Raman Sinha

3. Iconography of Tulsīdās

Abstract. This paper addresses a lacuna in current scholarship on how iconography has perceived the saint–poet Tulsīdās over the years. This question is important for the cultural historiography of North India, and also for understanding, in general, how historical figures acquire iconic status by fulfilling different purposes for different ages. The representation of Tulsīdās in paintings, illustrations, murals, sculpture, and other visual art forms provides some clues in determining whether he was perceived as a poet first who achieved sainthood later or was from the very beginning seen as a saint or a Vaishnava saint in particular. The portrayal of Tulsīdās in literary chronicles and hagiographical literature projects him as a saintly, charismatic demigod–like figure who only later acquired human form. It is safe to speculate that as his magnum opus *Rāmcaritmānas* acquired divine or religious status over time, he too became subsequently to be seen as divine. It was only very late in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century, when *Rāmcaritmānas* started to be treated as a literary text, that Tulsīdās began to be considered a poet or a littérateur.

Keywords. Iconography, Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas*, Miniature painting, Illustrated manuscripts.

In Indian tradition a poet is generally considered to be a seer or a person with divine vision—it is by experiencing the divine that man becomes a *ṛṣi* (seer) or a *kavi* (poet). In his *ādikāvya* (the first poem) Vālmīki describes his creative process:

> Valmiki utters the primal metrical line when he witnesses an act of violence in the forest. He then has a vision of the god Brahma, the ultimate repository of the Sanskrit tradition, and sinks into meditation. Gaining knowledge of Rama's 'full story, public and private' he renders it as Kavya by means of the meter and 'elegant speech' just produced through Brahma's will.[1]

It is no coincidence that Nābhādās considers Tulsīdās to be a reincarnation of Vālmīki for the redemption of mankind in this perverse *kaliyuga* (age of strife).[2] In premodern times, Tulsīdās was well-known, since biographical works of the poet were plentiful, and he was largely perceived and accepted as a devotee of Rāma

1 Quoted in Pollock (2007), p. 77.

2 कलि कुटिल जीव निस्तार हित, बाल्मीक ''तुलसी'' भयौ। त्रेता काब्य निबंध करिवसत कोटि रमायन। इक अक्षर उद्धरै ब्रह्महत्यादि परायन॥ Prasad (2009 [1910]), p. 756.

and a seer-poet almost unequivocally.[3] Even if we leave aside these biographies and survey how he was perceived in visual media, our conclusions would not be very different.

Tulsīdās in visual media

From the seventeenth century onwards, the portrayal of Tulsīdās in visual media was largely uniform and indeed quite similar to oral portrayals. The first portrait that has survived is considered to date to around 1608 CE (Fig. 3.1). It is claimed this portrait was made in the house of Pundit Gangaram Joshi of Prahalad Ghat, where Tulsīdās was supposedly staying at the time recovering from a serious illness.

Ranchorlal Vyas, who claims lineage to pundit Gangaram Joshi, published a monograph on Tulsīdās in 1915 in which he also incorporated this painting in monochrome. According to Vyas, the portrait was made by an artist from Jaipur under the tutelage of Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627). The artist asserted his copyright on this painting since, according to him, it was registered under his name. Later, it would be widely edited, beautified, copied, revised, and circulated. Kāśī Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā first enlarged it, had the 'anemic appearance' of its subject corrected by specialist artists and published it in *Tulsī Granthāvalī* (the collected works of Tulsīdās) in 1923. However, a statement in the third volume of *Tulsī Granthāvalī* says that the published portrait was brought from the noted art collector and connoisseur Rai Krishna Das later. Gyanmandal Karyalaya published it in monochrome and the editors of the reputed Hindi magazine *Madhuri* published it in colour. According to the collector Rai Krishna Das, this is one of the two oldest paintings of Tulsīdās. The other one, he explained, is in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan in Kashi. He emphasized the fact that the style of building shown in the Prahlad Ghat Portrait doesn't seem so old; that the architectural style developed much later after the rule of Mohammad Shah (1719–1748).[4] A more important painting of Tulsīdās is Sankata Ghat Portrait (Fig. 3.2).

