram in terms of the enjoyment of *rasa*. This is also one of the five forms of *mukti*. And those who adopt *sakhya rasa* desire the *sarupya mukti* that entails equality in the enjoyment of erotic sports in the highest realm. These three "non-different" modes result in the attainment of the highest realm. Some believe that *dasya rasa* is also non-different, such devotees become the adornments of the Lord, adopting the mode of service to his person to attain the highest realm.

The crux of the issue for Ramcharandas seems to be the word *bhed* or difference. *Moksha* entails the merging of the devotee with the Lord and this can be obtained by adopting the mode of *shanta rasa*. But devotees adopting the

[380] *Ānand laharī*, *Laṅkā kāṇḍ*, fols. 141.

modes of *shringar*, *sakhya,* and *dasya* do not desire to merge with Ram. They seek to enjoy his exploits in the highest realm by witnessing or participating in his *lila*.

Further, Ramcharandas goes on to name the female companions or the *sakhis* of both Ram and Sita. There are six, eight and sixteen *sakhis* each for Ram and Sita. This list is repeated once during the wedding ceremony and again in the *Uttar kāṇḍ* during the ceremony of royal consecration. It is interesting to note that in both cases, Ramcharandas chooses to enumerate only the *sakhis* and not he male companions or *sakhas.* He maintains that:

> *śrī rāmcandra svāmī haiṃ savkai bhakti savkai mati nārī hī rūp hai /*[381]
> Shri Ramcandra is the Lord and everyone's devotion and everyone's attitude is in the female mode.

Thus far, Ramcharandas has explicated in detail the relevance of *rasas* to *rasik* Ram *bhakti*. Towards the end of the commentary, he takes a brief to remind us that *śrī rāmcandra līlā puruṣottam aru marjādā puruottam haiṃ*, that is, Ram is both the exemplar of playfulness as well as the exemplar of honor.

**Conclusion**

While Ramcharandas is careful to take up many of the main theological concerns in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, he is concentrates his attention on interpreting the text from within the *rasik* tradition. As the discussion above demonstrates, he does so most successfully by inscribing *rasik* practice into the main text. The key aspects of his commentary center on the explication of the theory of *rasas* in relation to Ram *bhakti*. Ram himself is considered the source of all *rasas*. Ramcharandas also demonstrates how such *bhakti* might function in practice, that is, what mode is to be adopted and what the soteriological result might be. Thus, the *Ānand laharī* commentary tries to bridge literature and praxis. *Rasik* theology and practice are esoteric and apart from Bhagawati Prasad Singh's work in the 1950s, there is very little scholarship, if any, on the theology and practices of the *rasik sampraday*. A study of *rasik* commentaries can do much to enhance our understanding of these issues.

[381] *Ānand laharī*, *Uttar kāṇḍ*, fols. 16-17.

## Chapter 7
## The Theology of the *Mānas mayaṅk*

The *Mānas mayaṅk* is the second work of exegesis that I consider in this dissertation. The author of this work, Pandit Shivlal Pathak was born in 1756 in Sonahula village the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh.[382] His mother passed away when he was barely a year old and his father re-married soon after. His early family life does not seem to have been happy, and according to his biographers, he ran away to Varanasi when his stepmother spoke to him harshly. He was only nine years old at the time. In Varanasi, he found a home with a sweet maker from Gorakhpur. Shivlal Pathak was academically inclined and began his studies with a teacher named Shivlochan Mishra Shastri, who is credited with introducing him to Ram *bhakti*. Under his tutelage, Shivlal Pathak is said to have become proficient in the study of the six schools of Indian philosophy and an accomplished grammarian. He was also renowned for his expositions on the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. An anonymous poet, calling himself only "pandit *pravīn*," composed a series of five verses known as the *Śivlāl pañcak*, containing the main details of his life. According to this:

*veda au paurāna kurāna jaina jinda jñāna*
*tulasi kṛt kāvya ke samān nahīṃ hāṃke haiṃ/*
*rāmsuprasāda dāsa santa pādapadma chāḍi*
*paṇḍit pravīna kaho nāye śīśa kāke haiṃ/*
*dhanya śivalāla śaktidharasoṃ mahān*
*jinamāni kāminī ko aur neka nahiṃ tāke haiṃ/*

Among all the books of faith, the Vedas, the Puranas, the Kuran and the Jain texts, he found no text as great as the poem of Tusidas.
He considered the great Ramprasad to be his guru and "Pandit Praveen" says that he (Shivlal Pathak) bowed to no one else.
Blessed is the great and mighty Shivlal, who never lifted his eyes to even glance at the proud or women.

Shivlal Pathak's "conversion" of the *Rāmcaritmānas* happened overnight, as it were. According to Anjaninandan Sharan, Pathak "*hindī ke śatru the,*" that is, Pathak was as enemy of Hindi.[383] Shivlal Pathak's introduction to the *Rāmcaritmānas* and to *rasik bhakti* came through the famous *rāmāyaṇī* (expounder of the *Rāmcaritmānas*) Paramhaṃs Ramprasad, who decided to learn Sanskrit so

[382] These details about Shivlal Pathak's life have been drawn from Anjaninandan Sharan, "Sharan, "Mānas ke prācīn ṭīkākār," in *Kalyāṇ: Mānasāṅk*, ed. Hanuman Prasad Poddar (Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh: Gita Press, 1938), 908-928, Indradev Narayan, "The life of the author of the *Mayaṅk*" in *Mānas mayaṅk* (Bankipur, Buhar: Khadgavilas Press, 1920): 23-30 as well as Singh, *Rām bhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 422-424 and Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 142-144. Shivlal Pathak also finds mention in Baldev Upadhyay, *Kāśī kī pāṇḍitya paramparā* (Varanasi: Vishvavidyalay Prakashan, 1983), 160-61. However, Upadhyay gives his dates as 1734-1800.

