

Classic Poetry Series

# Goswami Tulsidas

## - poems -

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# Goswami Tulsidas(1543-1623)

Tulsidas (also known as Goswami Tulsidas) was a Hindu poet-saint, reformer and philosopher renowned for his devotion for the god Rama. A composer of several popular works, he is best known for being the author of the epic Ramcharitmanas, a retelling of the Sanskrit Ramayana in the vernacular Awadhi. Tulsidas was acclaimed in his lifetime to be a reincarnation of Valmiki, the composer of the original Ramayana in Sanskrit. He is also considered to be the composer of the Hanuman Chalisa, a popular devotional hymn dedicated to Hanuman, the divine monkey helper and devotee of Rama. Tulsidas lived permanently and died in the city of Varanasi. The Tulsi Ghat in Varanasi is named after him. He founded the Sankatmochan Temple dedicated to Hanuman in Varanasi, believed to stand at the place where he had the sight of das started the Ramlila plays, a folk-theatre adaption of the Ramayana. He has been acclaimed as one of the greatest poets in Hindi, Indian, and world literature. The impact of Tulsidas and his works on the art, culture and society in India is widespread and is seen to date in vernacular language, Ramlila plays, Hindustani classical music, popular music, and television series.

## <b> Birth </b>

Tulsidas was born on the seventh day of the bright half of the lunar Hindu month Shraavana (July–August). Although as many as seven places are mentioned as his birth-place, most scholars identify the place with Rajapur (Chitrakuta), a village on the banks of the Yamuna river in modern-day Uttar Pradesh. His parents were Hulsī and Atmaram Dubey. Most sources identify him as a Saryupareen Brahmin of the Parashar Gotra (lineage), although some sources claim he was a Kanyakubja or Sanadhya Brahmin.

## <b> Conflict About the Year of Birth </b>

There is difference of opinion among biographers regarding the year of birth of Tulsidas. Many sources rely on Veni Madhav Das' account in the Mula Gosain Charita, which gives the year of Tulsidas' birth as Vikrami Samvat 1554 (1497 CE). These sources include Shivilal Pathak, popular editions of Ramcharitmanas (Gita Press, Naval Kishore Press and Venkateshvar Press), Edwin Greaves, Hanuman Prasad Poddar, Ramanand Sarasvati, Ayodhyanath Sharma, Ramchandra Shukla, Narayandas, and Rambhadracharya. A second group of biographers led by Sant Tulsi Sahib of Hathras and Sir George Grierson give the year as Vikram 1589 (1532 CE). These biographers include Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Ramghulam Dwivedi, James Lochtefeld, Swami Sivananda and

others. A third small group of authors which includes H. H. Wilson, Garse De Tasse and Krishnadatta Mishra gives the year as Vikram 1600 (1543 CE).

The year 1497 appears in most current-day biographies and in popular culture. Biographers who disagree with this year argue that it makes the life span of Tulsidas equal 126 years, which in their opinion is unlikely if not impossible. In contrast, Ramchandra Shukla says that an age of 126 is not impossible for Mahatmas (great souls) like Tulsidas. The Government of India and provincial governments celebrated the 500th birth anniversary of Tulsidas in the year 1997 CE, according to the year of Tulsidas' birth in popular culture.

### <b> Childhood </b>

Legend goes that Tulsidas was born after staying in the womb for 12 months, he had all 32 teeth in his mouth at birth, his health and looks were like that of a five-year old boy, and he did not cry at the time of his birth but uttered Rama instead. He was therefore named Rambola (literally, he who uttered Rama), as Tulsidas himself states in Vinayapatrika. As per the Mula Gosain Charita, he was born under the Abhuktamula constellation, which according to Jyotisha (Hindu astrology) causes immediate danger to the life of the father. Due to the inauspicious events at the time of his birth, he was abandoned by his parents on the fourth night, sent away with Chuniya (some sources call her Muniya), a female servant of Hulsī. In his works Kavitavali and Vinayapatrika, Tulsidas attests to his parents abandoning him after birth due to an inauspicious astrological configuration.