This painting belongs to the family of the mahant Radhavallabha Sharan of Sankata Ghat in Varanasi and according to him, as reported by Vishwanathprasad Mishra, it has been in their family's custody since Shahjahan's time (1628–1658). Radhavallabha ji also emphasized that Rai Krishna Das had taken the portrait to him for supposedly closer scrutiny; in fact, he got it copied after reworking it—

3 See *Tulsī Carit* of Raghubardās; *Mūl Gosāīṁ Carit* of Benīmādhav Dās; Tulsī Sāhib's *Ātmacaritr*. See also hagiographical works like *Bhaktamāl* or its commentary of Priyādās, or the comments of Vaiṣṇavdās or Nāgrīdās in *Padprasaṅg Mālā* and *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇāvan kī Vārtā*.

4 Quoted in Mishra (1965), p. 314.

Figure 3.1 Tulsīdās: A young Vaishnava Saint. Prahlad Ghat, Varanasi. Courtesy *Gosain Tulsidas* by Viswanathprasad Mishra.

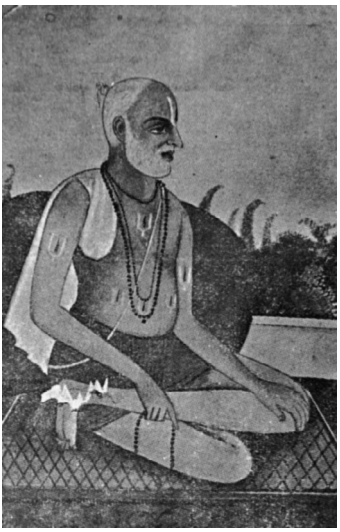

Figure 3.2 Tulsīdās: An old Vaishnava Saint. Sankata Ghat, Varanasi. Courtesy *Gosain Tulsidas* by Viswanathprasad Mishra.

Tulsīdās's beard was shaved and the setting was changed by the famous painter of Mughal tradition, Ustad Ram Prasad. There is also a painting of Tulsīdās in the Mayashankar Yagyik collection, in which he is portrayed as a typical Vaishnava saint. One of the five obligations (*pāñcasaṃskāra*) of a Vaishnava, as set out in the *Padma Purāṇa*, is to bear ornamental tilak (sectarian marks) on twelve prescribed parts of the body. In this painting of Tulsīdās, all but one of these tilak are prominently displayed—one, on the right abdomen, is hidden due to his posture in profile. It is evident that the painter wanted to emphasize Tulsīdās's Vaishnava identity very prominently. As Vishwanathprasad Mishra speculated, it seems that there were two original pictures of Tulsīdās—one in middle and one in old age.[5] The first tradition of iconography is based on the painting in the Kishangarh collection (Fig. 3.3) in which Tulsīdās is portrayed as a middle-aged Vaishnava saint with long hair and beard, tilak, sacred thread, *kaṇṭhī* mala (necklaces/rosary worn by Vaishnava), and *sumaranī* (meditating beads).

The originating painting of the second tradition of iconography is SGP (*Sankata Ghat Portrait*, Fig. 3.2), in which Tulsīdās is depicted as an old saint with white beard bearing all Vaishnava identity marks. But there is also a third tradition in which Tulsīdās is portrayed as old and clean-shaven, as in the golden-syllable

5 Mishra (1965), p. 314.

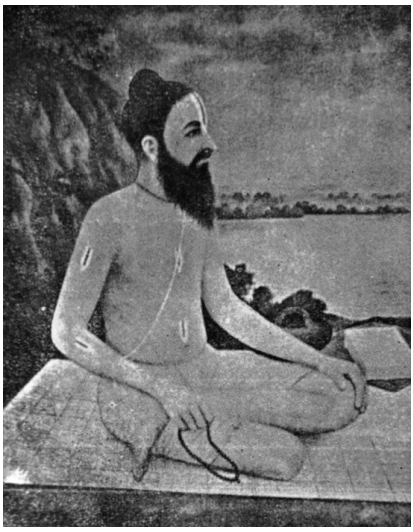

Figure 3.3 Young Tulsīdās. Museum of Kishangarh King. Courtesy *Gosain Tulsidas* by Viswanathprasad Mishra.