[383] Sharan, "Mānas ke prācīn ṭīkākār," 911.

that he could silence the critics of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, by showing that the text was in fact based on Sanskrit scriptures.[384] He came to Shivlal Pathak in order to learn Sanskrit. Once when Pathak went to Ramnagar on some business, Ramprasad took the opportunity to recite the *Rāmcaritmānas* to his fellow students. As luck would have it, bad weather has made it impossible for Shivlal Pathak to cross the Ganga that day, and he returned early. Hiding himself behind a door, he heard Ramprasad's nightlong recital and exposition. He was so moved and mesmerized, that teacher begged to exchange roles with his student. Ramprasad then initiated him with the six-syllable Ram mantra. On his guru's advice, Shivlal Pathak undertook one hundred and eight nine-day recitations of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, at the end of which the "hidden" meaning of the text was revealed to him. Bhagavati Prasad Singh adds that Shivlal Pathak was the only *rasik* Ramanandi to adopt the *guru putra* mode of devotion.[385]

He presents his lineage in the opening verses of his commentary:

*bipra kiśorī datta ko granthakāra hī dīnha/*
*alpa data paḍhi tāhi so citrakūta moṃ līnha//*
*rāmaprasādahiṃ so dai lahi tāte śiva lāla/*
*datta phanīśahiṃ jāni nija so dīnha sukha lāla//*
(1.12-13)

Tulsidas gave it (the *Rāmcaritmānas*) to the Brahmin Kishori Datt. From him, Alpa Datt received it in Chitrakut.
He then gave it to Ramprasad who in turn gave it to Shivlal.
Knowing Shesh (Phanish, being the Lord of Serpents) Datt to be his (disciple) Shivlal taught it to him.

Thus Shivlal Pathak puts himself in a lineage that traces itself back to Tulsidas himself. He also ensures the continuity of transmission by passing his knowledge to a disciple named Shesh Datt.

Shivlal Pathak is famous for his works of exegesis. Two of these were commentaries on *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Mānas mayaṅk* and the *Mānas abhiprāy dīpak* (n.d.). Yet another commentary on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Mānas bhāv prabhākar* (n.d.), is also attributed to him by some. Apart from these, he wrote a Sanskrit commentary on the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa,* titled *Bhāv prakāś ṭīkā* (n.d.)[386]. According to Lutgendorf, Pathak is said to have enjoyed the patronage of Raja Udit Narayan Singh of Varanasi as well as Raja Gopal Sharan Singh of Dumrao. Indradev Narayan in his introduction to the commentary tells us that, Shivlal Pathak also became closely connected with the Ramlila of Ramnagar, though it is not clear what role he played or what contribution he might have made to it.

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[384] He wanted to be able to read the "*nānā purāṇanigamāgama*" (*Rāmcaritmānas* 1.7 śloka) that Tulsidas refers to as the sources of his text.

[385] Singh, *Rāmbhaktī meṃ rasik sampradāy,* 426.

[386] Upadhyay, however, refers to this Sanskrit work as the *Sundarī ṭikā*. *Kāśī kī paṇḍitya paramparā*, 160.

The *Mānas mayaṅk* is a verse commentary. There are one thousand nine hundred and sixty eight verses, each of which is attached to a verse from the text of the *Ramcaritmānas*. Thus, not all the verses in the *Rāmcaritmānas* are commented upon. As Lutgendorf has observed, Pathak's commentary, like many others of this period, was probably an outline for oral exposition. Like the *Ānand laharī* of *mahant* Ramcharandas, the bulk of the commentary focuses on the *Bāl kāṇḍ* and in Pathak's case, also the *Uttar kāṇḍ*. This clearly because the *Bāl kāṇḍ* is the longest book in the *Rāmcaritmānas* and contains many of the key theological constructs that are taken up again in the *Uttar kāṇḍ*.

The verses of the *Mānas mayaṅk* are in Braj *bhasha* and have been described as *kūṭ*, or enigmatical. Pathak himself is said to have been able to expound on each verse from five different perspectives: *Vaidik* or scriptural; yogic or according to the tradition of Yoga; *tārkik* or according to logic; *tāttvik*, metaphysical; and *laukik*, worldly or practical.[387] Indradev Narayan, who wrote a sub-commentary on the *Mānas mayaṅk* titled *Candrikā ṭikā*, also comments on the difficulty of its ideas.[388]

The *Mānas mayaṇk* is certainly a complicated work of exegesis and its complexity stems partly from the verse format in which Shivlal Pathak chose to write. However, this very format also reveals that Pathak was a poet of some considerable talent. Moreover, the verse format is vital to what he is trying to accomplish. *Mahant* Ramcharandas's commentary was more traditional, in that it interpreted the *Rāmcaritmānas* in light of *rasik* theology. Shivlal Pathak, on the other hand, is completing the *Rāmcaritmānas* by composing the verses in Braj *bhasha* that will insert the "hidden" or "missing" meaning back into the text. Clearly Shivlal Pathak was highly accomplished and a man of many talents. Famous for his Sanskrit learning, particularly in epic literature and grammar, he also seems to have mastered *rasik* theology and Braj *bhasha* verse. The choice of Braj *bhashai* is also noteworthy. Braj *bhasha* was consecrated as the language of Krishna devotion in the sixteenth century and was also associates with the erotic poetry traditional to that mode of *bhakti*. For Pathak to insert Braj verses into the Avadhi *Rāmcaritmānas* is thus a clear indication of his theological position.

Pathak begins his commentary with the following invocation:

*jaya jaya jaya madhukañja jū rasikanha ānanda kanda/*
*būjhi laḍaiti rājabhū gahi bhuja hariye phanda//*
*jorī lāḍila lāḍilī raṅgi siṅgāra rasa gāta/*
*rasabasa mṛdu bāteṃ karata hauṃ kahi jaya jaya jāta //*
*suni musukāi bulāi ḍhiga yuga karunā bhei/*
*kahe candrikārasa racana jo mānasa rasa dei//*
*hauṃ birace tulasī race mānasa saṅkara sāra/*
*tūṃ raca paratama bodhakara candra mayūkhanha hāra//*
*lakhi māruti ruci takī sara rasa rasikanha cāha/*
*bīja deva guna śakti ḍhiga baiṭhi laḍaitī chāṃha//*

(1.1-5)

[387] Ibid., 143.

