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Encounter with the Hagiographies of the Poet-Saint Tulsīdās

Abstract. This chapter investigates how Tulsīdās, a poet-saint devoted to Rāma living in sixteenth-century North India, was portrayed in the hagiographies of different periods and how his image changed over time. Nābhādās, an author of one of the early hagiographies, the *Bhaktamāl*, described him as an incarnation of Vālmīki and a sincere devotee of Rāma. Priyādās provides further details in his commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*. Several legends that circulate today about Tulsīdās are based on Priyādās's commentary. However, the provenance of the other legends is unclear. The *Mūl Gosāi Carit*, composed of a surprisingly large number of episodes, might be one of the sources of those legends. The author of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*, Beṇī Mādhav Dās (Bhavānīdās), claimed to be a direct disciple of Tulsīdās, and the alleged year of the composition of this work is 1687 in Vikram Saṃvat (1630 CE), only seven years after Tulsīdās's death. The life of Tulsīdās as told in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* abounds in miraculous events; Tulsīdās was a great traveller, could appease ghosts, could bring back the dead, and lived to be 126 years old. The respect for the underprivileged, especially women and people of the lower castes, that is found in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* sounds more modern than the date of composition would imply. One of the reasons behind this might be to avert criticism regarding the controversial line in the *Rāmacaritamānas* in which Tulsīdās is said to have discriminated against women and *śūdras*. To counteract criticism of this line, the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* might have had Tulsīdās save more women and lower-caste peoples with his miracles than is depicted in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*.

Keywords. Tulsidas, Hagiography, Mul Gosai Carit, Ramacaritamanas, Beni Madhav Das, Hindu Pilgrimage sites

Introduction

Tulsīdās (Tulasīdās) was a poet-saint devoted to Rāma in the sixteenth century in North India. In his work *Rāmacaritamānas* (The Lake of the Deeds of Rāma), Tulsīdās presents an adaptation of the epic Rāmayaṇa in Old Avadhī, an eastern dialect of Hindi. His work is the most influential text in the devotional literature of the Hindi language. For this, Tulsīdās is often compared to Vālmīki, the author of the Rāmayaṇa. The twelve works attributed to Tulsīdās, including the *Rāmacarita-*

mānas, have drawn the attention of scholars of Hindi. During the colonial period, George Abraham Grierson (1851–1941), an Irish administrator in the Indian Civil Service, and Frederic Salmon Growse (1836–1893), a British civil servant, were quick to take note of Tulsīdās. Admiringly calling Tulsīdās “the greatest of Indian authors of modern times”,¹ Grierson searched for Tulsīdās’s manuscripts. Growse translated the *Rāmacaritamānas* into English. European scholars have sought to acquire an intimate knowledge of Hindi and bhakti by studying Tulsīdās’s works. The treatises on both the *Rāmacaritamānas* and Tulsīdās himself by European pioneers introduced the *Rāmacaritamānas* to the Western world, and Indian scholars in the twentieth century were influenced by these works as well. These included Rāmcandra Śukla, Mātāprasād Gupta, and Viśvanāthprasād Miśra, who all published critical editions of the *Rāmacaritamānas*.²

Although Tulsīdās did not write much about himself, numerous legends have been handed down about him. During the colonial period, Western scholars found it difficult to access this information, as sources for his biography were limited. Frederic Growse tried to portray Tulsīdās’s life using two early biographies: the *Bhaktamāl* (A Garland of Devotees) by Nābhādās (sixteenth century or early in the seventeenth century), possibly the oldest source for Tulsīdās’s biography, and Priyādās’s commentary, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (Awakening the Delight in Devotion, published 1712). While the reference to Tulsīdās in the *Bhaktamāl* was limited to only one hexastich, Priyādās added more to it in his commentary. Several legends that circulate today about Tulsīdās are based on Priyādās’s commentary, but the provenance of the other stories or legends is unclear. One potential key to this question can be found in the recently discovered hagiography of Tulsīdās, the *Mūl Gosāi (Gosāim) Carit* (The Essential of Deeds of Saint). Composed of a surprisingly large number of episodes, this work might be among the sources for those legends. The life of Tulsīdās as told in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* abounds in miraculous events; Tulsīdās can appease ghosts and can even bring the dead back to life. Rather than disregard these tales as spurious, we can take them as potential sources for Tulsīdās’s legend because they have contributed to shaping the popular conception of him, especially in the devotional milieu. In this chapter, a comparison of Tulsīdās depicted in these three biographical texts (sec. 1) will reveal the stepwise development of his sanctification, mainly focusing on his travels (sec. 2), various incidents or events that are identified with a year (sec. 3), and Tulsīdās’s contradicting attitudes in which the values of the author of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* are reflected (sec. 4).