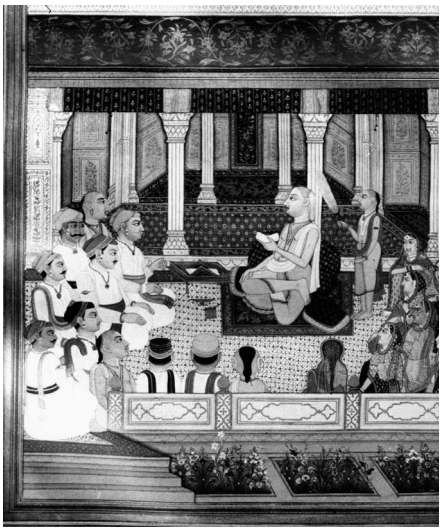

Figure 3.4 Tulsīdās reciting *Rāmcaritmānas* in an audience. *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Late Mughal. American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon, Haryana, India.

Rāmāyaṇa (*Svarnākṣarī Rāmāyaṇa*) of Ramnagar, Varanasi. This illustrated manuscript was commissioned by the then king of Kashi, Sri Udit Narayan Singh (1783–1835). It took eight years (1796–1804) to complete and was valued at around one lakh and sixty thousand rupees. Tulsīdās is portrayed in the manuscript as quite old and clean-shaven. He appears quite frequently in this manuscript and here (Fig. 3.4) is satin padmasana (lotus posture) with *kaṇṭhī* mala reciting his *Rāmcaritmānas* in front of a well-to-do gathering.

The artist of this manuscript, Sri Ramcharan, appears to be trained in Mughal miniature painting. Ananda Coomaraswamy has categorized it as 'Mughal influenced post-Rajput miniature painting. Later this style was called 'Popular Mughal style.'[6]

Another painted manuscript of *Rāmcaritmānas* was commissioned by Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II (1835–1880) of Jaipur and again Tulsīdās is portrayed prominently. There are 134 original paintings created between 1857 to 1864 for this manuscript. The final miniature of this manuscript is a depiction of Tulsīdās himself (Fig. 3.5) seated on a throne reciting his magnum opus to a group of his fellow devotees, sitting on the floor. Here Tulsīdās is depicted with beard and long hair, like his devotees around him.

6 Coomaraswamy (1976), p. 1.

Figure 3.5 Tulsīdās with his disciples. *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Pahari, Mughal Art Network.

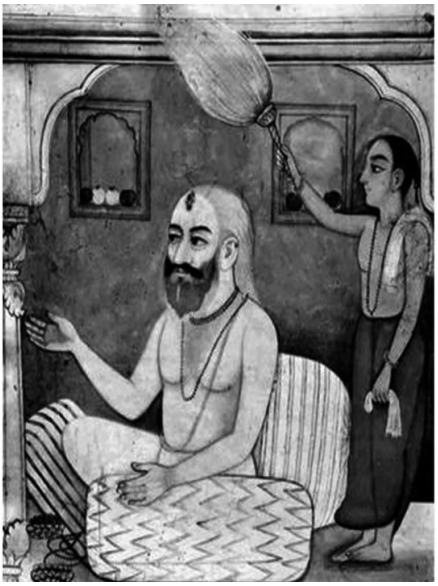

Figure 3.6 Tulsīdās with a disciple. Hanuman Temple, Tulsi Ghat, Varanasi, U.P. India.

Other portraits of Tulsīdās exist, such as the *Tulsi Ghat Portrait*, which was once considered to be very old and discovered late and, if we are to believe Rai Krishna Das, was 'done by a modern artist and totally artificial.'[7] This is the only portrait of Tulsīdās that is not in profile and has some resemblance in style with Sikh art (Fig. 3.6).