[388] Narayan, "Introduction" in *Mānas mayaṅk*, 7.

Victory to Ram, the moon-faced one, the source of delight to all rasiks.
Lord of the universe, with Sita's permission, please grasp my hand and release me from the net of this world.
The divine couple Ram and Sita, every limb drenched in the essence of love, speak sweetly to each other. Saying, "Victory" 'Victory" I approach.
Hearing me, full of compassion, they smiled and called me near and told me to compose the *Mayaṅk* (the essence of moonlight), which would describe the essence of the *Mānas*.
(Ram said) I created Tulsidas, who then fashioned the *Mānas*, the essence of Shiva. Now you fashion the *Mayaṅk*, a garland of moon rays, to reveal my essence.
Seeing Hanuman's eagerness, I took heart, for (to know) the essence of the *Mānas* is the desire of all *rasiks*. I take refuge in Sita (*bīja*), Ram (*dev)*, *guṇas* (Shiva, Kak Bhushundi and Yajnavalkya) and Hanuman (*śakti*) so that I may receive the protection of Sita.

In these verses of invocation, Shivlal Pathak lays out the some of the main theological positions he takes in his commentary. Firstly, it is clear that Ram and Sita are being addressed from within the *rasik* community – they are addressed as "*lāḍil lāḍilī*" or lover and beloved. Sita's primacy is also apparent. Ram has to ask Sita's permission to release him from the snares of the world and it is Sita's protection that Pathak seeks in the final verse. The *rasiks* often address themselves to Sita before Ram, sometimes as a conduit to Ram and sometimes independently. In Chapter 5 for instance, we saw that in *mahant* Ramcharandas's description of Saket, it is with Sita's permission that a devotee can take up service to the divine couple.[389] Moreover, the *Rāmcaritmānas* is described as being the essence of Shiva, reinforcing once more the importance of the *smārta* context that is common to Tulsidas, *mahant* Ramcharandas as well as Pandit Shivlal Pathak.

Finally, it is Ram and Sita who command Shivlal Pathak to compose a commentary that will reveal the true essence of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Thus, the lineage described above is taken a step further as Tulsidas is described as having been commissioned by Ram himself.

He then goes on to describe the varieties of "insights" that the three *gunas* (Shiva, Yajnavalskya and Kak bhushndi), have of Ram. It should be recalled from Chapter 2 that Shiva, Yajnavalkya and Kak bhushundi, are the three original and primary disseminators of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[390] Pathak attaches his commentary to a stanza that is in praise of the guru or preceptor.[391] Tulsidas, eulogizing his guru, says that the dust from the feet of the guru allows the disciple to see, or gain insight into the stories and deeds of Ram (the Ram *carit*), comparing these stories to precious jewels. Thus, according to Tulsidas, applying the dust from the guru's feet to one's eyes reveals the Ram *carit*:

[389] Ref. page.
[390] Chapter 2 page ref.
[391] *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.1.1-4

*jathā su anjana anji dṛga* ***sādhaka siddha sujāna****/*
*kautuka dekhata saila bana bhūtala bhūri nidhāna//*

(*Rāmcaritmānas* 1.1)

Just as by applying the wonderful eye-salve the *siddhāñjana,* strivers, adepts and the wise can easily see a host of mines (of precious jewels) on mountains, in forests and in the earth.

To this *doha*, Pathak adds the following verses as commentary:

*ṛśi* ***sādhaka*** *giri veda maha kautuka hāṃsa binoda /*
*rasika laḍaiti yaśa lakhe māṇika ānjita moda //*
*śambhu* ***siddha*** *jahāna bana kautuka vṛtti aneka /*
*nirguṇa yaśa maṇi anji dṛga gururaja bhaye viveka//*
*parama* ***sujāna*** *bhsuṇḍi jū bhūtala santa samāja/*
*yuta maṇi mānika sata carita lakhu yuta anjana sāja//*

(1.41-43)

Just as strivers see jewels on mountains through the power of dust, so too, Yajnavalkya (*rishi*) perceives the glories of Ram's (lover of Sita, *laḍaiti*) (*sagun*) deeds in the mountain-like Vedas.

Just as adepts see jewels on serpents in forests through the power of dust, so too, Shiva sees the glories of Ram's *nirgun* form.
Just as men of wisdom see both the jeweler and the jewels through the power of the dust, so too, the wise Bhushundi sees both the *sagun* and *nirgun* deeds of Ram.

Pathak's commentary proceeds from Tulsidas's verse, and expands on three key words in the main verse – *sadhak* or strivers, *siddha* or adepts, and *sujan* or wise men. He then uses these words are descriptors for the three narrators of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Yajnavalkya, Shiva and Kak bhushundi, in order to describe their vision of Ram, as *nirgun*, *sagun* or both. Thus, through his expansion of Tulsidas's original verse, Pathak states his position on *nirgun* and *sagun* forms of Ram, valorizing Kak bhushundi who has access to both. Also notice the ease with which Pathak uses words from Tulsidas's verse in all of three of his verses (*kautuk*, *anjana*, *drg* etc.*)*.

According to Indradev Narayan's sub-commentary, the *Candrikā tika*, Pathak's verses have further meaning in that they are to be understood as an illustration of the superiority of the path of *bhakti* over the paths of *karma* and *jnana*. Yajnavalkya as a striver follows the path of *karma* and hence has access to Ram's *sagun* form and deeds. Shiva, as an adept, follows the path of *jnana*, and hence, has access to Ram's *nirgun* form. Kak bhushundi, on the other hand, as a truly wise one, follows the path of *bhakti*, and thus, has access to both *sagun* and *nirgun* Ram.

Furthermore, *bhakti* is considered superior to *jnana* and this is described in conventional terms:

*mahā nirasa bādhaka mahā mahā kaṭhina patha jñāna/*
*mahā sarasa bādhaka nahiṃ sarala bhaktipatha māna//*
(7.324)

The path of knowledge is extremely arid and is beset with obstacles. The path of devotion is extremely lush and has not obstacles and is thus the easier path to follow.