1 Grierson 1893: 89.

2 Śukla VS 2030–2031, Vol. 1, Gupta 1949, Vol. 1, and Miśra 1962. As for the contribution of Western scholarship on the study of the *Rāmacaritamānas*, see Lütgendorf 1991: 229–233.

1 Three Hindi hagiographies referring to Tulsīdās

Before analysing the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*, two hagiographies, the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, traditionally regarded as authoritative sources, will be briefly reviewed. Nābhādās composed the *Bhaktamāl* in around 1600. In this work, not only poets of his era but also legendary saints and gods are praised in *chappayas* hexastiches. Regardless of the brevity of the reference, the description of Tulsīdās is considered to be reliable, since Nābhādās was a contemporary of Tulsīdās. The following is Growse's translation of the text.³

- 1 For the redeeming of mankind in this perverse Kali Yuga, Vālmīki has been born again as Tulasī.
- 2 The verses of the *Rāmāyana* composed in the Tretā Yuga are a hundred crores in number;
- 3 but a single letter has redeeming power, and would work the salvation of one who had even committed the murder of a Brāhmaṇa.
- 4 Now again, as a boon of blessing to the faithful, has he taken birth and published the sportive actions of the god.
- 5 Intoxicated with his passion for Rāma's feet, he perseveres day and night in the accomplishment of his vow,
- 6 and has supplied, as it were, a boat for the easy passage of the boundless ocean of existence.⁴

Here, Nābhādās depicted that Tulsīdās, who is the incarnation of Vālmīki, sought devotion to Rāma, and propagated Rāma's sportive action as a salvation for devotees in his era.

After nearly a century, Priyādās, who belonged to the Rāmānandī sampradāy, composed the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712),⁵ in which new stories about Tulsīdās are told. This work is called a commentary to the *Bhaktamāl*, but it is far from what we would expect from the word "commentary": Priyādās gives eight new stories that did not appear in the *Bhaktamāl*, namely: (1) Tulsīdās's renunciation, following the counsel of his wife, (2) the encounter with Rāma with the aid of Hanumān in Cītrakūṭ, (3) the rescue of a murderer who was a brahmin, (4) the elimination of thieves from his house by the guardian Rāma in Kāśī, (5) reviving a dead man and rescuing the dead man's wife from *satī*, (6) the arrest by the king of Delhi and his

3 Pollet 1974 referred to Tulsīdās as he is described by Nābhādās and gave his own English translation.

4 Growse 1883: iv–v. Although this verse is formulated in a sestina, the first line is repeated and usually written in the editions.

5 See Gupta 1969.

rescue by Hanumān, (7) meeting Nābhādās in Bṛndāvan, and (8) the transformation of an image of Kṛṣṇa into Rāma in Bṛndāvan.⁶ Here, new characters, such as Tulsīdās's wife, thieves, a brahmin, and an embodiment of Rāma and Hanumān appear, and specific events are narrated in detail. It might be Priyādās's fictional creation, but it is also possible that he collected the stories from oral tradition.⁷ In any case, nearly one hundred years elapsed between Nābhādās and Priyādās, which turned Tulsīdās from a seeker of bhakti to a wonder-working saint who could even revive the dead. It is interesting that neither author mentions the title "the *Rāmacaritamānas*", Tulsīdās's best-known work.

The third biographical text investigated here is the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* composed by Beṇī Mādhav Dās (Bhavānīdās). Beṇī Mādhav Dās, a name unknown except for this work, claimed himself a disciple of Tulsīdās, and according to the final couplets of that text, the date of composition was the ninth day of the white half of the month of Kārtik, 1687 ("soraha sai sattāsi sita navamīkātika māsa"), only seven years after the death of Tulsīdās (Vikram Saṃvat [henceforth VS]. 1680 = 1623 CE).⁸ This would make the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* almost as old as the *Bhaktamāl* by Nābhādās. For this reason, the discovery of this manuscript was important news in the twentieth century. The text was published by Gita Press in Gorakhpur, but the manuscript disappeared before it could be examined.⁹ There is no way to know what the printed text was based on or if there even was a manuscript to begin with. In particular, the year of creation remains uncertain. Previous studies point out that the text shows more modern traits than a dating of VS 1687 would suggest. Based on those traits, Lutgendorf argues that the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* could even be a nineteenth-century composition. The work has some questionable points, but the intention here is not to examine its authenticity but to identify what episodes were added. In particular, I hope to show how Tulsīdās became a virtuous saint who grants people's wishes in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*.¹⁰

6 For the original text and an English translation, see Growse 1883: iv–x. The seventh and eighth episodes are a chain of events, so it can be considered that seven stories are described.