Another portrait of Tulsīdās is worth mentioning here, first published in London and later circulated in India. The fauna and flora, and the posture and age of Tulsīdās, portrayed in this picture is very similar to the Kashi Ghat Collection. Features in this painting—the *kamaṇḍal* (water-pot), sacred threads, hair and beard style, glance perspective, riverbank—all suggest that either this or the paintings already discussed are copies of the other. Another portrait, which first appeared in the *Tulsī Rāmāyaṇa* published by Khadagvilash Press, Bankipur, in 1889 CE, is credited as having been discovered by Dr George Abraham Grierson (1851–1941). This is the only portrait where Tulsīdās is depicted sitting in *vajrāsana*, a yogic sitting posture. The oil painting in the Rai Krishna Das collection (Fig. 3.7) has become over the years the most popular and considered authentic, though Rai Krishna Das never revealed its source. It seems that it was a reworking of an older picture and later on this painting was itself retouched, reconstructed, and reworked in various ways.

7 Quoted in Mishra (1965), p. 315.

Figure 3.7 Tulsīdās on the river bank I. Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, Varanasi, U.P. India.

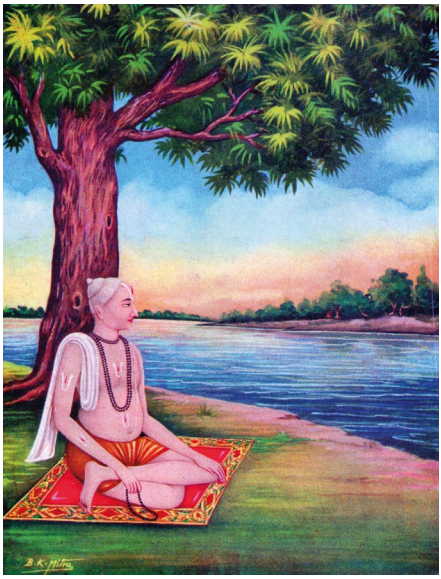

Figure 3.8 Tulsīdās on the river bank II. Gita Press, Gorakhpur, U.P. India.

In issuing a commemorative stamp of Tulsīdās, the Indian post office adopted this portrait as its only source.[8]

The picture that appears in the Gita Press publication on Tulsīdās (Fig. 3.8) is also largely based on this portrait.[9]

It can be easily observed that the Gita Press artist, B. K. Mitra, had simply reformulated the Rai Krishna Das collection portrait in such a way to make it more 'real' and so consequently more 'popular' for commercial consumption. It can be considered a measure of success of this reworking that most of publications since have used it as the most standard iconography of Tulsīdās. Gita Press has standardized and to some extant deified the icon of Tulsīdās in all its publications. Later statues of Tulsīdās installed in Hindu temples further made him more like a deity than a poet.

8 The stamp was issued on 1 October 1952. It was one of the stamps in the first emissions printed by photogravure in India and thus an important landmark in the evolution of Indian philately. Biographical sketches portrayed on the stamps, along with accompanying couplets from each, are given in the following pages. Vertical in design and measuring 1.6' x 0.95', the stamps are printed on all-over five-pointed multiple-star watermark paper; perforation 14: Set 160.
See <www.indianpost.com/viewstamp.php/Issue%20Date/year/1952/TULSIDAS>.
(Accessed 30 October 2018).

9 Gita Press has started using portraits of Tulsīdās for its publication in a big way after its hugely popular 1938 *Manas Ank* of Kalyan.

3. Iconography of Tulsīdās

The Satya Narayan Tulsi Manas Mandir was built in Varanasi in 1964 as a memorial to Tulsīdās and is a landmark in this regard since we hardly find any temple commemorating a poet or poetry in general. This magnificent temple not only houses a marble statue of Tulsīdās and a *jhanki* (tableau) of wooden figures depicting scenes from his life. It also features engravings on the walls; frescos and the full text of the Kashiraj edition of *Rāmcaritmānas*. The marble statue depicts Tulsīdās in *abhaymudrā* (fearless posture). The tableau, which shows him continuously reciting *Rāmcaritmānas*, is another example of perception of him as a saint-poet.

Another temple in which Tulsīdās is prominently displayed is Manas Mandir in Tulsi Peeth Seva Nyas, a religious and social service institution based at Janki Kund, Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh. Tulsi Peeth was established by Guruji Rambhadracharya on 2 August (Tulsi Jayanti Day) in 1987. The white-marble Manas Mandir temple, constructed in 2008, is situated at the entrance to the site, which incorporates several buildings and has a statue of saint Tulsīdās in the centre. There is another, larger-than-life-size, statue of Tulsīdās inside the temple and three-dimensional paintings depicting different episodes of the *Rāmcaritmānas* inscribed on the walls. In 2011 the Manas Darshan, an exhibition of moving models showing various scenes from the *Rāmcaritmānas*, was opened to the public and the statues of the poet unveiled.