Chuniya took the child to her village of Haripur and looked after him for five and a half years after which she died. Rambola was left to fend for himself as an impoverished orphan, and wandered from door to door begging for alms. It is believed that the goddess Parvati assumed the form of a Brahmin woman and fed Rambola every day.

### <b> Marriage and Renunciation</b>

According to the Mula Gosain Charita and some other works, Tulsidas was married to Ratnavali on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the Jyeshtha month (May–June) in Vikram 1583 (1526 CE). Ratnavali was the daughter of Dinbandhu Pathak, a Brahmin of the Bharadwaja Gotra, who belonged to Mahewa village of Kaushambi had a son named Tarak who died as a toddler. Once when Tulsidas had gone to a Hanuman temple, Ratnavali went to her father's home with her brother. When Tulsidas came to know this, he swam across the Yamuna river in the night to meet his wife. Ratnavali chided Tulsidas for this, and remarked that

if Tulsidas was even half as devoted to God as he was to her body of flesh and blood, he would have been redeemed. Tulsidas left her instantly and left for the holy city of Prayag. Here, he renounced the Grihastha (householder's life) stage and became a Sadhu (Hindu ascetic).

Some authors consider the marriage episode of Tulsidas to be a later interpolation and maintain that he was a include Rambhadracharya, who interprets two verses in the Vinayapatrika and Hanuman Bahuka to mean that Tulsidas never married and was a Sadhu from childhood.

### <b> Literary Life </b>

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

### <b> Composition of Ramcharitmanas </b>

In the year Vikram 1631 (1575 CE), Tulsidas started composing the Ramcharitmanas in Ayodhya on Tuesday, Ramnavami day (ninth day of the bright half of the Chaitra month, which is the birthday of Rama). Tulsidas himself attests this date in the Ramcharitmanas. He composed the epic over two years, seven months and twenty-six days, and completed the work in Vikram 1633 (1577 CE) on the Vivaha Panchami day (fifth day of the bright half of the Margashirsha month, which commenrates the wedding of Rama and his wife Sita).

Tulsidas came to Varanasi and recited the Ramcharitmanas to Shiva (Vishwanath) and Parvati (Annapurna) at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. A popular legend goes that the Brahmins of Varanasi, who were critical of Tulsidas for having rendered the Sanskrit Ramayana in the vernacular, decided to test the worth of the work. A manuscript of the Ramcharitmanas was kept at the bottom of pile of Sanskrit scriptures in the sanctum sanctorum of the Vishvanath temple in the night, and the doors of the sanctum sanctorum were locked. In the morning when the doors were opened, the Ramcharitmanas was found at the top

of the pile. The words "Satyam Shivam Sundara" (literally "truth, auspiciousness, beauty") were inscribed on the manuscript with the signature of Shiva. The words were also heard by the people present.

Per traditional accounts, some Brahmins of Varanasi were still not satisfied, and sent two thieves to steal the manuscript. The thieves tried to break into the Ashram of Tulsidas, but were confronted by two guards with bows and arrows, of dark and fair complexion. The thieves had a change of heart and came to Tulsidas in the morning to ask who the two guards were. Believing that the two guards could be none other than Rama and Lakshmana, Tulsidas was aggrieved to know that they were guarding his home at night. He sent the manuscript of Ramchahritmanas to his friend Rai Todar Mal, the finance minister of Akbar, and donated all his money. The thieves were reformed and became devotees of Rama.