7 Lutgendorf 1994: 81–82 points out that the participation of professional Rāmāyaṇī and Vyāses, story tellers of the *Rāmacaritamānas*, was added to Tulsīdās's biography during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

8 *MGC*, *dohā* 119.

9 According to Lutgendorf 1994: 69, Gita Press published the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* in 1934, 1937, and 1938 (*Mānasāṅkh*). I am grateful to Gita Press for giving me a xerox copy of the book which it keeps in its library at Gorakhpur. The date of publication was not mentioned in this copy, but it might be 1934 or 1937. For the discovery and loss of the manuscript, see Lutgendorf 1994: 66–73.

10 For sources of Tulsīdās's life, in addition to the three texts presented in this paper, the *Gautam Candrikā* (1624) by Kṛṣṇadatt Mīśra, the *Ratnāvalī Caritr* (n.d.) by Muralīdhar Caturvedī, and the *Śrītulsīprakāś* (n.d.) by Avināśrāy Brahmabhaṭṭ are all included in

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Beṇī Mādhav Dās allegedly composed two hagiographies of Tulsīdās, the *Gosāī (Gosāīm) Carit* (The Deeds of Saint) and the *Mūl Gosāī Carit*. He himself states at the beginning of the *Mūl Gosāī Carit* that “for the sake of everyday recitation, concise [text] will be good” (ati sam̐cheṇa sohāya, kahauṁ suniya nita pāṭha hita), meaning that the *Mūl Gosāī Carit* is an abridged edition of another hagiography that he had previously composed.¹¹ Since the previous composition, which is claimed to be the *Gosāī Carit*, has not proved as popular as the *Mūl Gosāī Carit*,¹² the following discussions are based mainly on the later text.

The *Mūl Gosāī Carit* is composed of roughly seven hundred lines, in which a standard stanza is composed of nine *toṭakas* followed by one or several lines of *dohā* or *sorṭhā*. *Śloka*, *chanda* (meaning metre in general), and *savaiyā* are sometimes inserted. It is several times longer than Priyādās’s *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, describing many episodes of Tulsīdās’s life from birth to death, such as childhood; learning Sanskrit texts from his teacher; his wedding; his encounters with Rāma and other gods; his meetings with kings, sages, contemporary poets, and followers; and the composition of sacred books. In the narration of many episodes, Beṇī Mādhav Dās tries to attribute particular characteristics to Tulsīdās. Paying attention to travel, events marked by year, and conflicting attitudes that the other two biographies (the *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī*) do not describe, I will illustrate in the following sections how Tulsīdās is portrayed as an unrivalled poet-saint in the *Mūl Gosāī Carit*.

volume 3 of the *Tulsī-Granthāvalī* (eds. Caturvedī/Gupta 1973), although the editors naturally express doubt about their authenticity in the preface. Yet the *Gautam Candrikā* has been considered reliable and is quoted by many scholars, e.g. Allchin 1964: 32–45. Some episodes contained within it correspond with the *Mūl Gosāī Carit*, but there are not as many outlandish stories as in the latter text. Śyāmsundardās and Baḍathvāl’s 1931 edition of Gosvāmī Tulsīdās (pp. 18–20, 211–217) refer to the *Tulsī Carit* composed by Raghubardās (17th century?), who was allegedly a disciple of Tulsīdās. Lutgendorf 1994: 70 discusses a manuscript of the same title composed by Beṇī Mādhav Dās, but they seem to be different works.

11 *MGC*, *sorṭhā* 1. In this paper, citations to the *Mūl Gosāī Carit* (*MGC*) are given by the number of the concluding *dohā* or *sorṭhā* in the stanza.

12 Kiśorilāl Gupta published the *Gosāī Carit* in 1964 and claimed that *Tulsī Carit* is the *Gosāī Carit*. For the controversy over the authenticity of the *Gosāī Carit* / *Tulsī Carit*, see Lutgendorf 1994: 70–73.

2 Tulsīdās as a great traveller

Tulsīdās's life was a journey. He travelled to many places. The following is an outline of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*, which describes his life journey.