Statues are very common for popular iconography but require some kind of likeness with the subject since it is an art form that is essentially realist in nature. Statuary presupposes a kind of eminence of the subject and its location of installation is also crucial to understand its areas of influence. Statues of Tulsīdās are installed in Hindu temples and are made of marble, stone, wood, clay, and so forth. These statues, like his paintings, do not resemble each other in their outer physical appearance but what is common among them is their saintly persona and non-materialistic ambience.

Just as the figurative aspect of the painting lost its centrality in modern portraiture, Tulsīdās began appearing in a very subjective way. In 1925 Abdur Rahman Chugtai (1897–1975) conceived Tulsīdās (Fig. 3.9) in a way that is very similar to the portraits of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, usually chiselled by the artists of the Bengal School. Chugtai was at the time very much influenced by the work of Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) and this work testifies it.

Another example of the modern depiction of Tulsīdās can be found in the murals of Shantiniketan by Binod Bihari Mukherjee (1904–1980). The mural *Life of the Medieval Saints* (Fig. 3.10) is considered to be one of the largest murals of contemporary India painted using the buon fresco technique. It was executed on three walls of the Hindi Bhavan of Visva-Bharati in Shantiniketan between December 1946 and April 1947.

Figure 3.9 Tulsīdās in trance. Chughtai Museum, Lahore, Pakistan.

Figure 3.10 Tulsīdās in Manikarnika Ghat. *Life of the Medieval Saints*, West Wall of Hindi Bhavan, Shantiniketan.

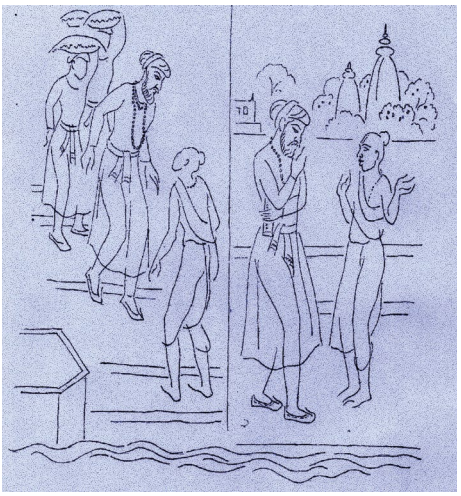

Figure 3.11 Tulsīdās with Rahīm. *Tulsidas: Hebbar's Narration in Lines*.

Gulammohammed Sheikh observes:

> The western wall is full of action with a dramatic image of Tulsidas in dialogue with an enigmatic character, probably Narhariyananad. The towering image of the Goswami stands in a performative gesture of supplication to an equally tall man holding a serpentine staff in one hand and gesticulating in animated exclamation with the other. . ..The Rising flames between the two protagonists indicate the location of Manikarnika ghat by the holy Ganga where the devout desire to die. A panorama of the busy Banaras Ghats surrounds the two. On the left, in a conglomeration of houses and shops, a daily drama unfolds; imbued with the rituals of death. . . . The compatibility of life with the ritual of death enmeshed in a philosophical underlayer is represented with a degree of dispassionate engagement. Or are we being led to follow the sadhu's view of samsara (world of mortals)?[10]

Whatever the case may be, it is certain that Tulsīdās is not treated here like the earlier iconography of him as someone concentrating silently on the isolated bank of Ganga or Saryu, away from the hustle and bustle of the everyday life. Rather, he is shown very much in the midst of events and historical time.

Another example of modern treatment is K. K. Hebbar's rendering, in which Tulsīdās's life story is illustrated without any 'larger than life approach.' He is depicted in two scenes in the reproduced plate (Fig. 3.11) firstly it seems in the background of plague-ridden neighbourhood leaving, he is making his point clear

10 Sheikh (2007), date and page number not mentioned.

to Rahīm and secondly thus refusing Akbar's invitation to grace his court in such trying situation to Rahīm. Hebbar made explicit his desire to illustrate the saint's life in 'simple lines,'[11] and his renderings illustrate how a poet struggles and overcomes various kinds of hurdles in life to achieve greatness.

