

THE RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF

TULSĪ DĀS

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By

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A study of religious views of Tulsī Dās, as expressed
in the Rāmcaritmānas, compared with those Vālmīki, as expressed
in the Rāmāyana.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the various reasons that led Tulsī Dās, one of the most renowned Hindi poets to "declare at length that which is told in the Rāmāyana".¹ This evaluation will be attempted with close reference to Tulsī Dās' religious views, which form the general background of the Rāmcaritmānas.

This study will pay a particular attention to the concept of dharma, which played a central role in the Rāmāyana of Vālmīki.² Since the importance of bhakti emerges conspicuously in the Rāmcaritmānas, frequent rapprochements between this concept and that of dharma will be necessary.

Etymologically, the word bhakti is derived from bhaj, to share, to participate in. The Śāṇḍilya-sutra defines it as a deep attachment to God.³ Likewise, the Nārada calls it deep love of God.⁴ For the Bhāgavata, bhakti consists of the uninterrupted presence of the individual mind in God.⁵ Rāmānuja defines it as the contemplation of God accompanied by love.⁶ The Practical Sanskrit Dictionary of Macdonnell defines it as attachment, devotion, homage, honour, respect, worship, faith. Bhakti may therefore be described as loving attachment to God and the expression thereof.

¹The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma, translated by W.O.P. Hill, Oxford University Press, 1952, Śloka 1, p. 2.

²Khan, Dr. Benjamin, The Concept of Dharma in Vālmīki Rāmāyana, Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, Delhi, 1965.

³Śāṇḍilya-sutra, 2.

⁴Nārada Bhakti Sūtram, 2.

⁵Bhāgavatam, 3/26.

⁶Gitāyām Jāmānuja Bhāṣyam, 7/1.

Dharma is derived from dhr which means to hold together, to support, to uphold. In the Vaiśeṣika system, dharma is defined as "knowledge prominently directed to the achievement of desired happiness here and hereafter by means of appropriate actions".⁷ In the Mahābhārata, it is called "that principle which is capable of preserving the world".⁸ After explaining that dharma is that which holds a thing together in the sense that it is its characteristic function or its essential nature, Dr. Bhagwandas defines it as the law of the being of a thing. In its widest sense, it is the law of the universe which not only holds material parts together but binds men together through mutual rights and duties. He sums up his thought in the following brief definition: "Dharma is characteristic property scientifically, Duty, morally and legally".⁹ Elaborating on the moral and legal aspects of dharma, Dr. Benjamin Khan defines it as:

- i) the fixed position of duty and, at the same time, right;
- ii) all religious observances;
- iii) the secular laws of community, caste and state;
- iv) conventions and usages.¹⁰

Macdonnell's Dictionary defines it as established order, usage, institution, custom, prescription, rule, duty, virtue,

⁷ Vaiśeṣikasūtras, I.1.2.

⁸ Mahābhārata, Karn., 51.

⁹ Bhagwandas, The Science of Social Organisation, Vol.I, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰ Khan, Dr. B. op. cit., p. 38.

moral merit, good words, right, justice, law. The emphasis in this thesis will be on the moral and legal sense of dharma. More specifically, our concern is with the social, moral, and religious duties of man.

The approach used to achieve the purpose of this thesis will be a comparative study of the Rāmcāritmānas of Tulsī Dās and the Rāmāyana of Vālmīki. It is important to bear in mind that the point is to study Tulsī Dās' thought, in the hope that the comparative method will clarify the major thoughts of his theological system. In a subsequent study, an attempt will be made to provide a social, political and historical interpretation of his system.

The first part of this thesis will give a brief outline of the general structure of the Rāmcāritmānas. The second will be a study of the sequence of Tulsī Dās' narrative in comparison with that of Vālmīki, both of which are divided into seven books. The third part will present an interpretation of the central concepts of Tulsī Dās' religious system as derived from the Rāmcāritmānas, and thereby attain an understanding of the originality of Tulsī Dās' contribution to the religious life of his time. Those concepts will be: God and the gods; Māyā; the ideal society, i.e. the government, the caste system, the individual, and dharma; salvation, i.e. authority of the brahmins, the Guru, the sires, and bhakti.

PART I

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE RĀMCAṬITHĀNAS

In his opening lines, Tulsī Dās avows his intention to "declare at length... that which is told in the Rāmāyana and culled from other sources too".¹

Scholars agree² that these other sources are the Nātakas, of which the Mahānataka or Hanumannātska is the most renowned; the mediaeval Rāmāyanas, especially the Adhyātma Rāmāyana, a short Sanskrit text of uncertain date³ which is an attempt to reconcile the Advaita Vedānta point of view with the Ramaite teaching of Rāmānanda's disciples, based on the Saguna form of the Supreme Reality.⁴

It is quite clear that Tulsī Dās considered Vālmiki's Rāmāyana as his chief source of inspiration, but not as a model to be copied, still less as a Sanskrit document to be merely translated. His chief concern was primarily with the content of the legend, not its form: "My verses are clumsy, but my theme is high".⁵ His main purpose was to present not so much a literary work, but a hero: Rāma. "Though a cow be black, its milk is white and wholesome and all men drink it; so though my speech be countrified, it tells of the glory of Sītā and Rāma, and good men sing it and listen to it."⁶

He did not, therefore, feel limited to the form set by his Sanskrit predecessor some twenty centuries earlier. In an age when vernacular poetry, though not a novelty,⁷ was

¹ H.L.A.R., (these initials will henceforward indicate Hill's translation of the Ramcaritmanas) Bāla-kāṇḍa, p.2.

² For instance Charlotte Vaudeville, F.R. Allchin, W.D.P. Hill.

³ 14th C.? see Allchin, F.R. Kavitāvali, N.Y., A. Barnes & Co., p.28.

⁴ Allchin, F.R., op. cit., pp. 28-29.

⁵ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, Caupāī (C.) 10, p. 9.

⁶ Id., Doha (D.) 10, p. 9.

still frowned upon by the Sanskrit pandits as a reprehensible concession to the uneducated masses,⁸ he deemed it fit to write in the spoken language of his milieu. Moreover, though he followed Vālmīki's narrative in its broadest outline, he felt free to alter certain episodes, displace incidents, suppress unnecessary elements, introduce expansions, especially doctrinal digressions, which all contributed to present his own conception of Rāma.

The seven books of the Rāmcaritmānas are: the Bāla-kāṇḍa, the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, the Aranya-kāṇḍa, the Kiskindhā-kāṇḍa, the Sundara-kāṇḍa, the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, and the Uttara-kāṇḍa. More than half of the first book and almost all of the last have no correspondence in Vālmīki's narrative. From the third book on, Tulsī Dās is less and less preoccupied with the details of the sequence followed by Vālmīki, many of which he omits. Certain events are merely alluded to, as if the poet assumed that the reader or auditor was already familiar with the Sanskrit original. The omission of many details could indicate that Tulsī Dās was presenting his story orally, at least in parts. It could also suggest that he wanted to use the Rāma story as an occasion to present his moral exhortations. Oftentimes, especially in the third and fourth books, the poet uses episodes of the Valmikian story as a mere pretext for didactic considerations.

⁸ Gonda, J. Les Religions de l'Inde, Vol. II, Payot, Paris, 1965, p.211. H.E.A.R., Bala-kanda, C.8, p. 7.

The second book, the only part of his manuscript extant, follows quite closely the sequence of the Sanskrit story. True, a number of didactic exhortations occasionally interrupt the narrative, but they never occupy as prominent a position as they do in books three and especially seven.⁹

⁹ Vaudeville, Charlotte. Le lac spirituel, Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris, 1955, p. vi.

PART II

THE SEQUENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF
THE RĀMĀYANA AND THE RĀM-
CARITMĀNAS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY.

BOOK I: BĀLA-KĀṆḌA (Book of the Childhood)

The first book of the Rāmcaritmānas can be divided into three distinct sections, the first two of which are not to be found in Vālmīki's Rāmāyana.

Section I: the Introduction

In his introduction, Tulsī Dās begins with a sixfold homage to those who have enabled him to realize his project.¹ He then cites his sources, declares his motive, namely his "own soul's delight", and announces his literary genre, a "very charming modern speech".²

This is followed by invocations to Viṣṇu and Śiva, and by repeated words of homage to his guru and the Brahmins, to the saints whose fellowship he highly values, and even to "the gang of villains who without cause return evil for good".³ For, he says, "knowing that all creatures in the world, conscious and unconscious, are instinct with Rāma, I ever do homage with folded hands to the lotus feet of all... all ye be gracious to me".⁴ This is accompanied by exhortations to use the power of discrimination granted by the Creator in order to distinguish between good and evil, and to reject the latter.

¹ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, Śloka (Ś.) 1, p. 1.

² Idem, p. 2.

³ Idem, C. 4, p. 4.

⁴ Idem, D. 7c-7d, p. 7.

In a somewhat lengthy apology for the imperfections of both his poetry and his moral conduct⁵ Tulsī Dās maintains, in spite of everything, the merits of his enterprise: "My verses are clumsy, but my theme is high".⁶ All words which sing Rāma's glory, no matter how imperfect, are "lovely to contemplate and cleanse from sin".⁷ The poet pays another series of homages to Rāma, and to those who have written the Rāmāyana before him, without forgetting "those skilled poets of common speech who have told of the acts of Hari in the vulgar tongue".⁸ After devoting several verses to the excellence and salvific power of Rāma's name and recalling once more the seriousness of his sins and the merits of his intention, the poet reminds the reader that "the Lord remembers not the sins we have committed, but dwells a hundred times upon the purpose of the heart".⁹

We are then informed that the story was originally composed by Śiva who, besides narrating it to his wife Umā, entrusted it to Kākabhūṣuṇḍhi. He in turn related it to Yājña- who told it to the great sage Bharadvāja as they were conversing.

⁵ Idem, C. 8 - C. 13, pp. 7-10.

⁶ Idem, C. 10, p. 9.

⁷ Idem, Chanda (Ch.) 1, p. 9.

⁸ Idem, C. 14, p. 14.

⁹ Idem, C. 29, p. 19.

It is this latter version that Tulsī Dās claims by the grace of Śiva to "repeat" after having heard it as a child from his Guru.¹⁰

Again, he admits that he writes the story to satisfy himself, but this time he adds: "I tell a tale that will remove my doubt and ignorance and error, and carry me across the river of rebirth".¹¹ Again and again, he repeats his conviction that the story of Rāma's acts brings peace and "effaces the foul stains of the Kaliyuga".¹²

In Chaupai 34, Tulsī Dās gives an important indication of the date and the setting where the story was begun: Tuesday, the ninth day of Caita, of the 1631st Samvat year (i.e. March, the thirtieth, 1574, A.D.) in the city of Avadh on the Sarayū River.

From the title of the epic "Holy Lake of Rāma's Acts", the poet draws many similes and metaphors which stress the refreshing effects of devotion to Rāma, and the dispositions required to reap these beneficial results: faith, experiential love, good companionship.¹³

Section II: Umā's doubts

The introduction is followed by a long section¹⁴ devoted

¹⁰ Idem, D. 30, p. 20.

¹¹ Idem, C. 31, p. 20.

¹² Idem.

¹³ Idem, D. 36 - C. 43, pp. 23-27.

¹⁴ Idem, C. 45 - C. 187, pp. 28-87.

to Śiva's controversy with his doubting wife, Umā, whom Tulsī Dās calls the Father and Mother of the earth.¹⁵

In describing the circumstances that led Yājñavalkya to relate the story to Bharadvāja, a Rāma devotee who already knew "the sovereign power of Raghupati", the opening paragraphs of this section may give another important indication as to why the poet determined to "repeat" Yājñavalkya's relation of it. Since Bharadvāja already knew the story, why did he ask Yājñavalkya to dispel his ignorance about Rāma? Because "you want to hear the deep mysteries of Rāma's perfections and so you have put your questions as though you were completely ignorant".¹⁶ It must be noticed that the relator complies quite willingly to the demand, thus illustrating Tulsī Dās' conviction, expressed in the preceding section, concerning the beneficial results obtained from repeatedly hearing (or writing) the story.

Umā's reason for doubting Rāma's authenticity as the incarnate omniscient Absolute is threefold. The first has to do with his relation to Śiva:

Saṁkara, she thought, is Lord of the world and worthy of all men's worship; gods, men and sages all bow the head before him. Yet he did obeissance to a prince (i.e. Rāma) calling him True Being, Consciousness and Bliss, and Spirit Supreme; and when he saw his beauty, he was so absorbed in it that even now nothing can check his devotion."¹⁷

¹⁵ Idem, C. 103, p. 52.

¹⁶ Idem, C. 47, p. 29.

¹⁷ Idem, C. 50, p. 30.

The second basis for doubt has to do with the possibility of the Absolute to assume a human form: "Can the Absolute, which is all-pervading, passionless, unborn, indivisible... take bodily form as a man?"¹⁸

The third motive for doubt concerns Rāma's omniscience:

Even if Visnu should take human form for the sake of the gods, yet is he omniscient like Tripurari (Śiva); then how should he, in whom all wisdom dwells...be searching for his wife as though he lacked knowledge? Yet again the word of Saṁbhu (Śiva) cannot be untrue, for Śiva is omniscient.¹⁹

The poet relates how Umā, disguised as Sītā, saw Rāma but did not admit to her husband that she had tried to hide her identity, a sin for which Śiva abandoned her. He also relates how Umā consumed her body in the sacrificial fire, as an expression of protest against her father who had failed to offer a sacrificial portion to Śiva. Reborn with an illusory body²⁰ as the daughter of King Himālaya, Umā is again given to Śiva in marriage after a long period of penance, and long maintaining her obstinate trust in the word of her Guru that she would marry Śiva, in spite of the Seven Seers' words to the contrary. It is to be noticed that even the integrity of Śiva, a detached ascetic in devotion to Rāma following his wife's absence, had to be put to the test before he could reward Umā. Brahmā decides that Kāmadeva will disturb Śiva's meditation.