Then again, the *Rāmcaritmānas* is described as containing the benefits of all three paths, *jnana, karma* and *bhakti*:

*damakati capalā sī parā kathā gulābī jñāna/*
*syāma ranga range karam kathā sāṃvare jāna/*
*kathā śambhu raghurāja kī bhū para sangama soha/*
*inha saṃyukta prayāga lasa ṛtaye sangama koha//*
(1.50-51)

*je yaha sara rasa nā cakhe take anata sukha āpu/*
*mṛga iva ūsara mo mare dīnhi kiśorī sāpu//*
(1.156)

*Para bhakti* shines bright white, and the *jnana* colors this tale red. Karma, being dark, colors this tale dark.
This tale of the Lord of Raghus composed by Shiva is a confluence of these (*bhakti, jnana* and *karma*) on earth. Hearing this tale brings benefits of all three paths, just as bathing at Prayag brings the benefits of bathing in the Ganga, Yamuna and the Saraswati. Those who do not believe this are subject to the confluence of (Ram's) anger.

Those who do not taste the essence of the lake (the *Mānas*) and seek happiness elsewhere, are cursed by Sita (*Kishori ji*) to perish, just as the like the deer fooled by the mirage dies in the desert.

Pathak thus, expands on the themes of *bhakti*, *jnan, and karma* comparing each of these paths to the three holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. Thus just as the *triveṇi sangam* at Prayag is the confluence of these three rivers, the *Rāmcaritmānas* is the confluence of all three paths to *moksha*. Moreover, he adds that fulfillment is to be found only in the *Rāmcaritmānas* and those who seek it elsewhere are condemned to perish.

He reflects further on the compatibility between *nirgun* and *sagun* forms of Ram:

*paratama nityakiśora kī ābhā nirguṇa jānu/*
*nirguṇa ābhā jñāna hai bhakti priyāsama mānu//*
*dou rāmarahasya hai yaha nāte tū dekha/*
*pratibimbī jana dukha hare bimbajñānī dukha pekha//*
(7.328-329)

The light of the supreme and ever-youthful Ram is his *nirgun* form. The light of his *nirguna* form is knowledge, but *bhakti* is the beloved of Ram. Both hold the secret to Ram and are hence related. But the devotees of the reflection destroy unhappiness whereas the devotees of the image see unhappiness.

However, between these two forms, *sagun*, is considered superior. In his commentary of the *Uttar kāṇḍ*, Pathak glosses the verses in which the sage Sanaka and his brothers praise Ram after his consecration as king. The *ardhali* from the *Rāmcaritmānas* is:

*jaya nirguna jaya jaya gunasāgar/ sukhamandira sundara ati nāgara/*
(7.34.2)

Hail to the Lord beyond all qualities. Glory! Glory! to the ocean of goodness, the abode of all happiness, the beautiful and accomplished (Ram).

Pathak's gloss is as follows:

*nirguṇa mo eka jaya karī saguṇe dui jaya sāra/*
*dharmahi dharmihi jāniheṃ jiha ke hiye bicāra//*
(7.209)

(They) hailed the *nirgun* (form of Ram) once and the *sagun* form twice, for those who have comprehension in their hearts know that *sagun* is the essence of *nirgun* and that *nirgun* is *dharma* and *sagun* is *dharmi*.

Thus, according to Pathak, the wise are aware that Ram's *nirgun* form is derived from the *sagun* form. The *sagun* is the essence of the *nirgun* form and therefore the former receives twice the praise from the wise sages. Further elaborating on the *nirgun* and *sagun* positions, Pathak adds:

*aguṇa saguṇa dounha ke acala upādhī nāma/*
*jaḍamata vāde tā lago dohā lakho svakāma//*
*jāpaka raghuvara bīca mo nāma dubhāṣī rāja/*
*jo jāpaka aguṇahiṃ cahe aguṇa jāpa kahi sāja//*
*rāma rūpa rasa bhakti ko raghuvara ko rasa nāma/*
*nāma prema rasa nāma ko taham mana ramu niḥkāma//*
(1.101-103)

*matta rāmarasa nāma ke sukha ke uṭhe taraṅga/*
*cāhata guṇa gāye na bana ukta arthabaṇa aṅga//*
*taje nāma kalyāna kasa kali śubha nāma adhīna/*
*je cāhata maṅgala anata te jaḍa dukhī malīna//*
(1.107-108)

The best means of obtaining either *nirgun* or *sagun* Ram is the Name. Do not listen to the words of the foolish naysayers, just turn to the *doha*.[392]

Between the one who recites and Ram, the Name is the best mediator. If the he desires the *nirgun* form, it helps him attain that form.
The essence of *bhakti* is the form of Ram and the essence of Ram's form is his name. The essence of the name is the love of the name, so O mind! Lose yourself in the name, without desire.

Even Ram himself cannot describe the greatness of the name, intoxicated as he is in the essence of the name, awash in waves of bliss. This is told in the *Vedanga* (Upanishads).
How can there be any good in the kali age if the name is abandoned? For all goodness is subject to Ram's name in the age of kali. Those fools who seek happiness elsewhere only find unhappiness.

In these verses Pathak echoes Tulsidas's valorization of the Ram *nam* as the conciliatory factor between the *nirgun* and *sagun* forms of Ram. The name is considered to be the ideal mediator, and the essence of Ram's *sagun* form. Merely repeating the name was considered all-powerful by Tulsidas. So much so that even saying the name in error, had the power to grant salvation.[393] Pathak, on the other hand, takes this one step further by urging the devotee to cultivate love for the name, and to lose himself in that love. He urges the devotee to become a *rasik* of the name like Ram. According to Pathak, Ram himself is lost in the essence of his own name, unable to describe its greatness. Thus, even Ram *nam* is to be approached through the lens of *rasik* appreciation.