Tulsīdās, who was born in Rājāpur as a son of a brahmin, was abandoned by his parents and brought up by the goddess Parvati. By the request of Shiva, Narharidās brought Tulsīdās to Avadh, the birthplace of Rāma, and initiated him. After staying in Sūkaraset for five years, they went to Kāśī, where Tulsīdās became a pupil of Śeṣ Sanātan. After fifteen years of studying four *vedas*, six *āgamas*, six *darśanas*, *itihāsa*, *purāṇa*, and poetry, Tulsīdās went back to his birthplace, Rājāpur. He was married but renounced the world, following the counsel of his wife. After visiting Prayāg, Raghuvīrapurī, and Purī, he began a pilgrimage to Rāmeśvar, Badrīnāth, Lake Mānasarovar, Lake Rūpā, the Nilgiri mountain, Mount Kailās, and the Bhavaban Forest. Then he met the god Rāma in Citrakūṭ and Yājñavalkya and Bharadvāja in Prayāg. He became immersed in the memories of his previous life as Vālmīki and composed *kaḥitts* at Sītāmaṛhī. Having received an oracle from Shiva in Kāśī, he moved to Avadh (Ayodhyā), where he composed the *Rāmacaritamānas*. The popularity of the book angered pandīts in Kāśī, and they harassed Tulsīdās, but the endorsement of Shiva resolved the problem. Tulsīdās composed the *Vinaya Patrikā*. He revived a dead husband for the latter's *satī* wife in Hansapur. After staying at the place of King Gambhīr near the Gaughāṭ for two years, he preached and saved people such as Manvarū at Kānt Brahmapuri [and] Dhanīdās at Belāpatār. At Bidehapuri, he met a girl who offered him *kheer* [milk rice pudding]. At Kāśī, he composed several books and cured Kāśī of the plague. In connection with his fame, the visit of Keśavdās and the debunking of Yogis and Agora ascetics were described. Upon the request of the brahmin Banaṣaṇḍi, he examined some holy spots around Ayodhyā.¹³ In Malihābād, he gave his book to Braj Vallabh Batrāj. After stopping by Koṭrā village, Biṭūr, Saṇḍilā, the Naimiṣ Forest, Khairābād, Mīśrikh, and Rāmpur, he arrived at Bṛṇḍāvan where he met Nābhādās, Nanddās (late sixteenth century), a brother disciple of Śeṣ Sanātan Swāmī, and Gopīnāth, a son of Hit Harivamś.¹⁴ In Citrakūṭ, he performed several miracles and was put in prison by a king in Delhi. Through Mahāban and Audh he travelled to his final resting place at Kāśī, where he composed several works, met many saints and poets, and died at Assī Ghāṭ.

Most of the places where Tulsīdās visited are in modern Hindi-speaking areas. Once Tulsīdās went to Mount Kailās in the north, to Purī in the east, and Rāmeśvar in the south. This reminds the four holy abodes of the Hindu pilgrimage, although

13 Some holy spots around Ayodhyā where Tulsīdās visited are Gaināhī, Sūkharaket, Lakhanaipur, and the bank of Dhenumatī (Gomatī River?).

14 McGregor 1976: 522 mentions another source about the meeting of Nanddās and Tulsīdās in Braj.

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Tulsīdās never visited Dvārka.¹⁵ He was not as active a traveller as Guru Nānak, the founder of Sikhism, who travelled as far as to Mecca, but there are similarities in the descriptions of the two figures, such as meeting people of different sects and sometimes defeating them in debate, which would have established Tulsīdās's authority. That Tulsīdās took milk pudding from a girl who was indicated to be Sītā might be adapted from the story wherein the Buddha received milk pudding from Sujātā.¹⁶ In addition to Kāśī, Ayodhyā and Citrakūṭ, which were already well known, some settlements and shrines have become sacred places today due to their association with Tulsīdās. The description of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* seems to agree with the local legends of such sacred places.¹⁷