¹⁸ Idem, D. 50, p. 30.

¹⁹ Idem, C. 51, p. 30.

²⁰ Idem, C. 98, p. 50.

"All creatures in the world...overstepped the limits of their nature and fell subject to Love".²¹ Śiva's trance, however, was unaffected "and Love waxed wroth".²² Then Brahmā asked Śiva to marry Umā once more, so that his son might destroy the powerful demon Tāraka.

After their reunion, Śiva dispels his wife's threefold doubt regarding Rāma.²³ Not only does he answer her three questions, but he also explains how Rāma is the Lord of illusion, "by whose reality the order of unconscious nature, allied with illusion, appears to be real".²⁴ When Umā heard Śiva's explanations, "all her critical doubts were resolved: she began to love and trust in Raghupati's feet".²⁵

Should the reader be disturbed over the fact that so far the story has dealt with Śiva's virtue and not with Rāma, Tulsī Dās reminds him through Yājñavalkya's words that "Those who are not devoted to Śiva's lotus feet can never dream of pleasing Rāma".²⁶ It is interesting to note that it is in a section where Tulsī Dās does not follow Vālmīki that he develops his important passages on Śiva.

Then follows a section where Śiva relates the diverse incarnations of Rāma in different aeons, as well as King

²¹Idem, D. 84, p. 43.

²²Idem, D. 86, p. 44.

²³Idem, C. 110-C. 120, pp. 55-59.

²⁴Idem, C. 117, p. 58.

²⁵Idem, C. 119, p. 59.

²⁶Idem, C. 104, p. 53; see also C. 144, p. 69.

²⁷Idem, D. 152 - D. 187, pp. 72-87.

Pratāpabhānu's rebirth as Rāvana, the installation of his kingdom in Laṅkā, and the resolve of Viṣṇu to deliver the earth from his evil influence.²⁷

The second section is mainly intended to stress the importance of banishing all doubts from the heart of Rāma's devotee, no doubt an operation considered as an essential prerequisite for genuine bhakti. Umā's love having been tested by doubts, it is not before the latter had been dispelled that she could abandon herself totally to Rāma: "Go ye to Pārvatī and test her love; then send Himālaya and have her brought home and remove her doubts".²⁸

Third Section: the Story of Rāma

This section substantially follows the contents of the first book of the Rāmāyana, except for the opening paragraphs of the Sanskrit epic, where Vālmīki presents three versions of the Rāmāyana, the first as related by Sri Nārada, the second as revealed in a Yoga meditation, and the third as sung by Rāma's two sons as they had learned it from Vālmīki.

Whereas Vālmīki had related at length how the sacrifice was prepared and performed by Daśaratha to obtain a son, Tulsī Dās barely mentions this fact. His emphasis lays rather on the rejoicings that accompanied Rāma's birth.²⁹ The intent of

²⁷ Idem, D. 152 - D. 187, pp. 72-87.

²⁸ Idem, D. 77, p. 41.

²⁹ Idem, D. 189-D. 197, pp. 87-91.

these lines, as well as those devoted to Rāma's youth,³⁰ seems to be an emphasis on the divine nature of Rāma, the young prince. Many details not to be found in the earlier epic contribute to this end: the rejoicings of the gods, Rāma's revelation to his mother that he is divine, his "super-human" tricks, and the emphasis on the excellence of his moral character and his physical body.

In both stories, the sage Viśvāmitra asks the King's permission to obtain Rāma's help against the demon Mārīca and Subāhu who keep obstructing the sage's sacrifice. In both instances the King refuses, but in Tulsī Dās' version³¹ his hesitation is much less emphasized than in Vālmīki's,³² where the King is very doubtful about his son's might. Further, Tulsī Dās' references to Viśvāmitra as the "guru" are much more frequent, although the latter is seen more as a devotee than as a guide, which is the exact opposite of Vālmīki's presentation of him.

Vālmīki stresses the dependence of Rāma on his Guru. For example, his Guru has to persuade him to kill the demoness Tārakā even though one should not kill a woman.³³ No such hesitation is recorded in Tulsī Dās' version. Again, whereas Vālmīki shows Rāma receiving the weapons and is instructed as

³⁰ *Idem*, C. 196 - C. 203, pp. 91-94.

³¹ *Idem*, C. 206, p. 95.

³² *The Rāmāyana of Vālmīki*, trans. by H.P. Shastri, Shantisadan, London, 1962, Vol. I, Bāla-kānda, pp. 49-52. (Henceforward this translation will be indicated by the initials: R.V.)

³³ *Idem*, pp. 58-59.

to their use by Viśvāmitra,³⁴ Tulsī Dās omits such details that might reveal his hero's helplessness; "Rāma is the supreme Spirit, Bhavānī, and that you should attribute error to him is most unfitting".³⁵ Finally, Vālmīki shows Rāma quite dependent on Viśvāmitra for information concerning Viṣṇu's previous births and the diverse genealogies of gods and kings which Rāma seems not to know though they are his kinsmen.³⁶ Tulsī Dās does not impute such ignorance to his hero.

In general, Tulsī Dās presents Rāma as a far more important figure, at this stage, than Vālmīki allows him to be. For example, when King Janaka welcomes the two princes accompanied by the sage Viśvāmitra, the latter is clearly shown by Vālmīki as the central personage, although he does show the two princes making a strong impression on the King.³⁷ With Tulsī Dās, Rāma is immediately recognized as the predominant figure, one of divine excellence. Not only is he shown restoring vitality to Gautama's wife on his way to Janaka's royal city, but Janaka loses consciousness upon seeing him.³⁸

Again, whereas Vālmīki related at length Viśvāmitra's story, particularly his misunderstandings and ensuing brawls with Vasistha,³⁹ Tulsī Dās omits such accounts that might shift the attention away from his hero, and emphasizes rather the

³⁴ *Idem*, pp. 62-65.

³⁵ *H.L.A.R.*, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 119, p. 59.

³⁶ *R.V.*, Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 65-102.

³⁷ *Idem*, pp. 103-104.

³⁸ *H.L.A.R.*, C. 212, p. 99.

³⁹ *R.V.*, Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 71ff.

impression Rāma creates on Janaka's entourage, his docility to his Guru and his conformity to prescribed devotions and rituals.⁴⁰ Likewise, Vālmiki's descriptions of the well-administered city of Ayodhyā and of King Daśaratha's well-behaved court⁴¹ have been shortened by Tulsī Dās, who emphasizes the beauty of Ayodhyā rather than its orderly organization.⁴²

Whereas Vālmiki had been rather laconic with regards to Sītā, Tulsī Dās insists on her beauty and on her rapturous admiration for Rāma.⁴³ Likewise, Tulsī Dās' tendency to exalt the perfections of Rāma in affectionate terms not to be found under Vālmiki's pen is noticeable in Rāma's breaking of the weapon⁴⁴ and his marriage with Sītā.⁴⁵

Finally, not only does the episode showing Rāma overcoming Paraśurāma occur at different times, but whereas Paraśurāma was treated with awe in Vālmiki's version,⁴⁶ he is made fun of by Lakshmanī in Tulsī Dās' version for having acted as a "quick-tempered warrior" rather than as a sage anchorite.⁴⁷ However, in neither stories is Rāma-with-the-Axe considered as an avatāra

⁴⁰ H.L.A.R., Bālakāṇḍa, C. 212- C. 225, pp. 99-104.

⁴¹ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 17-22.

⁴² H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 209 - C. 211, pp. 97-98.

⁴³ Idem, C. 226, p. 104. See also D. 258, p. 116; D. 263, p. 118, etc...

⁴⁴ Idem, D. 259 - D. 262, pp. 116-117.

⁴⁵ Idem, C. 287 - C. 358, pp. 128-161.

⁴⁶ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 146-150.

⁴⁷ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 273 - C. 282, pp. 123-126.

of Viṣṇu, which seems to imply that for both Tulsī Dās and Vālmīki Rāma is the only incarnate Saviour.

& & & & &

The Bāla-kāṇḍa is dominated by Tulsī Dās' desire to foster in his listeners devotion to Rāma. To do so, he introduces at the very outset a long narrative showing Śiva's efforts to remove all doubts from Umā, his wife, concerning the divine nature of Rāma and the causes of his incarnation, especially to deliver his devotees from the influence of the powerful demon Rāvana.

The same preoccupation dominates the narrative of Rāma's birth, childhood and adolescence. Tulsī Dās takes pain to show that Rāma's birth signified the coming of Viṣṇu; that he was a super-human child, whose divine power enabled him to slay Mārīca, Subāhu, and Tārakā; that he was able to break the bow, a super-human feat; that he was able to convert the incensed Paraśurāma who retired to the forest singing Rāma's praise.

BOOK II: AYODHYĀ - KĀṆDA (Book of Ayodhyā)

On the whole, Tulsī Dās follows Vālmīki's sequence of events quite closely in this chapter. The few differences there are point us directly to the main emphases in the Rāmcaritmanas.

Section I: The Lost Inheritance

The main event of this section is the succession to the throne of Ayodhyā. In both stories, Rāma is designated by his father to be his successor. The reason for such a choice is said to be, in the Valmikian version, the fact that Rāma is the eldest son of the royal family: "The throne should belong to the eldest son".¹ Without denying that point, Tulsī Das, in parallel passages² does not invoke this reason, but rather bases Rāma's right to inherit his father's throne on his superior perfection;

Raghurāo, says Bharat to the people of Ayodhyā, is the home of kindness and self-effacement, utter simplicity, mercy and love; Rāma has never injured even an enemy; and I, though I have done him wrong, am his child and servant. Believing, then this to be for my happiness.... give me your gracious blessing, that Rāma may listen to my prayer...and return to his capital." ³

At the same time, whereas Vālmīki brings to the fore those qualities which make Rāma fit to be a ruler and protector of his people, Tulsī Das seems more interested in those qualities which make him worthy to be an object of his people's love and devotion. For instance, the relatively long list of

¹ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 355, 400, 419.

² H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 10, p. 166; D. 31, p. 175.

³ Idem, C. 183, p. 235. See also, C. 3, p. 163.

of qualities that make Rāma a worthy candidate for regency, given by Valmiki,⁴ is completely omitted in the Rāmacaritmānas. Another indication of Vālmiki's interest to find in Rāma the the qualities proper to a monarch is the recurrence of reminders of his royal duty which he receives from his elders, for instance from his mother⁵ and from his father.⁶ Such counsels are not to be found in Tulsī Dās' corresponding passages, of which the most important is the King's presentation to his Guru of his eldest son as his successor:

Rāma is in all ways altogether worthy. Servants, ministers and all who dwell in the city, whether they be my foes or friends or neither, without exception love Rāma as I myself, as though my lord's blessing had taken a glorious bodily form. The Brāhmans and their families, holy saint, all hold him dear as you do. Those who place on their heads the dust of their guru's feet command all power as their own; this have I experienced as none other, and I have won it all by adoration of your sacred dust." ⁷

Again, Vālmiki suggests that Rāma is followed by the inhabitants of Ayodhyā to the forest because, where Rāma is, danger and misery are banished, for he is a warrior and the guide of his people,⁸ Tulsī Dās on the other hand insists that the main motive of the people resides in the fact that they are "constrained by love"⁹ and affection:¹⁰ "Unable to endure the fire of separation from Raghubar, all the people fled in panic from the city."¹¹

⁴ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 160-164.

⁵ Idem, pp. 164-167.

⁶ Idem, pp. 167-170.

⁷ E.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 3, p. 163.

⁸ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 279.

⁹ E.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 83, p. 195.

¹⁰ Idem, C. 85, p. 196.

¹¹ Idem, C. 84, p. 195.

Similarly, the reasons given to justify Sītā's following her husband are not based on exactly the same grounds in the two narrations. For Vālmīki, a woman cannot live without her husband not only because she loves him, as is the case for Sītā, but also because it is against the law: "A woman, who in this life has been given by her parents to a man...belongs to him according to the law, even after death."¹² With Tulsī Dās, there is no mention of law; it is love only which prompts Sītā to follow her husband: "She could not bear the mere word 'separation'".¹³

Tulsī Dās consciously eliminates from the picture he draws, both of Rāma and of other important figures of the royal family, such weaknesses that might contribute to make them appear too subject to human frailty. A case in point is Queen Kaikeyī. In order to show that she is not to blame, Tulsī Dās shows how her mind was perverted by the goddess Sarasvatī, who was asked by the jealous gods to expel Rāma to the forest. Again, whereas in Vālmīki's Rāmāyana, the king calls Kaikeyī the "sinful one",¹⁴ Tulsī Dās has him say: "It's not your fault; it is my fate that has possessed you like a devil."¹⁵ Explicit passages such as the following, which Tulsī Dās ascribes to Bharadvajā, are not to be found in the parallel passages by Vālmīki. Preferring to Kaikeyī's act, the great sage says:

¹² R.V., Ayodhyā-kānda, p. 237.