This *rasik* vision is most clearly in evidence in the famous scene when Ram and Sita meet in the gardens of Janakpur. Pathak attaches his commentary to selected verses from two separate stanzas in the *Rāmcaritmānas*. The main text is:

*calī agra kari priya sagi soī / prīti purātana lakhe na koī/*
(1.229.4b)

Having a dear friend lead the way, she followed (to the garden), no one knew then that hers was an old love.

*kaṅkana kiṅkini nūpura dhuni suni / kahata lakhana sana rāma hṛdaya guni/*
(1.230.1a)

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[392] The *doha* being referred to is:
*rāma nāma manidīpa dharu jīha deharī dvāra/*
*tulasī bhītara bāharehuṃ jauṃ cāhasi ujiyāra//* (1.21)

O Tulsidas, if you desire light both inside and outside, place the luminous jewel that is the name of Ram on the tip your tongue, at the threshold of your mouth.

[393] Recall the verse from the *Kavitāvalī* in Chapter 2.

Hearing the tinkling of bangles, the bells around the waist and the anklets, Ram spoke his heart's secrets to Lakshman.

To these verses, Pathak now adds the following:
*saje sāja rasarāja ke ranga mahala mo rāja/*
*prīti purātana so bhayi binu dekhe dukha sāja//*
*taje sakhina ke candrarasa laje kanja maṇimanda/*
*alī rasīle mana lase kanja lalī dhuniphnda//*
*mile nikuñje canda dina sarada saṃvāre pūna/*
*sakhī hetu ahalādinī ahalādī sukha dūna//*
(1.249-251)

Dressed in the garb of *Shringar* Sita reigned in the pleasure palace (in Saket). Recalling that old love, she was sad to be away from her beloved. Ram abandoned all thought of Sita's friends, just as a bee does not approach an ornamented lotus. The bee that is Ram's mind was ensnared in the loveliness of the flower that is Sita.

*ghana ghamaṇḍa pallo latā cātaka lakhe marora/*
*manda manda baju bāta basa sune su nācai mora//*
*damakata pallo candra hai so lakhi sukhi cakora/*
*e saba rasa śṛṅgāra ko uddīpana barajora//*
*e samāja ke bīca hī dāmini lalī lkhāyi/*
*camaka candani tana mano karata prakāśa dekhayi//*
*priti lalī paricchinna hai prīti lāla parakāśa/*
(1.252-255)

With the help of the *ahladini sakhi*, Ram and Sita met in the bowers of Mithila during *Sharad purnima*, enhancing the joy around.
The *chatak* birds cry out, mistaking the swaying blossoms and creepers in the garden for dense monsoon clouds. Mistaking the soft whispering sounds they as they sway in the breeze for roar of monsoon clouds, the peacocks begin to dance.
The *chakora* birds delight in seeing the blossoms shine forth like a garland of moons. All this happens through the power of the essence of love.
In the midst of her friends Sita is shines like a bolt of lightning. Her form shining forth like moonlight illuminates everything (in the garden).
Sita's love (for Ram) remains hidden, but Ram's love (for Sita) is not.

In these verses, Pathak enlarges upon Tulsidas's famous garden scene and reveals its "hidden" rasik orientation. He does so first by reminding us of Saket, the sacred landscape of the *rasik* tradition in which Ram and Sita perform their divine *lila*, or play. The garden in Mithila is then transformed into an earthly reflection of that sacred landscape. The language of these verses also makes direct reference to the standard *rasik* metaphorical associations of the lover (Ram) as a bee and the beloved (Sita) as the lotus. Sita's friends also become *sakhis*, who facilitate the meeting between Ram and Sita. Thus, the entire encounter takes on the hue of a *rasik lila.*

These verses also bring to mind some of the most beautiful verses in the *Araṇya kāṇḍ* of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[394] While the verses of Tulsidas were in the context of Ram's separation from Sita and his consequent grief, Pathak's verses pick up on the same setting, language and vocabulary to describe Ram and Sita's first meeting. While the monsoon season is the traditional setting for verse in the *viraha rasa*, or the mode of separation, here, the same setting is used to describe a union and to anticipate a marriage.

Pathak also further discusses the sacred landscape of Saket, but not in the elaborate and sustained manner that *mahant* Ramcharandas did in the *Ānand laharī*.[395] However, the importance of Saket to his theology is evident. Describing Ram's supreme form in the *Uttar kāṇḍ*, Kak bhushundi describes him as being *prakṛti pār*, to which Pathak adds the following gloss:

*kahe prakṛti bidyā raghu jāke para sāketa/*
*tahaṃ basi ravivata krānti te saba ura kareṃ saceta//*
(7.265)

Kak bhsushundi described the knowledge of *prakti* (*maya*) beyond which lies Saket. There resides Ram, who with his sun-like rays illuminates and awakens all hearts.

Thus, while Tulsidas's description of "*prakṛti pār*" refers to Ram's *nirgun* form, Pathak places that same form in the sacred space of Saket. Moreover, glossing the difference between *jnana* and *bhakti*, Pathak says:

*deta tripāda vibhūti ko jñāna bhakti sāketa/*
*janma mṛtyu hari leta dou hai abheda yaha heta//*
(7.322)

The path of knowledge leads to the supreme being, whereas devotion leads to Saket. Both destroy birth and death and hence are non-different.

But,

*jo durlabha kaivalya hai so tripāda mo pāva/*
*ati durlabha kaivalya jo so sāketa ramāva//*
(7.443)

The perfect salvation that is hard to reach can be found in the supreme being, but the salvation that is most difficult to attain can be easily found in Saket.

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394 *ghana ghamaṇḍa nabha garajata ghorā / priyā hīna ḍarapata mana mora /*
*dāmini damaka raha na ghana māhīṃ / khala kai prīti jathā thira nāhīṃ //*
(4.14.1)
The proud and swollen clouds roar dreadfully in the sky, without my beloved my heart is afraid.
Lightning flashes and does not remain in the cloud, just as the love of a wicked person is not steady.

395 See chapter 5.

Hence, Saket is the place that where the highest form of salvation is to be found. Moreover, the text of the *Rāmcaritmānas* itself is the conduit to such salvation which is located in Saket, and which is described as Ram ras *bhog*.