Tulsīdās in verbal media

There are three dramatic episodes that are said to have occurred in Tulsīdās's life that have attracted the most vivid depictions among iconographers. The first episode relates to his wife Ratnāvalī, the second his encounter with the emperor, and in the third, the Lord Śiva himself hails *Rāmcaritmānas* above the Vedas and Puranas. All three episodes may have first appeared in the *Bhaktamāl* commentary of Priyādās (1712)[12] and later, as Mataprasad Gupta believes, incorporated in Bhavānīdās's *Gosāīṁ Carit* and Benīmādhav Dās's *Mūl Gosāīṁ Carit*.[13]

The question of fact or fiction aside, these episodes have great potentiality for dramatic impact—no wonder they constitute the most poignant material for any narrative of Tulsīdās in any form. In his commentary, Priyādās describes the first dramatic episode thus:

> He (Tulsidas) had great love for his wife. Without asking his leave, she went to her father's home, and he forgot all about himself, and hastened there too. She was greatly ashamed, and went away in anger, saying, 'Have you no love for Rama? My body is but a framework of skin and bone.' When he heard these words it was as it were the day break; he felt compunction and left her and went to the city of Kashi.[14]

This story became so convincing over the years that no narrative of Tulsīdās—comic book, film, play, painting, novel, or poem—is considered authentic without incorporating it in some way.

11 Hebbar (1989), in the acknowledgements.
12 Prasad (2009 [1910]).
13 Gupta (2002), p. 78.
14 Cited in Gopal (1977), p. 113.

Tulsīdās in performative media

Poems about Tulsīdās have been very popular in classical, folk and popular music over the years; but adopting his life or episodes from his life as subject matter in a form like *viraha* is a new phenomenon. Ramkripal Yadav's *Wife's Taunts Enlighten the Husband*, a music album of *viraha*, is one such example of a performative narrative that is structured effectively on the first dramatic episode in Tulsīdās's life. Priyadās's version of the second episode, *The Emperor Visits Tulsidas*, goes like this:

> The Emperor of Delhi sent an offer to fetch him. . . they spoke so courteously that he agreed and went. He arrived before the king, who received him with honour, gave him an exalted seat, and said in gracious tone: 'Let me see a miracle; it is noised throughout the world that you are master of everything.' He said: 'It is false; know that Rama is all in all.' 'How is Rama to be seen?' he said, and threw him into prison. He prayed within himself: 'O gracious Hanumana, have pity upon me.' That very moment thousands upon thousands of sturdy monkeys spread all over the place, clawing bodies, and tearing clothes, and great was the alarm. They broke open the fort, wounding the men, destroying everything; where could one fly for safety? It seemed as though the end of the world had come. Then his eyes were open by this taste of a sea of calamities, and the king cried, 'Now I wager all my treasure; it is he only who can save me.' The king came and clasped his feet: 'If you give me life, I live: pray speak to them,' he told the king, 'Better watch the miracle a little.' The king was overwhelmed with confusion. Then he stopped it all and said to the king: 'Quickly abandon this spot; for, it is the abode of Rama.' So the king quitted the place and went and built a new fort, and to this day anyone who abides there falls ill and dies.[15]

The same episode is described in Dās's *Mūl Gosāīṁ Carit*:

> The king of Delhi requested the sage to show a miracle. Tulsi refused to oblige and was put in jail. The monkeys of Hanuman now assembled in the palace. They tore the clothes of the queens who were now exposed. They threw the king on the ground. There was terror in the palace. The saint was now released. The king asked for forgiveness. And Tulsi was sent away, with all honours, in a palanquin.[16]

Over the years, this episode has unfailingly caught the imagination of painters, film directors, comic book writers, and others.

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15 Quoted in Gopal (1977), pp. 114–115 (trans. Growse 1887).