¹³ H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kānda, D. 67, p. 189.

¹⁴ R.V., Ayodhyā-kānda, p. 187.

¹⁵ H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kānda, D. 35, p. 176.

"My son, Kaikeyī is not to blame, for it was Sarasvatī who perverted her reason".¹⁶ "That was fate's decree", he claims, adding that Kaikeyī "has at the last repented".¹⁷ At no point does Vālmiki speak of such a repentance. Again, Rāma himself is shown by Tulsī Dās at Kaikeyī's feet comforting her,¹⁸ whereas Kaikeyī herself is seen bitterly repenting upon seeing Sītā's simplicity.¹⁹

King Daśaratha is another example of the same tendency. Whereas Valmiki showed him to be "enslaved by his passion" for Queen Kaikeyī²⁰ or "made captive by her words",²¹ Tulsī Dās, in the parallel passage, comments that the monarch was "victim of fate".²² Likewise, Tulsī Dās merely mentions the involuntary murder of a young ascetic by Daśaratha,²³ an episode which is related at length in Vālmiki.²⁴

Again, where Kausalyā is seen in the Rāmāyana blaming her husband,²⁵ in the Rāmcaritmānas she encourages him.²⁶

This tendency in Tulsī Dās to embellish his heroes is well brought out by comparing the two poets' commentaries on the King's death. Here is how Vālmiki pictures it:

¹⁶ Idem, D. 206, p. 244.

¹⁷ Idem, C. 207, p. 245.

¹⁸ Idem, C. 244, p. 260.

¹⁹ Idem, C. 252, p. 263.

²⁰ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, Ch. 1, p. 172.

²¹ Idem, p. 186.

²² H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, Ch. 1, p. 172.

²³ Idem, C. 155, p. 224.

²⁴ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 315-318.

²⁵ Idem, pp. 312-313.

²⁶ H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 154, p. 224.

Thus groaning...King Daśaratha gave up life. Having lamenting thus, the unfortunate monarch of noble mien, who was distraught on account of the exile of his beloved son, passed away at midnight and under the weight of suffering yielded up his life. 27

Compare that sombre picture with Tulsī Dās' embellished one:

So Daśarath reaped his reward, in death as in life, and his spotless fame was raised abroad in countless universes. Living, he beheld the face of Rāma, fair as the moon; and dying for the loss of Rāma, died a glorious death. 28

Finally, the same tendency can also be detected in the picture Tulsī Dās draws of Kaussalyā, who is shown to be much more serene, almost heroic, and especially of Rāma. For instance, whereas the King's rightful heir is shown by Vālmīki to be "deeply distressed"²⁹ about having to obey the "ruthless order"³⁰ to renounce the kingdom,³¹ in the Rāmcaritmānas he welcomes the news of having to go to the forest,³² calling it a "trifling matter"³³ which will turn to his profit.³⁴ Again, whereas Vālmīki shows Rāma's entourage fearing for Rāma's inability to adapt himself to the hardships of forest life: "How will he be able to subsist on wild fruits?"³⁵ Tulsī Dās shows these same people concerned for themselves rather than Rāma: "There is no life for me apart from Rāma", exclaims the King.³⁶ So say the citizens of Ayodhyā.³⁷ Likewise,

27 R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 322.

28 H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 156, p. 224.

29 R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 213.

30 Idem, p. 218.

31 Idem, p. 250.

32 H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, D. 41, p. 178.

33 Idem, C. 45, p. 180.

34 Idem, D. 41, p. 178.

35 R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 192.

36 H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 33, p. 175.

37 Idem, C. 51, p. 182.

Kausalyā is more concerned over Bharata whose "love is so profound that if he stays at home I fear evil consequences,"³⁸ than for his exiled brother, for "if Rāma goes to the forest, all will be well in the end, not ill".³⁹ Similarly, Lakṣmaṇa's reason, given by Vālmīki, for wanting to accompany Rāma, namely to assist him,⁴⁰ is not found in Tulsī Dās' version which speaks much more in terms of love.⁴¹ A similar conclusion may be drawn from the fact that Vālmīki shows Rāma admitting his need for Sītā,⁴² a passage which has no parallel in the Rāmcaritmānas. Yet, the picture of Rāma, as it is drawn by Tulsī Dās in this book, strikes the reader as being much more human than that presented in the first book, where Rāma was shown performing such super-human feats as the slaughter of demons, the breaking of an extraordinary bow, and above all the revelation to his mother of his divine nature. In contrast, the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa presents him as the obedient son, the devoted brother and the ideal husband.

Section II: Bharata, the Perfect Devotee

The second half of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa deals mainly with Bharata. Whereas Vālmīki had pictured him as Rāma's ideal brother, whose aim was to give back his elder what belonged

³⁸ Idem, C. 284, p. 276.

³⁹ Idem, D. 282, p. 276.

⁴⁰ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 242.

⁴¹ H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C.70 - C.77, pp. 190-192.

⁴² R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 239-240.

to him by right, Tulsī Dās presents him as Rāma's ideal devotee, the perfect embodiment of the five characteristics he attributes to the saint.⁴³ Particular emphasis is given to the following: detachment, imitation of Rāma, humility, devotedness to others.

Bharata is presented by Tulsī Dās as a hero of detachment: "The contemplation of the Absolute, he says, (is useless) without detachment".⁴⁴ "I desire not wealth (artha), or spiritual gifts (dharma) or sensual pleasure (kāma) nor do I ask for liberation", he says: "This one boon I crave, devotion to the feet of Rāma in successive lives".⁴⁵

He is also the perfect imitator of Rāma. Whereas Vālmīki had shown Bharata followed by a richly adorned military escort.⁴⁶ with Tulsī Dās, the military escort becomes a procession of humbly clad penitents led by a saddened Bharata who chose to walk in imitation of Rāma:

Bharat went on foot, accompanied by riderless horses led by the bridle. His faithful servants repeatedly exclaimed: 'Pray mount your horse, my Lord'; but Bharat replied: 'Rama set forth on foot, and am I to have chariots, elephants and horses? Rather ought I to walk on my head! For a servant's part should be the hardest!'.⁴⁷

Bharat, the perfect devotee, is a model of humility and of hope in Rāma's saving power. Even if he had no direct part to play in it, he considered himself the cause of Rāma's exile: "My one consuming and intolerable woe is this, that it is due to me that Sītā and Rāma are unhappy".⁴⁸ Again and again he

⁴³ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 43 - C. 44, p. 323.

⁴⁴ Idem, Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, C. 178, p. 233.

⁴⁵ Idem, Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, D. 204, p. 244.

⁴⁶ R.V., Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, p. 361.

⁴⁷ H.L.A.R., Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, C. 203, p. 243.

⁴⁸ Idem, C. 182, p. 235.

seeks rehabilitation. But neither Queen Kaiselyā's comforting words⁴⁹ nor the assurance given by the sage Bharadvāja⁵⁰ will be sufficient, if they are not corroborated by Rāma's personal assurance.

This rehabilitating assurance is given in these words:

I hold that all the virtuous men who ever lived or shall live in the three worlds are not to be compared, dear Bharata, with yourself. If any even in thought ascribe iniquity to you, this world is lost to them and salvation in the next... By the recollection of your name all sin and ignorance and the burden of all that is unblest shall be destroyed, and fair fame shall be won in this world and bliss in the world to come.⁵¹

By these words, Bharata claims to have been rehabilitated:

O Master, ocean of grace, dweller in the hearts of all, what now can I say or cause to be said? Now that my guru is pleased and my Lord is gracious, the fancied torments of my melancholy soul are at an end... My own ill fortune, my mother's wickedness, the crooked ways of destiny and fate's malignity, all these together were determined to undo me, but the protector of his suppliants has kept his promise to protect... Your nature, divine Lord, is like that of the tree of Paradise... If a man recognize that tree and draw near to it, its shade relieves all cares, and king and beggar, good and evil, all receive in this world what they desire for the asking.⁵²

Time and again, Tulsī Dās shows Bharata bestowing his grace to those who invoke him. This saving power, as well as the experience of rehabilitation related above, are in perfect keeping with what had been said earlier regarding Rāma's name: "A man who in this world utters the Name of Rāma but once becomes saved himself and a saviour of others."⁵³

The assurance of rehabilitation being obtained, Bharata will await Rāma's expressed desire. The latter's hesitations

⁴⁹ Idem, C. 167, p. 229.

⁵⁰ Idem, D. 206 - D. 207, pp. 244-245.

⁵¹ Idem, C. 267, pp. 269-270.

⁵² Idem, C. 267, pp. 269-270.

⁵³ Idem, C. 217, p. 249.

to express it out of deference for the Guru Vasistha, not to be found in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, is clearly meant to bring out the importance of Rāma's will. When Rāma finally makes his will clearly known,⁵⁴ Bharata "cheerfully" accepts to act as regent of the kingdom. Such enthusiasm contrasts somewhat with Bharata's persistent reluctance, in Vālmiki's version, in spite of the note saying that he left the forest "joyfully".⁵⁵

Thus, if in Vālmiki's Rāmāyana the faithful observance of one's Sire's vowed will is the supreme criterion of duty, submissive devotion to Rāma is in Tulsī Dās' Rāmcaritmānas the supreme means of salvation.

The Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa comprises three lyrical exhortations or "Gītā" or songs, not to be found in the Valmikian story, but which, according to a comparative study made by Charlotte Vaudeville, are inspired by the Adhyātma Rāmāyana.⁵⁶ The first is Lakṣmaṇa's address to Guha,⁵⁷ which, in addition to Adhyātma Rāmāyana II, 6 also paraphrases a passage from the Bhagavad-Gītā, II. The second is Vasistha's exhortation to Bharata not to cry over the death of his father, for virtue should not be mourned for.⁵⁸ The third is Vālmiki's description to Rāma of the mystical dwelling of the Supreme Reality.

⁵⁴ Idem, C. 304 - C. 306, pp. 285-286.

⁵⁵ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 424.

⁵⁶ Vaudeville, Charlotte. op. cit., Introduction, p. xvi.

⁵⁷ H.L.VA.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 92 - C. 93, p. 199.

⁵⁸ Idem, C. 174 - C. 175, pp. 231-232.

⁵⁹ Idem, C. 128 - C. 132, pp. 213-215.

⁶⁰ Vaudeville, Charlotte. op. cit., Introduction, p. xvi.

Miss Vaudeville makes the point that Tulsī Dās' version of those passages "ont un caractère moins philosophique que dans l'Adhyātma Rāmāyana".⁶¹ This is the first indication of a point which will be dwelt on further at length: Tulsī Dās is much more a moralist than a philosopher, a conclusion which, if correct, can help in explaining many of the inconsistencies to be found in the philosophical views presented in the Rām-caritmanas.

* * * * *

Whereas Vālmīki, the heroic poet, wanted to present Rāma as a hero to be admired, Tulsī Dās, the moralist, presents Rāma and his devotees, as terms of reference to teach what is right and wrong. Hence his tendency to embellish his heroes. Tulsī Dās does not want to amaze, by presenting a hero; he wants to teach, by presenting models. Unlike Vālmīki, who seeks to present a hero of Kshatriya duty, Tulsī Dās, who seeks to promote bhakti, feels the necessity to enhance the role of devotees such as the people of Ayodhyā, Sītā, King Daśaratha, and especially Bharata.

⁶¹ Macfie, J.M. The Rāmāyan of Tulsī Dās, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1930, pp. 91-92.

BOOK III: ARANYA-KĀṆḌA (Book of the Forest)

Tulsī Dās begins this chapter with praises for Śiva and Rāma. The picture he will draw of the latter in this book shows him to be the divine hero we had met in the Bāla-kāṇḍa, in contrast with the more human picture we met in the preceding book.

This picture is illustrated, for instance, by the very opening episode, not to be found in the Sanskrit version, showing Indra's son, Jayanta, pecking Sītā's foot and running away, for the purpose of testing Rāma's might. Tulsī Dās qualifies Indra's son as "foolish" and informs us Indra wouldn't protect his son, who had become Rāma's foe: "Who can shelter an enemy of Rama?"¹ Then Nārada takes pity on the silly Jayanta and sends him to seek reconciliation with Rāma. The only punishment he incurs, though he deserves death, is that Rāma deprives him of one eye. Conclusion: "Who is so merciful as Raghubīr?"²

Rāma is then seen stopping at Atri's hermitage. This gives Tulsī Das an occasion to introduce another hymn of praise, the repetition of which he recommends explicitly: "Those who reverently repeat this hymn of praise with faith in thee win to thy sphere; of this there is no doubt".³

Likewise, the encounter between Anasūyā, Atri's wife, and Sita gives Tulsī Das an opportunity to remind his readers

¹ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C.2, p. 296.

² Idem, D. 2, p. 296.