### <b> Composition of The Vinaypatrika </b>

A criminal used to beg everyday with the call: 'For the love of Ram, give me—a murderer—alms.' Hearing the name of Ram, the delighted Tulsidas would cheerfully take him inside his house and give him food. This behaviour of Tulsi infuriated the orthodox brahmanas, who demanded an explanation. Tulsidas told them that the name 'Ram' had absolved the person concerned of all his offences. This attitude of Tulsi incensed the people further. In a fit of anger, they demanded that if the stone image of Nandi—the sacred bull in the temple of Shiva—would eat out of the hands of that murderer, then they would accept that he had been purified. A day was selected for this ritual, and to the consternation of the people, the Nandi image actually ate from the murderer's hands. The brahmanas were thus compelled to eat humble pie. However, this did not settle matters. This event increased Tulsidas's popularity even more and enraged the already defeated people afresh, triggering off more attacks and assaults. The troubled Tulsidas then turned to Hanuman for help. Hanuman appeared to him in a dream and asked him to appeal to Sri Ram. Thus was the Vinay-patrika born. It is a petition in the court of King Ram. Ganesh, Surya, Ganga, Yamuna, and others are propitiated first, just as the courtiers would be approached first. Then follows wonderful poetry soaked in bhakti:

He Hari! Kas na harahu bhram bhari; Jadyapi mrisha satya bhasai jabalagi nahin kripa tumhari.

O Hari, why do you not remove this heavy illusion of mine (that I see the world as real)? Even though the samsara is unreal, as long as your grace does not descend, it appears to be real.

## <b> Death </b>

Towards the end of his life Tulsidas suffered from very painful boils that affected his arms. At this time he wrote the Hanuman Bahuk, which begins with a verse in praise of Hanuman's strength, glory, and virtue, and is followed by a prayer to relieve him of his unbearable arm pain. The disease was cured. He passed away in 1623 (1623 CE) at Asighat, Varanasi. One interesting incident in Tulsidas's life is quite representative of his teachings. Once a woman, who happened to stay behind after Tulsidas had delivered a discourse, remarked during the course of conversation that her nose-ring had been given to her by her husband. Tulsidas immediately directed her mind deeper saying: 'I understand that your husband has given you this lovely nose-ring, but who has given you this beautiful face?'

# Doha

Goswami Tulsidas

# Glimpse Of The Invisible

Lightning flashed in my eye, O friend,  
And brightly did shine the light of the moon.  
I got a glimpse of the Invisible within,  
And thirst and longing for the Lord were aroused.  
My ears received the boon of Unstruck Music,  
And Knowledge came like the explosion of light, O Friend.  
Dark clouds began to scatter and the sight  
Of the Divine Mansion was revealed unto me.  
Beyond the sun, the moon and the tunnel,  
Tulsi beheld the abode of the Lord Almighty.

[Translation by S. L. Sondhi]

Goswami Tulsidas



# Maya (Translated In English)

Up till now I have lost much and wasted life in idle pursuits.

The grace of Lord Rama has aroused me from sleep.

Awakened now, I shall not allow myself to be victimized by Maya (illusion).

I have gained the grace of the Lord's Name. I shall hold it fast to my bosom and not let it from me for a second.

The beautiful form of the Lord I shall cherish in my mind.

Long has this world mocked me, making me a slave of the senses.

Now I shall have no more of it.

I am now a bee at my Lord's Lotus Feet and shall not allow my mind to leave the enjoyment of their nectar for a moment.

Goswami Tulsidas

# Prayer (Translated In English)

Lord Rama! My honour is in Your hands.

You are the protector of the poor; I surrender myself at Your Feet.

I have heard of the sinners whom You have reclaimed.

I am an old sinner, pray extend Your loving hand and take me to Yourself.

To destroy the sins of the sinner, and to remove the ailments of the afflicted is  
Your occupation.

Grant me devotion to You, O Lord, and confer Your grace on me!

Goswami Tulsidas

## Prayer 2 (Translated In English)

O Lord, let any one accept any sadhana, he is free to follow its pursuit.

But to me Your name is the granter of all boons.

Karma, upasana, jnana - the various paths outlined in the Vedas for the emancipation of the soul - all are good.

But I seek only one shelter and that is Your name; I seek nothing besides....

I have enjoyed the sweetness of Your name. It is the fulfiller of my wishes here and in the world to come...

A man may have his affection riveted anywhere as also his faith,

But I recognize my relationship with the Name - Rama; it is my father and mother.

I swear by Shankara and state the truth without hiding it,

That Tulsidas sees all good accruing to him only by repeating Your name.