16 दिल्लीपति बिनती करे दिखरावहु करमात । मुकरी गए बंदी किए कीन्हे कपि उतपात ॥
बेगम को पट फारेऊ नगन भई सब बाम । हाहाकार मच्यौ महल पटको नृपहिं धड़ाम ॥
मुनिहि मुकुत ततछन किए क्षमाऽपराध कराय । विदा कीन्ह सनमान जुत पीनस पै पधराय ॥
Quoted in Gupta (2002), pp. 63–64.

Particularly in comic books, the narratives are more or less authoritative in nature as compared to novels and fiction in general. Comic books present their subjects as true stories—multiplicities of voice are not encouraged. For example, Amar Chitra Katha and Wilco both present this second dramatic episode in Tulsīdās's life in a way that is supposed to be convincing for readers. Selecting from a plethora of earlier tales, legends, and stories, they arrange the material to suit the 'taste' of their reading public.[17]

In the twentieth century, depictions of Tulsīdās moved from static, two-dimensional forms to a dynamic interpretation of his life through film and performance. Most narratives of Tulsīdās's life have been adapted from premodern hagiographical works such as the *Gautam Candrikā* or the *Mūl Gosāīṁ Carit*. The *Gautam Candrikā* describes Tulsīdās's persona and daily routine thus:

> Tulasi (sic) would get up very early in the morning and spend some time singing songs, giving discourses or writing. He would then bathe in the Ganga, do Sandhya and, with a composed mind, as laid down, offer prayers. After this, he would offer water to those who deserved it and arghya (offering of water, flowers and uncooked rice) to the sun. With due ceremonies, he would offer leaves of bel tree to Vishwanath, tulasi leaves to Bindumadhav. Afterwards, he would enter the cave of Hanumana and offer fruits to gods. Then Tulasi would recite the whole of *Adhyatma Ramayana* and eat what others gave him, or what he got by begging. He would put on the ochre-coloured clothes. He had a tuft of hair, the sacred thread and a rosary.[18]

There are five biopic films in Hindi on the life of Tulsīdās—made in 1939, 1954, 1964, 1972, and 2013. Others have been made in other Indian languages like Marathi (1939), Bangla (1950), Gujarati (1972), and Telugu (2012).

The first biopic film, *Sant Tulsidas*,[19] is made in the tradition of devotional melodrama. This is one of the founding genres of Indian cinema and, as film critic Rachel Dwyer points out, 'the devotional films are often set outside brahmanical religion or question some aspect of it, and celebrate the introduction of vernacular language into worship.'[20] The dramatic pivot of the film revolves around Tulsīdās's realization of his life's vocation after being scolded by his wife amidst howling winds and a river flood. This is the turning point in his life and it caught the imagination of film-makers thereafter. He becomes an ascetic and settles down

17 See Pai (1977) and *Tulsidas* (2011).

18 Gopal (1977), appendix ii, p. 73.

19 Produced by Jayant Movietone and directed by Jayant Desai, with music by Gyan Dutt and Vishnupant Pagnis, cinematography by Krishna Gopal, and dialogue by Pundit Indra, this film was released in Hindi and Marathi simultaneously in 1939. Songs were sung by Vasanti and Ram Marathe, who also acted in the film. The lead actors were Vishnupant Pagnis (who played Tulsīdās), Leela Chitnis (Ratnāvalī), and Keshavrao Date (Baṭeśvar Śāstrī).

20 Dwyer (2007), p. 65.

in Benares where his magnum opus *Rāmcaritmānas* outrages the Brahminical clergy, until that point sole proprietors of the wisdom of Sanskrit texts.

A second film, *Tulsidas*,[21] was released in 1954. This critically acclaimed film[22] was technically much superior to first film. Its music compositions were a noted high, especially casting songs sung by Mohammad Rafi and songs like 'Kahan Chhupe Ho Raja Ram,' 'Hey Mahadev Meri Laaj Rahe,' and so on. The third dramatic episode of Tulsīdās's life—Śiva's hailing of *Rāmcaritmānas*—was vividly highlighted in this film.

Next came *Goswami Tulsidas*, released in 1964.[23] This film was largely in the style of films with a mythological theme; Tulsīdās is portrayed reciting Sanskrit verses about Rāma, inviting the wrath of *kaliyuga*, who instructs Kāmadeva to incite him with lust so that he abandons his vocation, marries Ratnāvalī, and devotes all his time to her. The film, however, fails to authentically make its point as its narrative was dependent on so many 'suspension of disbelief.'