*mānasa sāvara siddha hai hai kali agha yuta loga/*
*kahe sune dou nase rase rāma rasa bhoga//*
(1.89)

The *Rāmcaritmānas* is the great *sāvar* hymn that was fashioned (by Shiva) for the sake of the people of the kali age who are full of sin. Both listening to this tale and reciting it takes one beyond this one and the next and to the enjoyment of Ram's love.

*jo para nitya vibhūti mo aṣṭayāma rasa ḍhere/*
*jo līlā mānasa ihe pari jāniye savera//*
(7. 182)

The essence that is filled in the supreme being at every hour, that *lila* is this very *Mānas*, but this has to be recognized early.

Finally, Pathak also describes Ram *rajya*, Ram's reign on earth, as the ideal *rasik* space that mirrors the transcendental space of Saket. He does so by expanding on Tulsidas's verses on Ram *rajya*, which are a celebration of the social and moral order of *varnashrama dharma*.[396] According to Pathak, Ram *rajya* is one which:

*daṇḍa sūkhi ke daṇḍa meṃ sūkhe kara mo lāga/*
*rasika sukhī hoiheṃ sadā dukhī hohi hatabhāga//*
*śyāma ghaṭā unai rahe barṣe rasa sukha sāra/*
*sāja bāja rāge base naṭa sukha bheda apāra//*
*barhmadagdha dagdhe mane basa kari madhure boru/*
*hare mane hari sarbadā hari līnhe bara joru//*
(7.183-185)

(In Ram's kingdom) the rod of authority dries up and the only rods are those in the hands of the *yatis*. The *rasiks* are eternally happy and those who have abandoned Ram are eternally in distress.
Like a dark cloud, Ram is ever present, raining down a stream of the *rasa*, the essence of happiness. The garb, instruments and music of dancers, all bring great joy.
Hari wins over all hearts and thus even those whose minds are absorbed in the knowledge of *brahman* are become immersed forever in the sweet essence of love.

[396] Cite verses on Ram rajya from Tulsidas.

Thus the kingdom of Ram, which in the *Rāmcaritmānas* was a realm of social and moral order, is transformed by Pathak into a space for *rasiks*, in which Ram's *madhurya lila* or sweet play is celebrated with dancing and music. So much so that even the followers of the (arid) path *jnana* are overcome by the essence of Ram's love.

The description of Ram's *lila*, or deeds, is taken up by Pathak to distinguish between its two forms – *aiśvarya*, or glorious and *mādhurya*, or sweet.

> *madhu madhurata lāla kī raṅga bhūmi para sota/*
> *uchale dekhata lalana ko bhū dekhata le gota//*
> *dharī na rańcaka citta meṃ dharī bharī aiśvarya /*
> *karī suranha te dīnatā pari mādhurī garja //*
>
> (1.273)

> The charming sweetness of the dear one (Ram) flows on to this earth. (Sita's heart) leaps upon seeing him, just a fish does upon seeing land. Sita does not carry even a hint of the glorious (*aishwarya*) form of Ram in her heart. Taking pity on the gods, she venerates his sweet (*madhurya)* form.

Pathak adds this gloss in the *Bāl kāṇḍ* when Sita beholds Ram during the bow breaking ceremony in Mithila. The *madhurya* form of Ram includes his deeds as a child and thus makes the citizens of Ayodhya specially worthy of his grace:

> *kapirange aiśvarya mo yuddhādika mo dekhi/*
> *purajana range mādhurī śiśulīlā ko pekhi//*
>
> (7.156)

> The monkeys are immersed in his glory having seen (his deeds) during the war. The citizens of the city (of Ayodhya) are immersed in his sweetness, having witnessed his sports as a child.

Furthermore, after Ram's consecration as king, as his army of monkeys is about to leave, only one among them is singled out for special favor:

> *kahe sune dou uṭhe parihārī ko lena/*
> *nā lene aṅgada uṭhe prabhu rahi jāhu kahe na//*
> *rāma rūpa dhari saba cale tahāṃ madhura aiśvaryya/*
> *rāma kumāre mādhurī sou kathani basa laryya//*
> *kara chui chui saba ko dihe aṅgada ko sukha bheyi/*
> *ura lāye mo jāniye dṛḍha ye jo pitu deyi//*
>
> (7.161-163)

> After speaking and listening the two (Sugriv and Vibhishan) stood to take their leave. But Angad did not stand to take his leave and nor did Ram urge him to leave, but asked him stay.

All the (*vanar sena*, or monkey army) left bearing both Ram's glorious and sweet form in their hearts. But as Angad carried Ram's sweet form alone, he hesitated to leave.
Ram touched each and everyone with his hand, bidding them farewell, but he made Angad happy by clasping him to his heart and reassured him like a father would.

Thus, Angad is singled out for special treatment and receives Ram's love as a child would from his parent (*vatsalya bhav*). He is also close to Ram's heart unlike the other monkeys, who receive his blessings through his touch. Thus, while all modes of perceiving and worshipping Ram bring his blessings, the devotees that are most dear to him are those who are attached to his *madhurya lila.*

The devotion that is centered on his *madhurya lila* is elaborated upon at length. Firstly, of all forms of *bhakti, para bhakti* is dearest to Ram. Pathak uses the terms *bhakti* and its specific form *para bhakti* interchangeably.[397]

*parā bhakti rasa rasika ko rasa mandira te āni/*
*karī bhakta vaśa bhakti ko bhajana śiromaṇi māni//*
(1.82)

The connoisseur of *para bhakti*, Ram, is drawn to the devotee through the temple that is *bhakti rasa*. *Bhakti* is thus the highest form of worship.

Ram himself is thus described as a *rasik* or connoisseur of *para bhakti.* Pathak then goes on to elaborate upon *para bhakti*:

*sāra mahā rasarāja ko līlā sajjana hāra/*
*santa hiye hūṃ mo milī yuga naudhā hūṃ pāra//*
(1.134)

The deeds of Ram, who is essence of *Shringar*, the king of *rasas,* is the garland of the saints. It clears their hearts of malevolence. (Para and Prema Bhakti) is greater than *navadha*.