³ Idem, Ch.1, p. 297.

of the "wifely duty" of a woman.⁴ Anasūyā, who gives the instruction to her guest, goes as far as saying that "woman is inherently impure, but if she serve her husband faithfully, she wins to highest bliss".⁵ Before moving on to the next episode, Tulsī Dās extolls the merits of prayer, austerity and the performance of duty, but above all, those of devotion to Rāma.⁶

All this is new. It is essentially focused on bhakti. Even the passage on wifely duties culminates in bhakti: Harken Sītā; women will be faithful wives if they meditate upon your name, for Rāma is dear to you as your own life".⁷ On the other hand, Tulsī Dās has left out the opening section of the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, which dealt mainly with the duties of the king, particularly that of protecting his subjects.⁸

There follows the episode of the slaying of the demon Virāḍha, which is related by both poets. However, Vālmiki's lengthy narrative has shrunk to a mere three lines in the Rāmcaritmanās. One reason for this is that the difficulties of slaying that mighty demon have been overlooked by Tulsī Dās, who merely says that "Raghubīr slew him as he came".⁹ Another significant alteration is to be seen in the reason why the demon was delivered: "Seeing him sorrowing, he (Rāma)

⁴ Idem, C.4 - C.5, pp. 297-298.

⁵ Idem, Ś.5a, p. 298.

⁶ Idem, D.6a, p. 299.

⁷ Idem, Ś.5b, p. 298.

⁸ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, pp. 3-4-.

⁹ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C.5, p. 2991

sent him to his own abode".¹⁰ In the Valmikian version, the demon was saved not because of Rāma's mercy, but because of the realization of a prophecy of Kuvera, with whose curse he had been inflicted.¹¹

Tulsī Dās introduces another episode where Rāma sees, on his way to see Sutīksna, a heap of bones. He asks the sages whose bones they are. The sages reply; "Well you know the answer, you are omniscient". Being the bones of the sages the demons had devoured, Rāma declares: "I shall rid the earth of demons".¹² This encounter with Sutīksna gives Tulsī Dās another occasion to stress the theme of rapturous love, and introduce a lengthy song of praise.¹³ In the Valmikian parallel passage, Sutīksana had hailed Rāma as a "protector".

The reference in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana to the deer slaying, which Rāma wanted to avoid, has not been retained by Tulsī Dās. Likewise, the passage where Sītā is said to see an evil showing itself in Rāma, namely violence against the demons, is carefully omitted by Tulsī Dās.

The visit to Agastya has also been modified by Tulsī Dās. In the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, the sage is shown supplying Rāma with the means to kill the demons: a bow, two quivers, a dart,

¹⁰ Idem,

¹¹ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 9.

¹² H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C.8, p. 300.

¹³ Idem, C.10, pp. 301-302.

and a sword. In the Rāmcāritmānas, Rāma asks Agastya: "Advise me now, Lord, how I may slay the hermit's foes". But the sage cannot help him for Rāma is the omniscient Absolute: "Lord, what makes you ask for my advice?" Then he explains that by these words "you always magnify your servants and that is why, Raghuraj, you have asked me this question".¹⁴ And he sings the Lord's greatness, in loving terms with theological implications not to be found in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana. Later, omniscience, will be once more attributed to Rāma by another devotee, Savarī: "You ask me though you know all".¹⁵

The abode at Pancavati gives Tulsī Dās a chance to introduce another important doctrinal exposé, on the distinction between the 'good' and the 'bad' māyā, prompted by Lakṣmana's question:

Tell me, Lord, the whole distinction between God and the soul, and instruct me, that I may be devoted to your feet and freed from all sorrow and ignorance and error.¹⁶

The story of the punishment of Rāvana's sister, the desirous Sūrpanakhā, and the overthrow of her avenging brothers Khara and Dūṣana with their armies of demons is shortened in Tulsī Dās' version, although not otherwise altered except on one point:

When the Lord saw that the gods and sages were afraid, the master of illusion devised a merry spectacle. The enemy saw each his friend as Rāma, and joining battle with one another, they fought and died".¹⁷

¹⁴ Idem, C.12, p. 303.

¹⁵ Idem, C.34, p. 318.

¹⁶ Idem, D. 14 - D. 16, pp. 304-304.

¹⁷ Idem, Ch. 6, p. 309.

Likewise, the attempt by Mārīca, under the disguise of a deer, to entice Rāma and his brother away from Sītā, the kidnap of Sītā by Rāvana, as well as the search by Rāma that gollowed, are considerably shortened and given somewhat different overtones by the following details.

Before the kidnap, Sītā entered into the fire, leaving a mere image exposed to the demon's malicious intent. When Sītā asked Rāma to slay the deer and bring her its hide, "Raghupati understood why this was done and gladly rose to fulfill the purpose of the gods". Again, whereas Vālmiki had shown Rāvana proposing to marry Sītā, Tulsī Dās merely says that he "spoke of love". Tulsī Dās misses no occasion to "whitewash" his heroes. For instance, as Sītā is being carried away by Rāvana, she exclaims: "Ah, Lakṣmaṇ, it was no fault of yours (that he her alone!) I was angry and have reaped the fruit of wrath".¹⁸ Previously, we had been informed that Lakṣmaṇa had acted against his brother's word "under Hari's influence".¹⁹ Likewise, upon learning that Lakṣmaṇa had left Sītā alone, Rāma reproaches him, but very mildly, compared with Vālmiki's version. No such disculpation is found in the Sanskrit parallel passages.

The expression of Rāma's grief and wrath is given much less importance with Tulsī Dās, who insists that Rāma was acting as if he had been a man. He was "wretched and distressed like any ordinary mortal". He who knows no unsatisfied desire,

¹⁸ Idem, C.25 - C.27, pp. 312-313.

¹⁹ Idem, C. 26, p. 313.

very Joy, from everlasting, indestructible, was acting like a mortal man".²⁰

Jayatu, king of the vultures, does not repeat the reproach Vālmīki had him address to Rāvana concerning the seriousness for "a king fixed in his duty" to look upon the wife of another and insult her.²¹ On the other hand, Tulsī Dās shows Rāvana weaker in front of Jayatu, for he "lay in a swoon for the space of half an hour".²² When Rāvana finally defeated the vulture, Tulsī Dās adds the note that "the bird fell to the ground with his thoughts on Rāma's wondrous acts".²³ And when, later, he looked on the wondrous beauty of Rāma's face, he felt no more pain".²⁴ It is interesting to see how in Tulsī Dās' version, more importance is given to the vulture's praise for Rāmā,²⁵ whereas in Vālmīki's it was the other way around.²⁶

The encounter with Kabandha, whom Rama "overthrew", is much less dwelt upon than in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana. When Tulsī Dās assumes a story to be well known, he makes a mere mention of it: "Everybody knows his story, and so I have told it in brief".²⁷ However, Rāma gives a strong piece of advice to his victim, without informing us, as Vālmīki does,²⁸ what

²⁰ Idem, C.28, p. 315.

²¹ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 105.

²² H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C.27, p. 314.

²³ Idem.

²⁴ Idem, D.30, p. 315.

²⁵ Idem, Ch.8, pp. 316-317.

²⁶ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, pp. 142-144.

²⁷ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C.65, p. 36.

²⁸ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 149.

his offence was:

I declare to you that I am not pleased with those who injure Brahmins. He who in thought and word and deed does sincere service to those gods on earth may command myself and Brahman and Siva and all the other deities. A Brahman is to be revered even though he curse and beat you and use harsh words -- so say the saints. A Brahman must be revered though he be devoid of goodness or virtue, but a Sudra never, however virtuous and learned.²⁹

In spite of the above rigid distinction between Brahmins and Sudras, the meeting with the Savari (a woman of a savage Savara tribe) gives Tulsī Dās another occasion to add a doctrinal exposition of faith, which is above caste, family, religion, high degree, wealth, power, connexions, virtue and accomplishments, -- and the nine practices of faith. Noting that Rāma "granted liberation to a woman like that, of such low caste and altogether born in sin", he adds this exhortation: "Do you expect peace if you pay no heed to such a Lord?"³⁰

On his way to Lake Pampa, Rāma is heard giving another doctrinal instruction not to be found in Vālmiki's version:

Brother, there are three enemies of irresistible might -- lust, wrath and greed. These overthrow in the twinkling of an eye the souls of sages that are the homes of wisdom. The power of greed lies in desire and pride, of lust in woman only; the power of wrath lies in harsh words".³¹

Again, Śiva, who so far has been the narrator of most of this story makes the following observation to his enraptured wife Umā:

O Umā, Rāma transcends the elements of nature; he is Lord of all creation and reads the secrets of all hearts. Thus did he lay bare the wretched state of the lustful and confirm the detachment of the steadfast. Wrath, lust,

²⁹ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kanda, C.31 - C.32, p. 317.

³⁰ Idem, D.36, p. 319.

³¹ Idem, D.38, p. 320.

greed, pride and delusion are all exterminated by the mercy of Rāma; that man is not deceived by this state-trickery to whom the great illusionist grants his grace. I declare to you, Umā, my conclusion: the worship of Hari is reality, the whole world is but a dream". 32

The book ends with another section that has no parallel in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana. While he was resting, after his bath in Lake Pāmpā, the ṛṣi Nārada approaches Rāma and asks him why Rāma had not allowed him to wed, in spite of his wish. Rāma obliges his "servant" (such an appellation would hardly be found in Vālmīki's version) by explaining at length that woman is "illusion incarnate... the root of all evil, a torment and the source of every woe". 33 Then he enumerates the special characteristics of the saints, to which he adds a laudatory comment which ends thus: "Abandon lust and pride, worship Rāma and ever seek the fellowship of the saints". 34

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It is interesting to see how Tulsī Dās presents the episodes related in this book, where according to Vālmīki Rāma is duped by Rāvana, who steals away Sītā.

1. Vālmīki's account implied that Rāma was weak.

Tulsī Dās insists on his might, showing him killing the demon "as he came", that is, without difficulty.

2. Vālmīki's account implied that Rāma's knowledge was limited.

32 Idem, C.37, p. 320.

33 Idem, C.42, p. 322.

34 Idem, D.46b, p. 323.

Tulsī Dās counters by affirming his omniscience.

Rāma knows why his wife is kidnapped.

3. Vālmīki's account showed Rāma in desperation.

In Tulsī Dās' narrative, Sītā spares her divine husband both real sorrow and humiliation by changing her body into a mere mirage.

4. Vālmīki presents Rāma as a hero protector, who inspires confidence.

Tulsī Dās presents him as a divine saviour, who inspires devotion. Even the demons who are slain by him obtain salvation from him.

BOOK IV: KIṢKINDHA-KĀṆḌA (Book of the Mountain Kiṣkindha)

Tulsī Dās begins this new section, where Rāma's alliance with the monkeys is described, with praises for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, for Rāma's devotees, for Kāśī (where Rāma and his brother dwell) and for Śiva.¹

In a description of Spring, the opening section of the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, which is one of the most poetical, is entirely ignored by Tulsī Dās. An explanation of this omission might be that the aim of this Sanskrit section was to show Rāma's excessive attachment to Sītā, for which Lakṣmaṇa reproaches him.² Such weaknesses are not easily found in the Rāmcarit-mānas, as we have already seen.

When the monkey Hanumān recognized the Lord, he clasped his feet and trembled with emotion. Such expressions of loving devotion are not found in the Rāmāyana parallel passages.³ In his enthusiasm, Rāma declares that Hanumān is twice as dear to him as Lakṣmaṇ for "that servant is dear to me who looks to none other for salvation".⁴ After Bharata, Hanumān is the second great devotee presented by Tulsī Dās. He will play a major role in the remaining part of the narrative.

The same emotional strain, characteristic of Tulsī Dās,

¹ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, Ś. 1, p. 324.

² R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, p. 169.

³ Idem, pp. 176-177.

⁴ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C.3, pl 325.

is found in Sugrīva's encounter with Rāma.⁵ Whereas in Valmiki's version it is Sugrīva (Bāli's brother) who takes the initiative of asking Rāma for help,⁶ in Tulsī Dās', Rāma offers his help with an instruction on true friendship.⁷ A mere allusion is made to Dundubhi's bones: "He (Sugrīva) showed him (Rāma) Dundubhi's bones",⁸ which suggests once more that Tulsī Dās assumes that episode is already known because it is related at length by Vālmiki.⁹ Seeing Rāma hurling Dundubhi's bones away, Sugrīva immediately abandons all for Rāma, claiming Bāli his greatest friend for it is by his favours that he met Rāma.¹⁰ He makes an "ascetic vow" to Rāma, promising to leave all to worship him day and night.¹¹ No such expression of spontaneous confidence in Rāma, let alone the ascetic vow, is mentioned by Vālmiki.¹²

Tulsī Dās avoids repeating Sugrīva's admonition to Rāma, after the first challenge to fight his mighty brother, for failing to protect him.¹³ Rāma does, however, give the same excuse for failing to do so, namely his inability to distinguish between the two brothers. Tulsī Dās adds a detail to reinforce Rāma's image: "He passed his hand over Sugrīva's body and it

⁵ Idem, C.4, p. 326.

⁶ R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, p. 184.

⁷ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, D.6 - C. 7, p. 327.

⁸ Idem, C. 7, p. 327.

⁹ R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, pp. 190-196.

¹⁰ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, p. 327.

¹¹ Idem,

¹² R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, pp. 195-196.