While the *Bhaktamāl* contains no indication as to the locations where the events it describes happened, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* explicitly names Citrakūṭ, Kāśī, Delhi, and Bṛndāvan. The *Mūl Gosāi Carit* refers to many places; among them, Ayodhyā and Kāśī are especially important, as Tulsīdās himself often visited them. This is confirmed by noted facts regarding the works of Tulsīdās. In its prologue, he reports that he began the composition of the *Rāmacaritamānas* in Ayodhyā in VS 1631, which corresponds to the year and description of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*. He mentions the plague (*mahāmārī*) in Kāśī in the *Kavitāvalī* (7.176.1, 183.2). In Varanasi today, there are several holy sites that are connected with Tulsīdās, particularly the Tulsī Ghāṭ, which was constructed by Amrit Rao, the adopted son of Raghoba the Eleventh Peshwa of Maratha in 1807.¹⁸ Local people believe it to be the place where Tulsīdās lived and died. There is a small shrine in a corner of the Ghāṭ and, according to the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*, this might be the shrine that Ṭoḍar Mal built for Tulsīdās.¹⁹ This Ṭoḍar Mal is probably not the finance minister of the Mughal emperor Akbar, but a landlord of Kāśī who, with his descendants, contributed to the construction of holy sites connected with Tulsīdās in Kāśī. We will return later to the close relationship between Ṭoḍar Mal and Beṇī Mādhav Dās, an author of this book.

15 The Cār dhām is a set of four Hindu pilgrimage sites in India, located at four points of the compass: Purī, Rāmeśvar, Dvārka, and Badrīnāth.

16 *MGC, dohā* 53: “dhari bālikā bideha laṭī” (a lady of bideha took the form of a girl).

17 As far as I know, Bharadvāj Āśram and Sītāmaṛhī now exist as holy places in Allahabad.

18 Singh 2018 [1993]: 15.

19 When I visited a small shrine which contains the pādukā of Tulsīdās in Assī Ghāṭ, a priest said that Tulsīdās had lived there. If we rely on his testimony and take the remark of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* into consideration, this could be construed as evidence that the shrine was built by Ṭoḍar Mal.

3 Incidents given with years

Concerning the life history of Tulsīdās, incidents given with years indicate what seems to have been important for Beṇī Mādhav Dās. These are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Chronology of Tulsīdās's life

<i>Mūl Gosāi Carit</i> (Beṇī Mādhav Dās)			<i>Bhaktamāl</i> (Nābhādās)	<i>Bhaktirasabodhinī</i> (Priyādās)
Period	Age (years)	Incident		
VS 1554	0	Birth		
VS 1561	7	Apprenticed to Narhari		
VS 1583	29	Marriage		
VS 1589	35	Renunciation of the world and the death of the wife		✓
VS 1607	53	Encounter with the god Rāma		✓
VS 1609	55	Receiving a letter from Hit Harivamś		
VS 1616	62	Sūrdās's visit		
VS 1628	74	Writing the <i>Rāmagītāvalī</i> and the <i>Kṛṣṇagītāvalī</i>		
VS 1631	77	Start of writing the <i>Rāmacaritamānas</i>		
VS 1633	79	Completion of the <i>Rāmacaritamānas</i>		
VS 1640	86	Writing the <i>Dohāvalī</i> Writing the <i>Vālmīkī</i> for Recitation (the <i>Kavitāvalī</i> ?)		
VS 1642	88	Writing the <i>Satasaiyā</i> (<i>Satasāī</i>)		
VS 1649	95	Encounter with Pihānī Sukula		
VS 1669	115	Death of Toḍar Mal		
VS 1670	116	Encounter with Emperor Jahangir		
VS 1680	126	Death		

Source: The author (compiled on the basis of the three texts).

The incidents in Table 1, except for two (the encounter with Rāma in Citrakūt and the renouncement after his wife's admonishment), are not mentioned in the other two works, and it is noteworthy that nothing is shared by Nābhādās in the *Bhaktamāl*. While Beṇī Mādhav Dās gives meticulous details about Tulsīdās's life, the remark that Tulsīdās lived to be 126 years old is hard to believe. The dates of Tulsīdās's life are generally accepted to be 1532–1623 or 1543–1623.²⁰ The date given for his birth in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* is thirty-five to forty-six years earlier than the generally accepted years, 1532 or 1543, while the year of his death, 1623, is the same. By bringing the year of birth forward, Beṇī Mādhav Dās probably wanted to incorporate the letter from Hit Harivamś (1502–1552), a poet and the founder of Rādhavallabh Sampradāy in Braj. In the text, Hit Harivamś sends a message asking for Tulsīdās's blessing in VS 1609 (1552 CE), because he is going to die during the *maharās* (*Kṛṣṇa līlā* in *śaratpūrnimā*).²¹ Tulsīdās replies, “be it so” (evam astu). Following this exchange of messages, Hit Harivamś passes away in VS 1609 (1552 CE), the same year as is generally accepted in scholarship. At that time, Tulsīdās is 55 years old in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* but would have been in his teens or twenties according to the common belief. This interpolated episode is given to illustrate the priority of Tulsīdās over the famous poets of Kṛṣṇa devotion in Braj, including Hit Harivamś, who was his contemporary.²² It is confirmed by the unlikely travel of the blind poet Sūrdās, who came all the way from Braj to Kāmadgiri to ask Tulsīdās's blessing.²³ To make the story consistent with the description of Hit Harivamś, Beṇī Mādhav Dās had to bring forward both the year when Tulsīdās met his guru Narhari (who taught him the Rāmāyaṇa) and the year of his wedding to the period when he was not yet born according to the general belief.