*bhaktimaṇi ho jo kahe so navadhā ko jānu/*
*puni cintāmaṇi jo kahe so dasadhā ko mānu//*
*jyoṃ cintāmaṇi ke mile saba maṇi ko sukha hota/*
*tyoṃ hī dasadhā ke mile navadhā sukha udyota//*
(7.444-445)

*Navadha* is considered to be the jewel of *bhakti,* but *dashadha* is the most fabulous gem, the *chintamani.* Just obtaining this gem brings the happiness of all the rest, obtaining *dashadha* automatically brings all the happiness of *navadha*.

[397] See *mayaṅk* verse 1.50 above.

*saba sukhakhānī ke hiye naudhā sukha k khānī/*
*laghu madhyama pūraṇa tahāṃ binu jāne baḍī hāni//*
*naudhā hī te hota hai bhāva bhakti udyota/*
*tāte dasadhā jāniye laghu madhyama para hota//*
*jaga bāte phīkī lage mīṭhī kathā rasāla/*
*tehi sunive ko kyoṃ cale jyoṃ ṣatapada madhu āla//*
*jyoṃ kabahūṃ antara pare tyoṃ mana ati akulāta/*
*parāmahātam ko lakhe prabhulīlā darasāta//*
*hṛdaybhūmi komala bhayī rījhaveli sarasāta/*
*avadhavāsa kī āsa jala tehite sīṃcī jāta//*
*rāma rasika pyāro lage ruce na bichurana neke/*
*tina kī avaguṇa nahiṃ lakhe guṇgahi gāna aneka//*
*jauṃ kaha ina ko milegī dasadhā bhakti anūpa/*
*tehi para carata vāra baru dhana mana aura sarūpa//*
(7.446-452)

*Navadha,* the source of all happiness is of three types, *laghu*, *madhyam* and *puran*. Not knowing these brings great harm.
From *navadha* comes the *bhakti* of emotions. This is *dashadha,* which is also of three types, *laghu*, *madhyam* and *para*.
When this *bhakti* is attained, all things in the world seem bland and tasteless. Only the flavorful tale (of Ram) is sweet and the devotee is eager to listen to it just as a bee is eager to sip nectar from a lotus.
If there is any delay n hearing the tale, the mind becomes anxious.
Understanding the greatness of *para bhakti*, the devotee gains access to the lord's *lila*.
When this *bhakti* is attained, the heart becomes tender and the creeper of happiness blossoms nourished as it is by the desire to reside in Avadh.
The *rasiks* are dear to Ram and he hates to be separated from them. He does not see their faults; only their good qualities are praised by him.
If someone is told that he can attain such *dashadha bhakti*, he is ready to dedicate his body mind and wealth to attain it.

Thus, *para bhakti* is described as the highest state of *dashadha bhakti*, which is higher than the standard nine forms of *navadha.*[398] Pathak does not discuss the various stages of *navadha*, preferring to dwell on the superiority of the tenth type of *bhakti* or *dashadha bhakti*. The first, *laghu* stage of *dashadha* is one in which the devotee is overcome by love for Ram. This love erases *navadha* and allows him to progress further through these stages. The attainment of this first stage is characterized by physical signs in the devotee such as a trembling voice and tearful eyes. In the second or *madhyam* stage, the devotee displays more outward signs of joy – he sings, dances, cries, laughs with no reason but being overcome with love. In the final and highest stage, or *para* stage, the devotee loses all

[398] The standard form of *navadha bhakti* as described in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* as well as tulsidas's variation on it was discussed in Chapter 2.

awareness of his own mind and body, of day and night and becomes totally silent. He is aware only of Ram, both in his mind and body. His body is alive in name only, for in the stage of *para bhakti*, the highest stage of the ten-step system of *dashadha*, the devotee is overcome by the desire to leave this world and to reside with Ram in Avadh (Saket).

**Conclusion**

While Pathak's commentary is clearly later than *mahant* Ramcharandas's, it is not clear, at least from the commentary, if he was familiar with the *Ānand laharī*. However, the *rasiks* in Ayodhya and Varanasi in the early part of the nineteenth century seem to have been connected in a close network. As a resident of Varanasi, it is likely that Pathak knew Ramgulam Dwivedi, who was a close friend of *mahant* Ramcharandas's. Shivlal Pathak's commentary on the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* was certainly known to *mahant* Ramcharandas, as he makes a brief reference to it in the *Ānand laharī*. These *rasiks* were also connected through their patrons, in particular, Vishvanath Singh of Rewa and Udit Narayan Singh of Ramnagar.

In terms of the theological content, the two commentaries are not very far apart. Shivlal Pathak's *Mānas mayaṅk* takes up many of the themes pursued by *mahant* Ramchanrandas's *Ānand laharī*. While the traditional paths of *jnana* and *karma* are recognized, it is clear that *bhakti* is the highest and most favored path in the *rasik* tradition of devotion to Ram. While Pathak also echoes Tulsidas on the compatibility between *nirgun* and *sagun* forms of Ram, his commentary is entirely in the *rasik* mode and casts even *nirgun bhakti* and the Ram *nam* within its theology. Pathak also dwells on the specific mode of *rasik bhakti* that goes beyond the traditional system of *navadha.* He also celebrates the *madhurya* form of Ram and underscores the importance of Saket to *rasik* theology.

Thus, while Pathak's commentary is not unlike Ramcharandas's work in that both interpret the *Rāmcaritmānas* in light of *rasik* theology, its originality lies in the addition of verses that "fill the gaps" that the *rasiks* perceive in the text. Pathak's commentary not only provides exegesis in verse format, but also adds original compositions to the main text.