¹³ Idem, p. 197.

became hard as a thunder-bolt and he felt no more pain".¹⁴

After Rāma had felled Bāli with his bow during the second fight, the latter addresses reproaches in both stories, but Tulsī Dās shortens them considerably. He adds, however, that when Bāli saw Rāma before him, "he sat up...gazed at him earnestly...laid his heart at his feet" so glad he had been born "now that he recognized him as his Lord".¹⁵

Likewise, Tulsī Dās shortens Rāma's apologetic explanation to his adversary. According to the Rāmcaritmānas, when Rāma saw Bāli asking forgiveness, he wanted to restore him to health, but Bāli asked rather this boon: "May I be devoted to Rāma's feet". Granting the boon, he "whose praise the scriptures ever hymn as 'Not thus'... sent Bāli to his own realm".¹⁶ This stands in contrast with the words Vālmīki has Rāma address to Bāli, where devotion to Rāma is absent: "Put away grief, bewilderment, and fear with which thine heart is filled; thou canst not avoid thy fate, O chief of the Monkeys. What Aṅgada was to thee...he will be to Sugrīva and myself; and myself; do not doubt it".¹⁷ *

Likewise, Tulsī Dās reports that Tārā, moved by his remonstrance that a dead body is not the undying soul,¹⁸ asked Rāma the boon of perfect faith.¹⁹ It is Rāma, and not Hanumān, as Vālmīki had it, who first tried to console her.²⁰

¹⁴ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C.8, p. 328.

¹⁵ Idem, C.9, p. 328.

¹⁶ Idem, C.10 - C.11, p. 329.

¹⁷ R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, p. 214.

¹⁸ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C.11, p. 329.

¹⁹ Idem, p. 330.

²⁰ R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, pp. 219-220.

* See Appendix, note 1.

Then came the dialogue between Rāma and Tārā, quite different from the one reported by Vālmīki,²¹ where Rāma promises Tārā supreme happiness and predicts her son will become heir-apparent to the kingdom.

Tulsī Dās then says "Rāma gave orders to his brother to go and set Sugrīva on the throne",²² which is different from the information Vālmīki gave us where Rāma, acting on Hanumān's request, instructs Sugrīva to name Aṅgada heir-apparent to the kingdom.²³ Tulsī Dās sings the praises of Rāma for having made Sugrīva king of the monkeys, and his praise ends with the following admonition: "Surely those who knowingly turn from such a Lord shall be caught in the toils of disaster".²⁴

In both stories, a description of the poetic rainy seasons is given by Rāma, but with Tulsī Dās, the descriptive comparisons carry doctrinal elements not to be found in the Sanskrit text. For example: "The waters of the rivers flow into the sea where they rest moveless like a soul that has found Hari".²⁵ "Lovely are the ponds when the lotuses blossom, like the impersonal Absolute become personal".²⁶

At this point, Tulsī Dās admits that Rāma has grown angry

²¹ Idem, pp. 227, 228.

²² H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C.11, p. 330.

²³ R.V., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, pp. 231-233.

²⁴ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C. 12, p. 330.

²⁵ Idem, C. 14, p. 331.

²⁶ Idem, C.17, p. 332.

with the forgetful Sugrīva: "Now that Sugrīva is enjoying sovereignty and riches, life in a city and a wife, he has quite forgotten me. Tomorrow I shall slay the fool with that same arrow with which I killed Bāli".²⁷ Commenting on this, Śiva, the narrator, adds this apologetic note: "Can he really be wroth, Umā, by whose grace pride and delusion are dispelled? Only wise sages are devoted to the feet of Raghubīr can comprehend these his acts".²⁸ Tulsī Dās informs his listeners that Rāma was not really serious about this, since he instructs his brother merely to threaten "our friend Sugrīva...and bring him here".

As to the narrative of the monkeys' hunt for Sītā in obedience to Sugrīva's command, Tulsī Dās follows Vālmiki quite closely, although he omits details and adds others which mostly refer to the love for Rāma: "Then they (the monkeys) took leave and...went off rejoicing with Raghurai in their thoughts."²⁹ And again: "Although the Lord knows all things, yet as protector of the gods he observed the rules of royal conduct".³⁰ For Rāma knew Hanumān would find her.

Whereas with Vālmiki the ascetic Swayamprabha re-entered her cave after guiding the monkeys out,³¹ with Tulsī Dās,

²⁷ Idem, C.18, p. 332.

²⁸ Idem, p. 333.

²⁹ Idem, C. 23, p. 335.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ R.V., Kiskindhā-kāṇḍa, p. 290

instead of re-entering the cave she visited Rāma, and the Lord gave her the gift of faith. Then in obedience to the Lord's command she went to the Badarī forest, laying on her heart Rāma's two feet, which Brahmā and Śiva adore".³²

When Bālī's son Aṅgaḍ complains that, since the monkeys deserve death for failing to return on time, he should have died with his father, Jāmbavān consoles him, in an important passage not found in Vālmīki's narrative:

Dear Friend, deem not Rāma to be a man; know him to be the Absolute, impersonal, invincible, unborn. How blest are all we, his servants, ever devoted to the Absolute made personal! Of his own will had the Lord come down from heaven to save gods and earth and cows and Brahmins, and those who worship him as personal, abandoning all thoughts of liberation, abide with him wherever he may be. ³³

As usual, the book ends with an exhortation to hear or sing the story of Rāma.³⁴

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The main thrust of this book is to show Rāma as the Saviour. Vālmīki's corresponding book had shown Rāma seeking collaborators in his search for Sītā. With Tulsī Dās, Rāma's first intention is to make new devotees. Not only the beloved Hanumān but also Bālī, whom he had just defeated, become his votaries. So do Sugrīva, Tārā, Swayamprabha, and all the

³² H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C. 25, p. 336.

³³ Idem, C. 26, p. 336.

³⁴ Idem, D. 30, p. 338.

mondeys who set out with him to rescue Sītā.

Since Rāma knew in his omniscience that he would find Sītā, why should he be so absorbed by this preoccupation as he is shown to be in the Valmikian narrative? Instead of recruiting an army, he was really saving his collaborators and all those he met on his way, even his enemies, by showing them the way of bhakti.

BOOK V: THE SUNDARA-KĀNDĀ (Book of the Beautiful)

The Sundara-kānda relates the reconnaissance trip of Hanumān to Laṅkā, from where he brings news of Sītā, and the departure of Rāma and his army for Laṅkā.

Section I: Hanumān's Mission to Laṅkā

Tulsī Dās insists on the fact that on his way to Laṅkā, Hanumān had "his thoughts fixed unceasingly on Raghubīr".¹ He often reminds his listener of the importance of following Rāma's will in all things. Thus, whereas Surasā, the Mother of Serpents, lets Rāma go with this exhortation, in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana: "Now, restore Sītā to the magnanimous Raghava",² in the Rāmcaritmānas it becomes: "You will perform all Rāma's charge".³

The narrative of Hanumān's trip to Laṅkā along with the description of the demons' sumptuous city is quickly passed over, but the poet gives a somewhat obscure justification for the brevity of his account.⁴

Several details suggest the importance of bhakti. Having been overthrown by Hanumān, the female demon Lankinī asks to

¹ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kānda, Ś. 1, p. 339.

² R.V., Sundara-kānda, p. 336.

³ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kānda, D.2, p. 340.

⁴ Idem, Ch. 1, p. 341. "Tulasī Dās has described them thus in brief because they will assuredly find salvation when they abandon their bodies at the holy shrine of Raghubīr's arrows."

"enter the city and do all you have to do, dwelling in your heart of the king of the city of Kosala".⁵ The atmosphere of devotion is heightened by Vibhīṣan's waking words: "Rāma, Rāma",⁶ as well as by his words of welcome to Hanumān (who had taken the form of a Brahman)⁷ and also by their common contemplation and praise of Rāma.

Again, Tulsī Dās embellishes his heroes. Practically all the difficulties surmounted by Hanumān to locate Sītā are ignored. Much of Vālmīki's insistence on Sītā's grief is also ignored.⁸ And the episode showing Rāvaṇa begging Sītā to wed him undergoes a considerable change under Tulsī Dās' pen. Instead of asking Sītā to marry him, he merely asks her to look but once on him.⁹

On the other hand, it is surprising to see that it is Vālmīki who insists on the saving devotion of Rāma when it comes to Sītā's will to hang herself,¹⁰ whereas Tulsī Dās has Sītā ask Trijātā (the demoness devotee to Rāma) to prepare a fire, which she refuses to do on account of lack of fire.¹¹ Again, the cry of despair uttered by Sītā: "Alas, my Lord has quite forgotten me!"¹² is not to be found in the Sanskrit

⁵ Idem, C. 5, p. 341.

⁶ Idem, C. 6, p. 342.

⁷ Idem, C. 7, p. 342.

⁸ R.V., Sundara-kāṇḍa, pl 362.

⁹ H.L.A.R., Sundarā-kāṇḍa, C. 9, p. 343.

¹⁰ R.V., Sundara-kāṇḍa, p. 403.

¹¹ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kāṇḍa, C. 12, pp. 344-345.

¹² Idem, C. 14, p. 345.

Rāmāyana, although the latter shows Sītā questioning Hanumān on Rāma's attitude towards her.¹³

In the Rāmaritmanas, Hanumān calls Sītā "Mother"¹⁴ and she calls him "My son".¹⁵

The monkeys' praise of Rāma in front of Rāvana¹⁶ is much more laudatory in Tulsī Dās' narrative than in Vālmiki's.¹⁷ His exhortation to worship Rāma¹⁸ finds no parallel in the Sanskrit version, where Hanumān tells Rāma not to "commit acts prohibited by the law of righteousness which lead to ruin".¹⁹

Oddly enough, the attitude of contempt towards Hanumān is emphasized more in the Rāmaritmanas. For example: "A wise guru have I found in a monkey", exclaims Rāvana scornfully.²⁰ The monkey is to have every bone of his body broken;²¹ people kicked him and laughed at him with loud guffaws.²² On the other hand, some of Hanumān's limitations which appear in Vālmiki's narrative, for instance his fear of having burnt Sītā,²³ do not appear in Tulsī Dās' version.

¹³ R.V., Sundara-kāṇḍa, p. 420.

¹⁴ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kāṇḍa, C. 16, p. 346.

¹⁵ Idem, C. 17, p. 347.

¹⁶ Idem, C. 21, p. 348.

¹⁷ R.V., Sundara-kāṇḍa, p. 457.

¹⁸ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kāṇḍa, p. D. 22- D. 23, p. 349.

¹⁹ R.V., Sundara-kāṇḍa, p. 457.

²⁰ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kāṇḍa, C. 24, p. 349.

²¹ Idem, p. 350.

²² Idem, C. 25, p. 350.

²³ R.V., Sundara-kāṇḍa, pp. 467-469.

Hanumān's rapturous adoration of Rama, as described by Tulsī Dās, is not to be found in Vālmīki's Rāmāyana.²⁴ Likewise, the monkey attributes his force to Rāma, asks him for salvation and faith, to which Rāma is reported to have said: "So be it".²⁵ To this, Tulsī Dās adds a comment put in Śiva's mouth:

He, Umā, who understands Rāma's nature is content with nothing but his worship, and he whose heart has been touched by this conversation has attained to faith in Raghupati's feet. 26

It is not easy to see why Hanumān is given such a prominent role. At any rate, Tulsī Dās displays towards him much the same attitude as he does towards Śiva. In both cases the approach is syncretistic. Tulsī Dās does not want to exclude or oppose other devotions but to assimilate them with the devotion par excellence to Rāma. Those many Hindus who worship Hanumān as the Great Hero (Mahāvīra) and who erect shrines in his honour are thus incited to imitate the great monkey devotee, who put all his love and faith in Rāma.

Section II: Rāma sets out to meet Rāvana.

The remaining part of this narrative corresponds to the opening part of Book VI in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana.

Rama leads the march, and whereas Vālmīki had shown how Sītā occupied a place in Rāmā's heart, Tulsī Dās shows how

²⁴ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kānda, C. 32, p. 353.

²⁵ Idem, C.33 - C.34, pp. 353-354.

²⁶ Idem, C. 34, p. 354.

central a place Rāma occupied in the picture and in everybody's heart.²⁷

Vibhīṣan reminds Rāvaṇa, his brother, that "lust, anger, pride and greed... are all roads that lead to hell".²⁸ He entreats him to "give them up and worship Raghubīr, whom the saints worship".²⁹ This insistence, along with the long description by Vibhīṣan of Rāma's qualities³⁰ are not to be found in Vālmiki's version.

Tulsī Dās misses no occasion to draw didactic conclusions from the events he relates. For example, having shown how Vibhūṣan refused to return Rāvaṇa's kicks, the narrator (Śiva) draws the following lesson: "Umā, herein lies the greatness of a saint that he does good to one who does him ill".³¹

The moving encounter of Rāma and his loving devotee, the demon Vibhīṣan, "by nature addicted to sin", is dwelt upon at length. It is after having been spurned by Rāvaṇa that Vibhīṣan went to Rāma. The latter tells his reluctant entourage: "Those who spurn a suppliant because they think

²⁷ Idem, C. 35, pp. 354-355.

²⁸ Idem, D. 38, p. 356.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Idem, C. 39 - C. 40, pp. 356-357.

³¹ Idem, C. 41, p. 357.

he may do them injury are vile and sinful." "How tenderly the Blessed Lord loves his suppliant," thought Hanumān.³² And Rāma adds: "Only a man of pure heart can find me... As soon as any creature enters my presence, the sins of ten million lives are blotted out".³³ Vibhīṣan asks Rāma for faith in his person, to which Rāma answers: "So be it! Although, my friend, you do not desire reward, yet the vision of myself is effectual throughout the world".³⁴ With these words Rāma marked his forehead with the mark of loyalty.³⁴

In the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, the spies, who had been made captive upon Vibīṣana's denunciation, sing Rāma's praise only on their release.³⁵ In the Rāmcaritmānas, Rāvana's spies immediately applauded Rāma's perfections and love upon seeing him, and in their enthusiasm forgot to disguise themselves. Spared by Lakṣmaṇ, they return to Laṅkā, singing Rāma's praise.³⁶

The chapter finishes with an exhortation to listen with reverence to the song of Raghunāyaka's virtues.³⁷

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³² Idem, C. 43, p. 358.

