

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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TUTSIDAS

Tulsidas (1532?-1623 CE) was the author of the most popular version of the Rama story in north India. *Tulsi* is the Hindi word for the basil plant, which is considered sacred to worshippers of Visnu (and Rama). *Das* means 'servant' or 'slave.' Although we lack reliable information on his life, it is thought that he wrote eleven poetic texts in Hindi or in the eastern dialect of Awadhi), all in praise of Visnu, his avatars, Rama and Krishna, and his devotee the monkey Hanuman. As a Vaishnavite, who believed in the doctrine of a supreme god with qualities (*saguna*), he worshipped Visnu in the form of the man-god Rama. The end of life, as for most Hindus, is *moksa*, or liberation from the cycle of life and birth. But this bliss is understood not as total absorption in god (as it is for some Hindus) but in union with god.

The poet's undisputed crowning achievement is the *Ramcharitmanas*, which tells the story of Rama and which he composed in the 1570s. It is believed that he married at a young age and had a son. After his wife returned to her family home, Tulsi Das began his life as a wandering poet. For some time, he stayed in Ayodhya (legendary birthplace of Rama) before moving to Benares, where he died. The only extant text in his handwriting and signature is an arbitration document dated 1612, which concerns a land dispute between his friend and another landowner.