## Conclusion

If the sixteenth century was the moment of genesis for the two principal facets of Ram *bhakti*, the devotional text, the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the devotional community, the *rasik* Ramanandi sect, this dissertation has identified and focused on the early nineteenth century as the next crucial "moment" that witnessed the union between text and sect. I have suggested that this "moment of union" is to be located in the shifting historical and political contexts of North India. In this period, a variety of literary genres –narrative, exegetical and hagiographical – went into the reshaping of the Ram *bhakti* tradition. The primary orchestrators of this reconfiguration were the *rasik* Ramanandis, whose involvement at this crucial juncture in the history of Ram devotion has been undervalued, if not altogether ignored. While I acknowledge the role of regional Hindu courts at this juncture, my primary focus lies with this sect and the commentaries that form the earliest link between the Ramanandi *sampraday* and the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

The early nineteenth century *rasik* reconfiguration of Ram *bhakti* is reflected in the shifts that took place in the theology of Ram. Identifying and tracing these shifts through the two key works of *rasik* exegesis, the *Ānand laharī* and the *Mānas mayaṅk*, is the primary focus of this dissertation. I also highlight the role of new works of sectarian hagiographies such as the *Rasik prakāś bhakatamāl*, which were also being composed to accommodate the expansion of the sect to include the literature of Tulsidas.

Any discussion on the shifts in the theology of Ram in the commentarial literature of the *rasiks* must be based on the foundation of such literature, the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Thus, Section I is devoted to a discussion of various aspects of this text. Chapter 1 focuses on the life of its author, the poet Tulsidas. In this chapter, I highlight the conflicts between Tulsidas and Brahmanical orthodoxy as a corrective to the dismissal of this text as a mouthpiece of conservative Brahmanism. Chapter 2 focuses on the narrative structure and the theology of the text. I focus on Tulsidas's much-celebrated "syncretism" that effected reconciliation between two sets of theologies at odds with one another – *nirgun* and *sagun bhakti*, and Shaiva and Vaishnava *bhakti*. This chapter provides the background for the discussion of the commentarial literature in Section II. Chapter 3 moves on to review some of the key scholarship on the text as well as to identify some of the major interpretive traditions. I conclude this chapter with an introduction to commentarial tradition on the *Rāmcaritmānas* that has hitherto remained unexamined.

Section II shifts the conversation to the second facet of Ram *bhakti* in North India – the Ramanandi *sampraday* and its commentarial tradition. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the complex trajectory of the Ramanandi sect in order to highlight the significance of the early nineteenth century to its history. Chapter 5 moves on to a discussion of the first *rasik* commentary on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Ānand laharī*. In this chapter I connect the historical shift of the *rasik sampraday* from Rajasthan to Ayodhya to a key feature of its theology – the sacralization of space. In Chapter 6, I discuss the key elements of *rasik* theology that the commentator inscribes into the *Rāmcaritmānas*, highlighting the shifts between the main text and the commentary in the understanding of *bhakti*. Chapter 7, does the same with the *Mānas mayaṅk*.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 thus highlight the shifts between the major theological concerns in Tulsidas's sixteenth century text and those of the Ramanandi sect in the early nineteenth century. While both commentators echo Tulsidas's syncretic spirit, they are not as concerned with reconciliation. Both commentators do not pay more than lip service to the compatibility between Shavism and Vaishnavism, choosing to focus instead on the development of *bhakti rasa*. While both commentators echo Tulsidas's position on the compatibility between *nirgun* and *sagun* bhakti, both are clearly writing from within the tradition that is centered on the celebration of Ram's *sagun* form. Both commentators therefore lavish considerable attention on the theology of *bhakti rasa*, each employing different strategies with which to re-interpret the text. Mahant Ramchanrandas in the *Ānand laharī* inscribes the text with *rasik* practices of visualization based on the modes of *rasa* based devotion. Shivlal Pathak's *Mānas mayaṅk* is a more literary work that interprets the narrative in the light of *rasik* theology and inserts the new verses that would, in effect, "complete" the text or reveal its "hidden" orientation. Mahant Ramchanrandas's commentary seems to come from a *smarta* context, even more clearly than Tulsidas himself. This raises interesting questions about the way Ram *bhakti* was being practiced.

Thus, in this dissertation I locate the intersection of the Ram devotional text and sect in the larger historical context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century North India. I show that the text and sect represent two distinct strands devotion that are linked by the commentarial tradition. My reading of the commentaries shows how text and practice intersect: how text can be transformed by practice and perhaps point us to ways in which text, in turn, can reshape practice.

While the discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are meant to highlight the shifts in the theological concerns between the text and the sect, there are certain issues that remain unchanged between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly the one on the question of language. The contention over writing in the *bhasha* is taken up by Mahant Ramchanrandas in his need to provide a justification for composing a vernacular commentary on a work of vernacular literature. In the case of the second commentary, it is the commentator himself who experiences a shift in attitude toward the vernacular. We also saw that an attempt was made as late as the early twentieth century to fabricate a claim that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was in fact a translation of a Sanskrit work. The unease with works of *bhasha* literature did not disappear until later in the twentieth century when Hindi was being championed as the national language for a putative nation. Tulsidas's composition then became valorized as part of the heritage of Hindi.

My focus on the early nineteenth century "moment" also anticipates the work of colonial scholars in the latter half of that century when both the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the Ramanandi sect were profoundly implicated in colonial / orientalist mission to systematize the literary and religious traditions of North India. Colonial scholars, in particular, figures like George Grierson were in dialogue with leading *rasik* Ramandandis such as Sitaramsharan Bhagwan Prasad Rupkala. In Grierson's work, as we saw, Ram was cast as the savior/father figure, while the Ramanandis (especially the founder of the sect, Ramanand) were the "reformers" of the early modern period who preached a

new religion of devotion (*bhakti*), the core text of which was the *Rāmcaritmānas*. His work thus implicated both sect and text in the project of shaping a Hindu identity based on devotion to Ram. This colonial project would then go on to inform the work of Hindi / nationalist scholars and writers in the twentieth century who would conflate Hindu identity with national identity.

Thus, I have attempted to highlight the confluence between Ram, the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the Ramanandi sect in the early nineteenth century as a key moment in the history of the devotional traditions of North India.

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