³³ Idem, C. 44, p. 358.

³⁴ Idem, C. 49, p. 360.

³⁵ R.V., Yuddha-kāṇḍa, p. 61.

³⁶ H.L.A.R., Sundara-kāṇḍa, C. 52, p. 361-362.

³⁷ Idem, D. 60, p. 365.

Here again, Tulsī Dās gives a new significance to an important episode of the Rāmāyana story. Vālmiki's military invasion has become a spiritual invasion. We have seen how Rāma had been shown saving repentent sinners, such as Bāli. Here he is shown considering no one as his natural enemy, much to the surprise of his other devotees. Even the demon Vibhīṣan, by nature addicted to sin, is admitted to the fold of his dearest votaries.

BOOK VI: LAṆKĀ-KĀṆḌA (Book of Laṅkā)

The opening paragraphs are dedicated to Rāma and Śiva. The order (by Jāmbavān) to proceed with the building of the bridge is accompanied with exhortations to think of Rāma.¹ When Rāma sees the bridge, he promises to establish there worship to Śiva. He does so immediately, by setting "an emblem of Śiva", and proclaiming that "those who make pilgrimage to Rāmaśvara shall enter my realm".² Upon returning to Ayodhyā with his wife, Rāma will show her the bridge and point out the image of Śiva, and both will do obeissance to Him.³

After reporting that the stones floated by the power of the Lord Raghubīr, Tulsī Dās gives an exhortation to follow Rāma: "What senseless fools are they who turn from Rāma to worship any other Lord".⁴

With Tulsī Dās, the atmosphere of the building of the bridge episode becomes one of devotion and gaiety. When Rāma was on the ramp of the bridge, "all the creatures of the deep came forth in multitudes to see the Lord, the source of mercy".⁵ Whereas Rama had been shown, in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, to

¹ H.L.A.R., Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, C. 1, p. 367.

² Idem, C. 2 - C. 3, p. 367.

³ Idem, D. 119a, p. 429.

⁴ Idem, D. 3, p. 368.

⁵ Idem, C. 4, p. 368.

have seen portents on this occasion, with Tulsī Dās he is shown quite cheerful: "And the two brothers (Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa) laughed as they watched the spectacle (of the crossing)".⁶

The weakness of Rāvana is more emphasized in the Rāmarit-mānas as against the might of Rāma. This tendency is brought out, for example, by the words of Mandodarī, his wife, who says: "The difference between yourself and Raghupati is of a truth the difference between a firefly and the sun".⁷ She pleads with him to give up a fight against Rāma, that Lord of all, of whom she gives a long description.⁸ She even exhorts him to "go to the woods and worship Raghunāth".⁹ Rāvana answers he is superior to Death, Gods, demons and men. But this is termed "arrogance...due to the influence of fate".¹⁰ Likewise, the episode of Rāma hitting Rāvana's umbrella and ruining his festivities is new: "No one could solve the mystery".¹¹

In general, Tulsī Dās lays more emphasis on Rāvana's pride than did Vālmīki, who insisted on Rāvana's passion for Sītā.

On being sent to Laṅkā as an envoy, the monkey Aṅga

⁶ Idem, C. 5, p. 368.

⁷ Idem, C. 6, p. 369.

⁸ Idem, C. 14 - C. 15, pp. 372-273.

⁹ Idem, D. 6, p. 369.

¹⁰ Idem, C. 8, p. 370.

¹¹ Idem, D. 13a, p. 372.

reverence to Rāma before leaving. After giving Rāvāna assurance that Rāma will grant him his pardon, he warns the resisting demon that his adversary is no "mere man".¹² The degree of mutual arrogance between Rāvāna and Aṅgad is not to be found in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana. Rāvāna shows even more contempt for Rāma: "Every night and day the demons eat numberless men like him (Rāma) on whose strength you (Aṅgad) boast such proud reliance."¹³

But Aṅgad is shown in the Rāmcaritmānas to be more powerful. He tells Rāvāna, after shaking him to the floor and breaking his crown, that he could kill him if Rāma allowed it. None of Rāvāna's warriors can make Aṅgad move his foot, "And they sat down again bowing their heads in shame".¹⁴ This episode prompts Tulsī Dās to sing his praise to Rama:

How can one enjoy peace of mind if one strives with Rāma, soul of the world and lord of life? At the play of Rāma's eyebrows, O Uma, the universe comes into being and is again dissolved... How then can his envoy's challenge fail? ¹⁵

After the success of Aṅgad's challenge, Rāvāna's wife pleads again with her husband: "My lord, deem not Raghupati to be a mere king but know him to be Lord of creation, peerless in might."¹⁶

Tulsī Dās insists much more upon the fact that in battle

¹² Idem, C. 26, p. 378.

¹³ Idem, D. 31b, p. 381.

¹⁴ Idem, S. 33b, p. 382.

¹⁵ Idem, C. 35, pp. 382-383.

¹⁶ Idem, C. 36, p. 383.

monkeys and bears were victorious and sang the praises of Rāma. There is, however, a passage devoted to the momentary setback of Rāma's army. But Śiva, the narrator, hurriedly adds that "they were going to win the day in the end".¹⁷ He shows Aṅgad and Hanumān joining forces to devastate Rāvana's palace and smashing the demon's heads in front of Rāvana for not wanting to worship Rāma. They hurl the great commanders of Kaṅkā to Rāma, who "bestowed upon them final liberation", such was his mercy, for he knew these demons "had him in mind, though it be in a spirit of enmity".¹⁸

Rāma is the dispeller par excellence of the adversary's power of illusion. One night, with Aṅgad and Hanumān absent, the monkeys and demons fight. The "warriors on either side would admit defeat". After some time, the monkeys are delivered by Rāma of the demons' illusory darkness. Aṅgad and Hanumān are sent by Rāma to help them, and they win the battle easily from there on.¹⁹ The monkeys return to Rāma and all at once forget their weariness. The next morning, another battle takes place, under Meghanāda or Indrija, and this time the monkeys are cut to pieces, but "gave no ground" and beat them back with rocks. The Meghanāda himself puts monkeys to flight or strikes them down. He tries his magic power on Rāma, but,

¹⁷ Idem, C. 43, p. 386.

¹⁸ Idem, C. 45, p. 387.

¹⁹ Idem, C. 47, p. 388.

smiling, the latter "cleft asunder the whole illusion with a single arrow", an episode not related by Vālmīki. Likewise, Vālmīki does not speak so much as Tulsī Dās Indrijiṭa's magic or illusive power.²⁰

Then the monkeys, Lakṣman and Aṅgad attack. Lakṣman fights with Meghanāda. As the demon was practising guile and trickery contrary to the laws of chivalry, he wins, knocking Lakṣmana unconscious. They try to lift him but "how could Śeṣa, the world's support, be raised? Ahnumān, who had gone to get a doctor, is mistakenly shot down by Bharat, but is reanimated thanks to a prayer to Rāma, Bharat. Rāma cries over his brother, but again Tulsī Dās justifies such apparent weakness by saying that Rāma "grieved with many a lament he who delivers all from grief".

Upon being awakened by his brother Rāvaṇa, the demon Kuṁbhakarna blames Rāvaṇa and exhorts him to worship Rāma, which is an addition by Tulsī Dās. Likewise, he has words of praise for his brother Vibhīṣan who has become Raghupati's votary.²¹

Meghanāda strikes again, using his magic power against Rāma. "The arrows he shot became serpents as they struck him", so that he was entangled in the serpents' coils, "he the free, the everlasting, one and immutable".²² Again, Tulsī Dās shows

²⁰ Idem, C. 49 - C. 53, pp. 389-391.

²¹ Idem, C. 64 - C. 65, p. 396.

²² Idem, C. 73, p. 400.

shows the same tendency to justify or explain Rāma's weakness: "It was to enhance the glory of the battle that the Lord let himself be bound by the serpents' coils". Coming to Rāma's help, Jāmbavān overcomes Meghanāda and hurls him into Laṅkā. Then he sends Rarur to Rāma, and the king of birds "seized and swallowed the whole swarm of magic serpent".²³

In the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, the defeat of Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa is much more insisted upon, as well as the defeat of the leaders of the monkeys. Tulsī Dās is much less insistent and omits episodes like those showing Rāma^{ma}waking by himself and crying over his brother as well as Sītā being brought to see Rāma unconscious.²⁴ Likewise, Tulsī Dās shortens the fight between Indriyita and Rāma,²⁵ adding that when Indriyita died, he abandoned all deception, and crying: "Where is Lakṣmaṇ? Where is Rāma?" so expired.²⁶

In his first combat against Rāvaṇa, Rāma is offered a chariot; he seizes the occasion to give a lesson on what kind of chariot the victor really needs. With the "chariot of righteousness" one can vanquish all foes, says Rāma.²⁷ No such moral lesson is to be found in Vālmīki's account.²⁸

²³ Idem, D. 74a, p. 401.

²⁴ R.V., Yuddha-kāṇḍa, pp. 119-121.

²⁵ Idem, pp. 246-261.

²⁶ H.L.A.R., Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, D. 76, p. 402.

²⁷ Idem, C. 80, p. 404.

²⁸ R.V., Yuddha-kāṇḍa, p. 298.

In the heat of the second battle, Rāma pauses to give his opponent a "lesson of philosophy", as Rāvana mockingly calls it, about three kinds of men: one talks, the other talks and acts, the third acts only. The implication is that the second category, which comprises men who, like the mango tree, bear both flower and fruit, is the superior one.²⁹

Rāma smites Rāvana's charioteer, "and he fell to the ground, crying, 'Victory to Rāma!'. So Rāma in his mercy raised the charioteer again".³⁰ Such outbursts of devotion are not to be found in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana.

Again, Tulsī Dās shows Rāma's power against the enemy's illusive power, which he destroys in a sportive act. Rāma suggests the episode of Rāma cutting Rāvana's heads, which kept growing again, as an example of how "very sportive is the Lord of Kosala".³¹ Another such sportive act will be given towards the end of the book when Rāma showers gems and garments on all: "Very sportive is the Lord of grace!"³² This "sportiveness" is an obvious reference to the Hindu doctrine of "līla" which emphasizes the freedom and independence of the Creator.

Rāma puts himself in front of his devotee Vibhīṣan in order to protect him because he remembered that "he had sworn

²⁹ H.L.A.R., Lañkā-kāṇḍa, Ch. 15, pp. 410-411.

³⁰ Idem, C. 91, p. 411.

³¹ Idem, C. 92, p. 412.

³² Idem, C. 113, p. 428.

to deliver his suppliants" and Rāvana's spear struck him and he swooned, feigning weakness".³³ Then Vibhīṣana dared to challenge Rāvana "in the power of the Lord Raghubir".³⁴

Next Hanumān challenges Rāvana, but the monkeys and bears have to come to Hanumān's help. Rāvana multiplies himself and Rāma, smiling, slays them all, thus dispelling the illusion.³⁵ Vibhīṣana reveals to Rāma where to hit Rāvana: in the hollow of his navel. Rāvana is killed: "Śaṅ bhu and Brahmā saw it".³⁶

Mandodarī (Rāvana's wife) who is presented as a Rāma devotee in the Rāmcaritmānas, praises her husband's power, but reproaches him for heeding no advice and deeming "the Lord of all creation to be but mortal man", and refusing to worship the "Lord of compassion, whom Śiva and Brahmā and all the gods adore". She accuses him of having tried to injure others, his body being "a mass of sin", but she adds that Rāma now has granted you a place in his own realm, and him I worship, the faultless Absolute". He has "bestowed on you the final liberation that contemplatives hardly win".³⁷

Rāma and Sītā's complaints are rarely spoken of by Tulsī Dās. Nevertheless, Sītā laments: "God is ever working against

³³ Idem, C. 94, p. 412.

³⁴ Idem, D. 94, p. 413.

³⁵ Idem, Ch. 27, p. 417.

³⁶ Idem, C. 102, p. 419.

³⁷ Idem, C. 103, pp. 419-420.

me".³⁸ But as she bewailed Rāma's absence, she noticed the throb of her left eye and arm, and those were recognized as good omens.

Both authors report the episode of Sītā's undergoing the ordeal by fire. However when Sītā saw the fire, Tulsī Dās says "she was glad at heart, and felt no fear".³⁹ That is not so in Vālmiki's account, where the gods protest Rāma's cruel decision.⁴⁰ Again, the reason Vālmiki gave to explain the ordeal by fire, namely to show she had been faithful to Rāma, is not mentioned by Tulsī Dās, who claims Rāma wanted "to make her manifest again".⁴¹ This is a reference to the fact that since her first ordeal by fire in the forest, Sītā had been but a shadow. It was therefore not the real Sītā, but her shadow, which had been kidnapped by Rāvana and rescued by Rāma. And it is that shadow which was now "burnt up in the blazing fire".⁴² Once again, Tulsī Dās shows his refusal to accept the full implications of a real incarnation. Hence the necessity to change Vālmiki's version, where the real Sītā had been carried off and was now compelled to undergo the ordeal by fire.