As a consequence, Tulsīdās is pictured as composing almost all of his work after middle age or in his later years. While no titles are given in the *Bhaktamāl* or the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* of any of the known works of Tulsīdās, the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* mentions many works attributed to Tulsīdās, with their year of composition; the *Rāmagītāvalī* (VS 1628), the *Kṛṣṇagītāvalī* (VS 1628), the *Rāmacarita-*

20 On the dating of 1532–1623, see McGregor 1984: 109–110, fn. 311. On another view of the date of the poet's birth of 1543 (VS 1699) which is supported by the *Gautamacandrikā*, see Allchin 1964: 35. Lutgendorf 2016 gives 1543–1623 on the cover of his Epic of Ram.

21 *MGC*, *sorṭhā* 8.

22 In the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* Priyādās describes the transformation of an image of Kṛṣṇa into Rāma in front of Tulsīdās in Bṛndāvan, which can be interpreted as a sign of Rāma's superiority over Kṛṣṇa. The *Mūl Gosāi Carit* portrays Tulsīdās as superior to the poets of Kṛṣṇa devotion in Bṛndāvan.

23 Sūrdās, a blind poet of Sūrsāgar, was sent by Gokulnath to meet Tulsīdās while he was living near the Kamadgiri, although there is no mention of Sūrdās's eyesight in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*.

mānas (VS 1633), the *Dohāvalī* (VS 1640), the *Satasāī* (VS 1642), the *Baravai Rāmāyaṇa* (VS 1669), the *Rāmalalā Nahachū* (VS 1669), the *Jānakī maṅgala* (VS 1669), the *Pārvaṭī Maṅgala* (VS 1669), the *Hanumān Bāhuka* (VS 1669), the *Vairāgya Sandīpanī* (VS 1669), and the *Rāmājñā Praśna* (VS 1669). The *Vālmikī for Recitation* is not known; however, this might refer to the *Kavitāvalī*.²⁴ With a few exceptions, the chronological order of composition of these works agrees with current views.²⁵

Specifying the year in highlighting individuals seems to indicate that they were influential or in some cases sponsors of the text. Ṭoḍar Mal, who was a resident of Kāśī, is described twice. The first mention is the story that the manuscript of the *Rāmacaritamānas* written by Tulsīdās came to be kept in the house of Ṭoḍar Mal. The *Mūl Gosāī Carit* goes on to say that many manuscripts were copied from that book. The second mention of Ṭoḍar Mal follows the murder plot and harassment by pandits. As Tulsīdās was leaving Kāśī, Ṭoḍar Mal asked him to stay at Assī Ghāṭ and constructed a new house for him. Tulsīdās's great lament at Ṭoḍar Mal's death in VS 1669 suggests that they were close associates. Being aware of his own impending death, Ṭoḍar Mal divided his estate between his two sons five months before, on the thirteenth day of the white half of the month of Aśvin in the presence of Tulsīdās. According to Śyāmsundardās (1875–1945), this might be supported by the fact that descendants of Ṭoḍar Mal possessed a note in which a benediction and a couplet appeared in Tulsīdās's hand.²⁶ It is even possible that the *Mūl Gosāī Carit* was written upon the request of Ṭoḍar Mal or his descendants, who contributed to the construction of holy sites connected with Tulsīdās in Kāśī. Similarly, the reason for the special mention of Pihānī Sukula (Śukla?), a name unknown today, might be that he was a patron or supporter of Tulsīdās, although this is not beyond speculation.