Eight years later, a fourth biopic appeared. *Sant Tulsidas*[24] was made, supposedly, only for believers since Tulsīdās interacts with Śiva, Hanumān, and other mythical characters and at the same time transcends historical timelines and talks with saints like Kabīr with equal ease. This film was released in Hindi and Gujarati simultaneously in 1972.

The latest film on Tulsīdās is *Goswami Tulsidas*, released in 2013.[25] This film is more realistic in tone and far more technically superior than all earlier films. The traditional episodes of Tulsīdās's life are presented in such a way that the contemporary viewer may empathize with the poet in his distress and sublimation.

Beyond film, Tulsīdās is presented in other performative arts such as television series and theatre. One episode of the Indian TV series *Upanishad Ganga* titled 'Glory of Human Birth' depicts Tulsīdās in a much more undeified form.[26] Shekhar Sen wrote, composed, directed, and acted in *Goswami Tulsidas*, a mono-act

21 Produced by Ratnadeep Pictures and directed by Bhalchandra Shukla and Harsukh Bhatt, with music by Chandra Gupta and lyrics by Gopal Singh Nepali; the cast included Mahipal, Shyama, Raj Kumar, Dulari, Sunder, Ramesh Sinha, and Uma Dutt.

22 Dwyer (2007), p. 86.

23 Directed by B. K. Adarsh, music direction by S. N. Tripathi, screenplay by Adarsh, and dialogue by Naval Mathur and B. D. Mishra. Leading roles were played by Shahu Modak, P. Kailash, Tuntun, and Jaymala.

24 Directed and produced by Pundit Bhalchandra. Cast includes Rekha Chauhan, Dalpat, Vijay Dutt, Shahu Modak, and B. M. Vyas.

25 Produced by Matcha Srinivasa Rao, screenplay and direction by Allani Sreedhar. The lyrics and dialogues are written by D. K. Goel and the music composed by Shashi Preetam. 'Goswami Tulsidas' is played by actor Sunil Sharma, with Pooja Baluti playing Ratnāvalī and Vindu Dara Singh playing Hanumān.

26 This twenty-third episode of the series was directed by Chandraprakash Dwivedi and produced by Chinmay Mission, broadcast on DD National in 2012.

musical play depicting the entire life sketch of the poet using mostly his work. The play begins asTulsīdās arrives on earth for a day and tells his story. It's a story of how an orphan beggar boy becomes the greatest poet in India. Shekhar Sen presents Tulsīdās as a social reformer who rebels against the exploitation of poor and ignorant people by the Sanskrit-literate priestly class and writes the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a local language. This 120-minute-long drama was presented in fifty-two musical parts. These musical parts were not mere accompaniment—they were the very structure of the play. The play was presented in 1998 on the eve of 501st anniversary of the poet's birth.

The iconography of Tulsīdās in narrative forms differs from its non-narrative forms. Portraits are like snapshots; narrative presupposes a story. The story of Tulsīdās has been told in verbal media like biography, *vārtā* (written hagiography), novels, and poems and also in visual media like film, theatre, TV series, paintings, sketches, comic books, and so on. These narratives can be classified further into two categories—premodern and modern—based on their treatment of the subject and the timeline. Most hagiographical and biographical works treat Tulsīdās as having some kind of supernatural power and this is the main characteristic of premodern iconography. In contrast, some modern renderings of Tulsīdās insist upon his human aspects in a realistic form; films like *Tulsidas*, Sen's solo play *Goswami Tulsidas*, Dwivedi's *Upanishad Ganga* episode, and Yadav's *viraha*. Not covered in this chapter, we may add to this list two novels—Amritlal Nagar's *Manas ka Hans* and Rangeya Raghav's *Ratna ki Baat*—and Nirala's long poem *Tulsidas*. All these works portray Tulsīdās as a creative person who evolves through his hardships in life. Despite this contrast in interpretation, modern presentations have continued premodern tendencies to *mythicize* this subject, as it is said, 'more the things change, the more they remain same!'

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