³⁸ Idem, C. 99, p. 416.

³⁹ Idem, C. 108, p. 422.

⁴⁰ R.V., Yuddha-kāṇḍa, p. 337.

⁴¹ H.L.A.R., Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, C. 107, p. 422.

⁴² Idem, Ch. 33, p. 422.

Tulsī Dās shows how the gods, who had often been adverse to Rāma before, had become laudatory after Rāma's victory: "The gods came, thinking as always only of themselves, and addressed Rāma with feigned piety". They now acclaim him as the Absolute who underwent several avatāras "whenever the gods suffered affliction".⁴³ Two long prayers of praise by Brahmā follow; neither were recorded in Vālmīki's narrative.⁴⁴

Having shown Rāma asking the king of heaven to revive the monkeys and bears (an episode also reported by Vālmīki), Tulsī Dās hastens to explain this apparent dependence of the gods:

This appeal of the Lord was very mysterious, and only wise mystics comprehend it. The Lord can slay the three worlds and bring them to life. His aim was only to exalt the power of Indra.⁴⁵

And, explaining why the demons were not brought to life, Tulsī Dās points out that the monkeys and bears were granted that boon for they were already of essence divine, thus not subject to the bonds of birth and death.

Since King Daśaratha had not attained to liberation, for "he had devoted himself to worship of the separate object", Rāma gave him perfect knowledge: "Those who worship the personal",

⁴³ Idem, C. 109, p. 423.

⁴⁴ Idem, Ch. 34 - Ch. 37, pp. 423-426.

⁴⁵ Idem, C. 111, p. 426.

warns the poet, "are not released".⁴⁶

Except for a short passage showing Sītā worshipping the Ganges, by whom she is blessed,⁴⁷ the concluding section of Book VI, proper to Tulsī Dās, is aimed at extolling the devotion to Rāma.

After Śiva and Vibhīsan's prayers to Rāma,⁴⁸ the monkeys and bears also sing their praises to the Lord. When Rāma beheld their rapturous devotion, he took Nīla, Aṅgad, Nala, and Hanumān with him in his car, along with Vibhīsan and all the other mighty monkey captains.

At the news that Rāma, who had stopped on the river bank of the Gangā, was within reach, Guha, that "utterly low-born Nisāda" hastened up to his Lord and fell unconscious for love. "Beholding his marvellous devotion, Raghurai joyfully raised him and clasped him to his bosom".⁴⁹

The book ends with the customary reminder on the efficacy of hearing the story of Rāma and the importance of invoking his name.⁵⁰

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⁴⁶ Idem, C. 110, p. 425.

⁴⁷ Idem, C. 117, pp. 429-430.

⁴⁸ Idem, Ch. 37 - C. 112, pp. 426-427.

⁴⁹ Idem, C. 117, p. 430.

⁵⁰ Idem, Ch. 37, p. 430.

Again, Tulsī Dās uses an episode of the Rāmāyana to extoll devotion to Rāma, to the point that one almost loses sight the ultimate goal of the invasion of Laṅkā, namely to deliver Sītā. Instead Tulsī Dās shows Rāma making new votaries on enemy territory. Rāvana's wife and his brother Kumbhakarna, as well as his charioteer acknowledge Rāma's lordship. However, the king of Laṅkā entrenches himself in his pride and opposes resistance to Rāma, which the latter can only break by slaying him, although we learn at the end that he is not thus ultimately destroyed but granted final liberation. This is important because so far all those who were reported to be saved by Rāma had proclaimed their love for him. In Rāvana's case, Tulsī Dās has gone to the very extreme possibilities of Rāma's salvific power. Not only all his suppliants, be they demons or low-born, can obtain liberation through bhakti, but even those who resist Rāma's love can be saved by it.

BOOK VII: UTTARA-KĀNDA (Latter Book)

After the customary opening homage, to Rāma and Śiva, Tulsī Dās insists on Bharata's state of anguished expectancy, one day before Rāma's return. Hanumān gives him assurance that Rāma is returning in safety and Bharata is overjoyed to hear that Rāma thinks of him as his servant.¹ The insistence, in Tulsī Dās' version, on the devotee's inner thought and sentiments contrasts with Vālmīki's parallel passage,² where is related at length what Rāma underwent during his absence, with very few references to Bharata's inner reactions and feelings. Love and devotion are inner feelings.

Likewise, with Tulsī Dās, the praise of Ayodhyā is more laudatory. He shows how happiness dwelt in Rāma's kingdom, stressing the fact that every citizen does his duty as a citizen, in addition to being a devotee to Rāma. "This city, is the city of perfect bliss, granting its citizens a home with me hereafter", exclaims Rāma.³ How could such a city not cause delight to Tulsī Dās, where "children were teaching parrots to say 'Rāma' and 'Raghupati' and 'Saviour'?"⁴

¹ H.L.A.R., Ś. 1 - Ch. 1, Uttara-kānda, pp. 431-432.

² R.V., Yuddha-kānda, pp. 358-361.

³ H.L.A.R., Uttara-kānda, C. 4, p. 433.

⁴ Idem, D. 27, p. 446.

The return of Rāma to Ayodhyā gives the poet another occasion to present suggestive scenes of bhakti.

The reunion of the four brothers is much more affectionate in the Rāmaritmanās than in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana. Rāma multiplies himself in numberless forms so that all could greet him".⁵

The poet dwells on the difficulty for the monkeys to part with Rāma, after a stay of six months in Ayodhyā.⁶

The coronation is given more attention by Tulsī Dās. The praises emphasize the efficacy of placing one's trust in Rāma and acclaim him as the Absolute. At the end of this episode the reminder is made that final liberation will be given to those who read the story of Rāma's coronation.⁷

Meanwhile, Rāma "the sum of True Being, Thought and Bliss", is said to "play the part of a mortal man" and listen to the recitation of the Vedas and Purānas, "though he knew them all".⁸

After having spoken of those who were made joyful because of Rāma's return, Tulsī Dās speaks of those who were made sorrowful: "Envy, pride, folly and conceit are thieves, and they had no outlet for their artfulness".⁹

⁵ Idem, C. 6, p. 434.

⁶ Idem, C. 15 - C. 16, pp. 441-442.

⁷ Idem, C. 11-C. 12, pp. 437-440.

⁸ Idem, C. 24, p. 445.

⁹ Idem, C. 29, p. 448.

The sages, on the contrary, pay homage to Rāma.¹⁰ Asked by Gharata what were the marks of the saint and those of the sinner, Rāma answers at length, with the warning that "who fully understand them (the qualities) fall not into the toils of birth and death".¹¹

This is explicated in an important passage, which will be discussed in the chapter devoted to māyā, where qualities, whether good or bad, are said to be illusory.¹²

Having summoned all his citizens, Rāma tells them that "He is my servant, he is most dear to me who does my bidding", and goes on to extol the good fortune of being born as a man, "a blessing scarcely to be won by the gods", for the human body is the gateway to deliverance. He instructs his audience that "even the joys of heaven are shortlived and end in pain", an assertion not to be found in Vālmiki's theology.¹³

Praising Rāma, the sage Vasistha gives a list of religious duties, which culminates in bhakti: "the glorious fruit of all these practices (is) unceasing devotion, Lord, to your lotus feet".¹⁴

Returning to the episode of the binding of Rāma by Indrajita, Śiva dwells upon Garuḍ's bewilderment over the

¹¹ Idem, C. 39, p. 452.

¹² Idem, D. 41, p. 452.

¹³ Idem, C. 42, p. 453.

¹⁴ Idem, C. 47, p. 455.

¹⁰ Idem, D. 32 - D. 36, pp. 448-450.

fact that the incarnate Absolute was bound in serpent coils. Like Uṃā, the king of birds was "a prey to perplexity". To resolve his doubt, Śiva teaches him that the only way is to live for a considerable time in the fellowship of the saints and hear the story of Hari in their company:

Only among the saints he explains, can the story of Hari be heard, and not till that be heard will delusion take to flight; and only when delusion is dispelled can one experience unwavering devotion to Rāma's feet. Without such devotion Raghupati is not won, whether by contemplation or prayer or knowledge or austerity. ¹⁵

We learn that Garur's doubts are attributable to Rāma's power of illusion: "Rāma's power of illusion is very great, for it robs even wise men of their wits and renders their souls slaves to delusion". ¹⁶ The illusion of the Lord is not to be escaped by anyone, for "what man is there so wise that it leads him not astray?" ¹⁷ Even the gods have been led astray. ¹⁸

Garur was delivered from his illusion as soon as he approached the retreat of a crow-devotee to Rāma who was surrounded by birds. Asked to do so by Garur, the crow relates the story of Rāma. ¹⁹ As he listened, Garur realized the reason for his doubts: so that he could better appreciate Rāma's grace manifested by the hearing of his story and the

¹⁵ *Idem*, D. 61 - C. 60, p. 460.

¹⁶ *Idem*, C. 57, p. 459.

¹⁷ *Idem*, D. 61, p. 461.

¹⁸ *Idem*, C. 68, p. 464.

¹⁹ *Idem*, C. 62, - C. 66, pp. 461-463.

intercourse with pure and holy saints.²⁰

Illusion is said to be found "in every quarter of the world", nay the very world is created by it, and it can be dispelled only by the grace of Rāma. Not only is the world set a-dancing by the incomprehensible power of illusion, but illusion itself is caused to dance. Only Rāma escaped illusion; he is the all-other.²¹

It is wrong, we are told, to impute delusion to Rāma "as when a man with defective vision says that the moon is yellow", for Rāma "had nothing whatever to do with ignorance".²² The apparent contradiction that we find in the statement that illusion is due to Rāma's action, followed by the denial of it, is accompanied by the explanation that "the impersonal form is easy to comprehend, but no one understands the personal".

Only by the worship of Rāma can one attain release: "The troubles of men's souls cannot be dispelled unless they worship Hari. Ignorance affects not the servants of Hari".²³ The devotee is accepted because of his devotion, regardless of his caste or sex: "Whether man, eunuch or woman, animate creature or inanimate, if with heart and soul he worships me unfeignedly, is most dear of all to me".²⁴

²⁰ Idem, C. 67, pp. 463-464.

²¹ Idem, C. 70, p. 465.

²² Idem, C. 71, p. 465.

²³ Idem, C. 77, p. 468.

²⁴ Idem, D. 87a, p. 471.

It is made clear that grace precedes man's faith:

The almighty power of Rāma cannot be understood without his grace; without such understanding there can be no confidence, and where confidence is lacking, no devotion; where there is no devotion, faith lacks assured endurance, as water...retains not always its smooth surface. 25

Yet, at other places, Tulsī Dās will say that faith is the effect of prayer, penance, sacrifice, etc.²⁶

The whole point of this section, if not of the whole epilogue, which was also developed in Book I, may be summarized in the following words: "When (Ragur) thought upon his earliest doubts, he felt remorse that he had deemed the eternal Absolute a mere man".²⁷

In a long passage, where Bhṛṣūndī explains to Garur why death has no power over him, we are informed that the crow chose to keep his body because it is in that form that he won to faith in Rāma: "It was when I wore this form that faith in Rāma took root in my heart, and that is why, my master, I love it best of all".²⁸

He goes on to explain that for the past twenty-seven aeons (kalpas) he has sung the praises of Rāma and gone to Ayodhyā every time Rāma was born in human form to bless his

²⁵ Idem, C. 87, p. 472.

²⁶ Idem, C. 93, p. 475.

²⁷ Idem, C. 91, p. 474.

²⁸ Idem, C. 94, p. 475.

worshippers, in order to watch his childish games.²⁹

Accepting the traditional Hindu Belief in the cycle of aeons divided in four ages (yugas), namely the Kṛta (first or golden age), Tretā (third), Dvāpara (second), and Kali (last), the crow points out that one must acknowledge the special characteristics of each age and devotee himself to his appropriate duties. In the Kṛtayuga, he explains, one attains salvation through austerity, by meditating on Hari. In the Tretayuga, through sacrifice, by offering his works to the Lord. In the Dvāparayuga, through worship, by adoring the Lord.

In the long description he gives of the Kaliyuga, the present age, which is full of iniquity, one can see the opposite of what is Tulsī Dās' ideal of a sound society: "No one paid heed to Vedic ordinance", he complains. "The rules of caste were neglected. The guru and his pupil were like the blind and the deaf; the pupil never listened and the guru had no insight". Yet, we are told that in such an age of pollution and vice, salvation was easy for it could be obtained by the mere mention of the name of Hari. If, in the three former ages the ways of salvation were austerity, sacrifice, and worship, in the Kaliyuga, there is no need for these means: "The singing of Rāma's praise is the only

²⁹ Idem, C. 109, p. 487.

sure means of salvation".³⁰

However, Tulsī Dās hastens to point out that faith is not an exclusive characteristic of the Kaliyuga, for the "characteristics of the several ages have no effect on his who devoutly loves the feet of Raghupati",³¹

In this passage just referred to, there are traces similar to those we have seen in Book I of a possible conflict between the devotion to Viṣṇu and the devotion to Śiva, that is the devotion to Śiva to the exclusion of that to Viṣṇu. However, explains the crow's guru the two can be reconciled: "The worship of Śiva, he says, should result in profound devotion to the feet of Rāma", because "even Śiva and Brahmā worship Rāma".³²

Disrespect to the guru is shown to be a "heinous sin". The crow relates an episode wherein his guru "demolished the doctrine of the personal and expounded the impersonal". As the crow who was then a Brahman, refused to acquiesce to this doctrine, the guru punished him with a curse that changed him into a crow, but says Bhuṣuṇḍi, "my thoughts fixed on Rāma, the jewel of the house of Raghu, I joyfully flew away". Not only that, but the guru, whose mind had been caused to err by Rāma to test his disciple's love, was brought back to

³⁰ Idem, D. 96b - D. 103, pp. 476-479.