24 Beside the *Rāmacaritamānas*, the following eleven works are believed to be written by Tulsidas. The *Rāmagītāvalī* and the *Kṛṣṇagītāvalī* are collection of songs for Rāma and Kṛṣṇa respectively, the *Dohāvalī* is a collection of couplets. The *Kavitāvalī* is a collection in *kavitt* metre. The *Baravai Rāmāyaṇa* is Rāmāyaṇa in *baravai* metre, the *Rāmalalā Nahachū*, the *Jānakī maṅgala*, and the *Pārvaṭī Maṅgala* are wedding songs for Rāma, Sītā, and Pārvaṭī, respectively. The *Vairāgya Sandīpanī* are hymns of salvation and the *Rāmājñā Praśna* is a collection of questions and answers about Rāma. The *Vinaya Patrikā*, which is not mentioned in the *Mūl Gosāī Carit*, is a collection of songs of the petition. The *Hanumān Bāhuka* and the *Hanumān Cārīsa*, which are hymns for Hanumān, and the *Satasāī*, which contains seven hundred verses in name only, are attributed to Tulsīdās due to their popularity but are probably spurious.

25 On years of composition, see Allchin 1964: 32–45.

26 Śyāmsundardās 1931: 108–109. Allchin 1964: 44–45 also gives a reference for it.

4 Benefactor or curse giver

It is a specific feature in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* that the conflicting natures of Tulsīdās, namely, his mercy and cruelty, are described. The text indicates that after Tulsīdās's reputation was fully established, people visited him or sent him letters to gain his blessing. Tulsīdās generally treated them with warmth, but in some cases he reproached or even cursed them. The peaceful meeting or exchange of letters with prominent Hindi poets of the sixteenth century such as Rahīm (1556–1627), who was a courtier of the Mughal emperor Akbar; Keśavdās (1555–1617), who was a Sanskrit and Hindi scholar of Orcha; Sūrdās, Nanddās, and Mīrābāī who were poets of the Kṛṣṇa bhakti; and so on, indicates that they respected Tulsīdās. For example, Sūrdās stayed at the hut of Tulsīdās for seven days and had discussions with him on the nature of truth (*satsaṅg*).²⁷ On the other hand, the court poet Gaṅg (sixteenth to seventeenth century) was cursed by Tulsīdās, because, Gaṅg said, “one who wears a wood garland is a fake devotee”²⁸, for which Tulsīdās cursed him angrily. An elephant sent by Tulsīdās sprang on him, and his body was broken, while, according to folktales, he is thought to have opposed the act of cruelty conducted by Jahangīr (1569–1627), for which he was crushed by elephant by the order of emperor.²⁹

According to the text, Tulsīdās brought dead people to life, turned a woman into a man, and made the poor rich. However, the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* also describes his heartlessness. When one person, Kamalabhav, begs Tulsīdās to let him meet Rāma, Tulsīdās tells him to jump on the top of the trident (*triśūl*). Kamalabhav does not have the courage to do so, but a brave of the west (*pachāīm bīra eka*) does, and Rāma is manifested to him.³⁰ Effectively, Tulsīdās drove a pious person to suicide. Thus, he saved people, but he also sent people to their deaths.

By what criteria does Beṅī Mādhav Dās use to determine when to portray Tulsīdās as gentle or as cold? A king of Delhi who had imprisoned Tulsīdās was punished by Hanumān when Tulsīdās implored.³¹ Here, the phrase “a king of Delhi” most likely refers to a Mughal emperor, and Tulsīdās seems to have opposed the Mughals. However, the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* presents another episode in

27 *MGC, dohā* 29–31.

28 *MGC, dohā* 91.

29 *MGC, dohā* 92: “chamā kiye nahīm srāpadiya, raṅge sānti rasa raṅga. mārga meṁ hāthī kiyo, jhapaṭī gaṅgatana bhaṅga” ([Tulsīdās], who is dyed in the color of sānti rasa, cursed Gaṅg without mercy. An elephant sprang on him in the road, and his body was broken). On the tale of Gaṅg and the elephant, see Busch 2011: 137.

30 *MGC, dohā* 113–115.

31 Priyādās describes in detail the anecdote of Tulsī's imprisonment by the king of Delhi, but this episode is described only briefly in the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*. According to Wilson 1846: 41, the king of Delhi is Shahjahan.

which Tulsīdās willingly meets with Emperor Jahangir. Jahangir's Muslim faith apparently does not matter for Tulsīdās. The reason for such a favourable portrayal might be due to the common understanding in India that Jahangir provided justice. It is interesting that Tulsīdās complained to Jahangir that one Bīrbal had knowledge but did not worship Hari.³² This Bīrbal was probably an adviser at Akbar's court who is often depicted in modern folk tales as a cunning minister.