Goswami Tulsidas

## Prayer 3 (Translated In English)

O Lord who is there besides You who will hear my cry?

Strange is my petition: a poor man, I, I seek to become a king...

From time immemorial I have suffered the tortures of hell and have lived through many low births, but I crave not for wealth or even salvation though I know that You can confer all these.

What I desire is to become in every birth a toy for You to play with or a stone to touch Your Feet.

Goswami Tulsidas

# Sound Celestial

Listen, O friend, to the thunderous roar of Shabd,  
Which reverberates throughout the firmament.  
Water, which becomes turbid by relishing the earth,  
Gets cleansed of its impurities when filtered.  
Waves of pure bliss emanate from the heart  
When the moss that covers it is removed.

Hold the arrow, be still, stretch the bow taut,  
Fix your aim sharp at the target, pierce the firmament.  
The invisible world is contained within the human eye,  
So say and describe all men of inner knowledge.  
Behold the Brahmand within, through your astral eye.  
When that eye is opened, everything stands revealed.

The soul in Sunn will hear resounding peals of Sound,  
She will uncover and know the essence of Shabd.

They alone, O Tulsi, will know that perfect state,  
Who have seen and experienced it themselves.

[Translation by S. L. Sondhi]

Goswami Tulsidas

# The Rainy Season

In whom longing for the Beloved hath taken abode,  
Every moment his body becometh feeble and enervated.  
A stream of tears constantly flows from his eyes;  
The pangs of pain ceaselessly smart his body and mind.

Like rivers in Sawan and Bhadon, overflows the stream of my love.  
Day and night I long for Him and tears fall like incessant rain.

The pain for my Beloved increasingly penetrates my being every moment;  
My attention can be transfixed on nought but him,  
Even as the moon bird never gets satiated by looking at the moon.

Dark clouds gather and burst with thunder, and lightning dazzles the eyes.  
The peacock crows in delight and the rain bird sings his longing.  
I yearn for thee evermore, my body keeps wasting away in anguish.

When I listen to the Sound, I lose my patience and I write to my Beloved.  
With mind and soul as my couriers, I send my message to His inaccessible  
abode.

When I hear the tidings of His well-being,  
My heart is filled with love and delight.  
Ever since this yearning for the Lord has taken hold of me,  
I have severed all connections with the world.

[Translation by S. L. Sondhi]

Goswami Tulsidas

# Truth Lies Within

Within the body lies the essence which the Vedas and the Puranas are seeking.  
Within this body exists the entire Universe, so the sagacious Saints say.  
Recluses, ascetics and monks are searching for Him in variegated garbs.  
Rishis, munis and avdhoots lay stress on scriptures and holy books.  
The learned of the world, puffed up with pride in their scholarly traditions, remain  
deluded by their erudition.  
They delude the world through the practice of pilgrimage, fasting and charity;  
They glorify bathing in holy waters and their gollowers bear the evil  
consequences.  
They get lost in rituals and external observances and never can reach the  
destination.

Such is the state of people in this world  
Who keep revolving in the cycle of eighty-four.  
Only the Saints have attained the Ultimate, O Tulsi,  
They obtain liberation who realize this truth.  
The pedantic are engrossed in the practice of traditions,  
And evermore, in their ego, are they enslaved by delusion

[Translation by S. L. Sondhi]

Goswami Tulsidas

# Within This Body

Within this body  
breathes the secret essence.  
Within this body  
beats the heart of the Vedas.

Within this body  
shines the entire Universe,  
so the saints say.

Hermits, ascetics, celibates --  
all are lost  
seeking Him  
in endless guises.

Seers and sages perfectly parrot  
the scriptures and holy books,  
blinded by knowledge.

Their pilgrimage,  
and fasting,  
and striving  
but delude.  
Despite their perfect practice,  
they discover no destination.

Only the saints  
who know the body's heart  
have attained the Ultimate, O Tulsi.  
Realize this, and you've found your freedom.

While teachers trapped in tradition  
know only the mirage  
in the mirror.

Goswami Tulsidas