This ambiguity in behaviour and close interaction with the famous Hindi poets of the time has become part of Tulsīdās's canonisation. For the pious attitude of his followers, those who seek in him shelter, Tulsīdās performs miracles. Yet Beṇī Mādhav Dās intends to show Tulsīdās as a sincere inquirer of devotion by showing no leniency to arrogant Hindu believers. Tulsīdās's uncompromising attitude is directed not only at the Hindus but also on occasion at the Muslim authorities, despite their power. Tulsīdās's criteria of to whom he shows mercy or disdain seem to reflect the modern Indian view on those figures, although the author claims himself to be a direct disciple of Tulsīdās.

Conclusion

Beṇī Mādhav Dās referred to all the stories described in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, so he probably wrote the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* after he saw Priyādās's work; as such, the production date of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* must be later than the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (dated 1712). The respect for people in the lower castes and concern for the vulnerable that are found in this text also sound more modern than the date of composition would suggest.³³ Arrogant brahmins and rājapūts who did not respect Tulsīdās or who were not sincere devotees were punished mercilessly, while kāyasths who respected him and weavers who had good relationships with him became wealthy.³⁴ These stories emphasise that Tulsīdās did not have any prejudice based on caste. In the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* of Priyādās, the husband who is revived by Tulsīdās is a brahmin, but the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* changes his caste to a wine peddler (*kalār*).³⁵ The change of caste of the saved person reflects the recognition that the target readership for Tulsīdās's biography had become broader. The protection of women's rights is also reflected in the increased number of

32 Tulsīdās expresses his regret that "buddhi pāi nahim hari bhaje" (having gained power, he does not worship Hari). See *MGC, dohā* 98.

33 Hawley 1997: 107–134 investigates Hindu hagiographies in earlier centuries compared with the *Amar citr kathā*, the popular comic series of the twentieth century which seeks to spread religion to the masses. He points out that authors of hagiographies try to satisfy the conflicting demands of all faiths and sects in their depictions.

34 *MGC, dohā* 69, *sorthā* 19.

35 *MGC, dohā* 84.

saved women and in portraying Tulsīdās as an admirer of his own wife.³⁶ One of the reasons behind this might be to deflect criticism regarding the controversial line in the *Rāmacaritamānas* that “ḍhola gavāra sudra pasu nārī. sakala tāḍanā ke adhikārī” (drums, illiterate people, *śudra*, animals, and women should be beaten)³⁷. To counteract criticism of this line, the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* makes Tulsīdās save more people of lower castes and pay more respect to women with his miracles than in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. However, this tendency is not seen in the *Bhaktamāl* at all.

The ultimate remedy against criticism might be this line in the *Bhaktamāl*: “ika akṣara uddharai brahmahatyādi kari jina hota pārāyana” (A single letter would work the salvation of one who had even committed the murder of a Brāhmaṇa).³⁸ However, the salvation from *brahmahatyā* (a murderer of a brahmin) is modified into another story where a brahmin who has committed murder is forgiven in the name of Rāma, and this interpretation is adopted in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* and the *Mūl Gosāi Carit*. Changing the eligibility for salvation from brahmin-murderers to murderers who are brahmin would mean something completely different from what Nābhādās intended in *Bhaktamāl*.

Needless to say, the apparent reason behind the change in the character of Tulsīdās from a seeker of bhakti to a great poet-saint who performs miracles is that the authors wish to make Tulsīdās into an unparalleled saint. People needed such stories that were easy to accept, as Lutgendorf (1994) points out: if the authors gathered some stories from storytelling Vyāses, they may have created stories to please audiences of different castes. In many stories, people were granted wealth by Tulsīdās, who himself rejected wealth. This has the ironic result of creating an image of a miraculous saint that is more secular than sacred. The image of a miracle-working saint who responds to people’s needs is popular, but it is far from the image of Tulsīdās given by Nābhādās, for that figure was not a giver of worldly benefit but one who “supplied a boat for the easy passage of the boundless ocean of existence” (*saṁsāra apāra ke pāra sugama rūpa naukā liyo*)³⁹, as Nābhādās wrote. In other words, the benefit was to be found in the next life.

36 On Tulsīdās’s attitude towards women, see Hill 1952: xxxvii.

37 *Rāmacaritamānas* (5.59.6).

38 For the original text of the *Mūl Gosāi Carit* and an English translation, see Growse 1883: iv-v.

39 *Ibid*.

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