³¹ Idem, C. 100, p. 480.

³² Idem, C. 102, p. 480.

Rāma, and recited the Holy Lake of Rāma's Acts to the crowd. The moral is clear: one must resist even his guru, rather than admit the doctrine of the impersonal.³³

We now come to the passage on the foolishness of those who strive laboriously "to tread the way of knowledge only" to the exclusion of faith. Although both faith and knowledge "put an end to the troubles caused by the cycle of mortality", yet knowledge without faith is insufficient:

The way of knowledge is the edge of a sword; very soon one falls therefrom, O king of birds. He who treads this path and stumbles not attains to the high state of final liberation. Very hard to reach is final liberation... but by the worship of Rāma that release comes unsought, spontaneously".

Moreover, "apart from faith in Hari the joy of liberation cannot be assured". Therefore, devotion to Hari is both easier and more delightful.³⁴ This teaching confirms what he had said earlier in an often quoted passage:

²The way of devotion to me, my brothers, is an easy path and leads to bliss...; the way of knowledge is hard to pursue and there are many obstacles...; and though with infinite trouble a man should find it, yet is he not dear to me if he lack faith.

In addition to faith, he mentions the company of saints, the worship of Brahmins' feet, and the worship of Saṅkara, as essential principles of conduct.³⁵

³³ Idem, C. 105 - C. 106, pp. 484-485.

³⁴ Idem, C. 110 - C. 114, pp. 488-491.

³⁵ Idem, C. 44, p. 454.

A final exhortation is given to read the Rāma story; certain people, explains Tulsī Dās, are not fit to hear the story. Those who love the fellowship of the saints, who are devoted to their guru's feet, walk in righteous ways, minister to Brahmans, and above all those who love the Lord Rāma are fit to hear this story.³⁶

After explaining that he wrote the Rāmāyana "in the vulgar tongue in order to dispel the darkness of his inner self", the poet ends with this beautiful allegorical verse:

Those who plunge with faith into this Holy Lake of Rāma's Acts, a lake of merit, sin-destroying, ever blessing the soul and granting faith and wisdom, which by its pure, clear waters full of love washes away the filth of ignorance and illusion, are not scorched by the burning rays of the sun of birth and death. 37

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By relating Rāma's return to Ayodhya and his reunion with Bharata, the Uttara-kāṇḍa has given Tulsī Dās an opportunity to highlight once more the importance of bhakti. Likewise, the coronation becomes a symbol of Rāma's lordship as the incarnate Absolute. Even if he had let himself be bound in serpent coils, his supreme omnipotence must not be doubted.

³⁶ Idem, C. 123, p. 497.

³⁷ Idem, Ś. p. 499.

In a dialogue which presents a summary of the poet's own religious attitude and views, the crow insists that as only Rāma can escape the seductive power of Māyā, so only the devotee can be set free through bhakti.

In this same dialogue between the crow and Garur, it is shown that bhakti entails the recognition of a personal God, a doctrine which is incompatible with that of an impersonal (Nirguna) Brahman, even if the supremacy of Rāma does not exclude devotion to Śiva, and the way of bhakti does not exclude the way of knowledge.

PART THREE

THEMATICAL EVALUATION OF THE RAMAYANA AND

THE RAMCARITMANAS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

On the basis of the analytic study of the preceding section, the following section will attempt to present a synthesis of Tulsī Dās' views, as exposed in the four following chapters:

I. God and the gods

II. Māyā

III. The Ideal Society

A. The Government, the Caste System, the Individual

B. Dharma

IV. Salvation

A. Authority of the Brahman, the Guru, the Sires

B. Bhakti

CHAPTER I: THE ABSOLUTE AND THE GODS

When one compares in detail the qualities attributed to Rāma in the two versions of the Rāmāyana story, one is struck by Tulsī Dās' insistence on the divine nature of his hero.

Although Vālmiki had affirmed that after several other human existences, where Viṣṇu had taken human form in order to destroy those hostile to gods¹ and protect the earth,² the protector god had incarnated himself in the King's three wives;³ that Rāma, equal to Brahma and Viṣṇu, was capable of striking terror in the hearts of celestial beings;⁴ that he was omniscient⁵ or truth incarnate;⁶ and that his eyes were slightly red (a mark of a divine incarnation);⁷ yet, the over-all impression is that Rāma is meant to be above all a model proposed to the admirer's imitation, especially to the Kṣatrya class. Hence the importance attached to his

¹ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 40.

² Idem, p. 157.

³ Idem, pp. 39-40.

⁴ Idem, pp. 3-4.

⁵ Idem, p. 3.

⁶ Idem, p. 12.

⁷ Idem, p. 369.

human qualities. This picture of Vālmiki's hero is corroborated by the widely accepted view that those passages in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana where Rāma is seen as an avatāra of Viṣṇu are later interpolations,⁸ particularly the account of the incarnation at the beginning, and the return to heaven at the end.⁹

With Tulsī Dās, the divine nature of Rāma is stressed much more. True, one must not overlook the fact that the Hindi version is much richer in poetical figures than is its Sanskrit predecessor. For instance, when Tulsī Dās his guru an "ocean of grace, Hari in human form",¹⁰ the reader is not bound to literal interpretation, as the general context of the Bāla-kāṇḍa will sufficiently indicate.

But when it comes to Rāma, the matter is quite different. First, the poet establishes the theoretical possibility for the Absolute to take a human form. The question is clearly formulated by the doubting Umā, when she asks Śiva: "Can the Absolute, which is all-pervading, passionless, unborn, indivisible, desireless, without parts... take bodily form as a man?"¹¹ To this Śiva answers quite emphatically: "The im-

⁸ Khan, B. The Concept of Dharma in Vālmiki Rāmāyana, pp.18-19.
Macfie, F.M. The Rāmāyana of Tulsī Dās, p. 93.

⁹ Carpenter, J.N. The Theology of Tulsī Dās, p. 29.

¹⁰ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, Ś., p. 2.

¹¹ Idem, D. 50, p. 30.

personal, formless, invisible and unborn becomes personal for love of the faithful".¹²

That Rāma is the human form of the Absolute referred to above is expressed beyond doubt in several passages. King Janaka summarizes it all in these words: "O Rāma...thou, the all-pervading Absolute, invisible and indestructible, Consciousness and Bliss, impersonal and personal; whom neither speech nor thought can comprehend, nor any argument infer; thou whose greatness the Vedas declare to be "Not thus"; one and the same yesterday, today and for ever".¹³

When Tulsī Dās describes the Absolute as both "impersonal and personal", he is not thinking exactly in terms of the distinction made the advaita philosopher Śankara between Nirguna Brahman, the attributeless Brahman, and Saguna Brahman, with attributes, that is in its limited or inferior form. Tulsī Dās believes first and foremost in a personal God; hence he does not see in the Absolute with attributes a limited form of Brahman: "Though you are the Absolute, indivisible and eternal, comprehensible only by intuition, adored by the saints, though I know and speak of that form of yours, yet I constantly turn back therefrom and spend my

¹² Idem, C. 116, p. 58.

¹³ Idem, C. 338, p. 153.

love on the Absolute made man".¹⁴ To that extent, his conception of God is much closer to that of Rāmānuja than to that of Śankara. He believes that God is omniscient,¹⁵ infinitely merciful, to whose salvific action the real devotee owes his personal immortality, not in absorption, but in communion with Him.

Nevertheless, his theological thought is strongly influenced by advaita philosophy. Whereas Rāmānuja held that Brahman is one without a second, but with attributes, Tulsī Dās often uses "Nirguna for the pre-incarnate deity, and Saguna for the incarnation in Rāma: "He who is without qualities, without form, without sign, without birth, for the sake of his love to the faithful, has become Saguna (incarnate)."¹⁶ He often uses such monistic phrases as Sechidananda.¹⁷ He explains creation in terms of the illusory influence of Māyā.¹⁸

The claim that the Absolute can take a human form, which is probably not made by Valmiki, is accompanied in the Rām-caritmanas by another claim, also made in the first book of the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, that Rāma is the incarnation of Viṣṇu,

¹⁴ Idem, C. 12, p. 303.

¹⁵ Idem, C. 51, p. 30.

¹⁶ Idem, D. 50, p. 30. See also: C. 13, p. 10.

¹⁷ Idem, C. 50, p. 30.

¹⁸ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 14, p. 304.

the second member of the Trīda tried.

Yet, more than once, Rāma is shown to be superior to the three gods of the tried, including Viṣṇu: "I do homage to Rāma... essence of Brahmā, Hari and Hara". Tulsī Dās wants to present Rāma not merely as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, but as the very embodiment of Saccidānanda.

Śiva, the main narrator of the epic, is given a prominent place in the Rāmcaritmānas. With his wife Umā, he is the central figure in the first half of the Bāla-kāṇḍa. Every book opens with an expression of homage to him, and exhortations to worship and invoke him are found throughout the poem. A model of integrity who was put to the test by Kāmadeva,¹⁹ not only is he called the father of the universe,²⁰ but whereas in the Valmikian story he is a mere anchorite, he is given in the Rāmcaritmānas qualities usually attributed to the Absolute, namely pure intelligence and bliss.²¹ The people of Ayodhyā pray to Śiva, including Daśaratha, Sītā, Rāma and his brother Lakṣmaṇa.

However, as has already been seen, Tulsī Dās does no reason to choose between Rāma and Śiva, for "even Śiva and Brahmā worship Rāma".²² Moreover, the whole point of the long

¹⁹ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 84, p. 43.

²⁰ Idem, C. 103, p. 52.

²¹ Idem, Bāl. 87 (85) 99.

²² Idem, C. 102, p. 480.

narration centered on Umā's doubt, dispelled by Śiva, is to establish clearly the divine nature of Rāma, who is the supreme object of belief and devotion.²³ However, Tulsī Dās does not repudiate Śiva-bhakti, as the episode concerning the establishment of a probable linga shrine related in the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa had indicated. In fact, Śiva-bhakti leads to Rāma-bhakti.

Tulsī Dās acknowledges Brahmā as the author of Creation, "a mixture of virtue and vice", who gave men the power to discriminate between good and evil. However, men are influenced by other forces which impede them from using that power: time, nature (sṃbhava) and the law of action (karma).²⁴ Though he is shown as spokesman for the gods, he is nevertheless inferior to Viṣṇu, since he directs the gods to have recourse to him against Rāvaṇa. In effect, having granted a boon to Rāvaṇa, because of the latter's asceticism, Brahmā is unable to withdraw it. The gods ask him to obstruct Rāvaṇa's evil influence, but he has to admit that he "can do naught".

Tulsī Dās displays little reverence for the lesser gods. Whereas Vālmīki claimed that Viṣṇu took a human form especially for the sake of the gods²⁵ and equalled Rāma to "the mighty Indra",²⁶ Tulsī Dās insists that it was especially "to save

²³ Idem, D. 118, p. 59.

²⁴ Idem, C. 6 - C. 7, pp. 56.

²⁵ R.V., Bālakaṇḍa, pp. 39-40.

²⁶ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 259.

his faithful people".²⁷

True, the lesser gods are quite often presented in a favorable light. They share in men's joys and sorrows, particularly Rāma's, in the form of monkeys, they help Rāma fight Rāvāṇa. Prayers are addressed to them for assistance; worship is offered to the gods and the saints. Nevertheless, the general attitude seems to be one of contempt. They are often pictured as selfish, jealous, and obsequious.

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Such seems to be Tulsī Dās' conception of the Supreme Reality. In order to explain the relation between that Reality and the order of creation, Hindus have recourse to the concept of Māyā. It is to that concept, as it is understood by Tulsī Dās, that we shall now turn our attention.

²⁷ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, Ch. 2, p. 31.

CHAPTER II: MĀYĀ

When Vālmiki used the word Māyā¹ he used it in the very limited sense of magic or black art, and not in the philosophical sense of the deluding power by which the universe was created and appears as real.²

Tulsī Dās also uses the word Māyā in the sense of magic or illusory tricks, especially in the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa with reference to the devices used by the demons to fight the invaders, and in the Aranya-kāṇḍa with reference to the means Rāma used to bring an end to his conflicts with Kāra, Dūṣaṇa, and Trisirā.³

However, Māyā is especially used with reference to Rāma's all-pervasive power over creation. The entire created order is subject to his Māyā.⁴ Rāma is māyādhanī, the Lord or owner of Māyā.⁵ However, not only is Rāma untouched by Māyā⁶ but he is also able to help man liberate himself from its prison. The one condition he asks is faith. Though faith and illusion be

¹ R.V., Yuddha-kāṇḍa, pp. 101-107.

² Khan, Dr. B. The Concept of Dharma in Vālmiki Rāmāyana, p. 123.

³ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, Ch. 6ff., pp. 38ff.

⁴ H.A.A.R., Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 76, p. 467.

⁵ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, Ch. 2, p. 31.

⁶ Idem, Ch. 20, p. 86.

both feminine nouns, illusion, the crow explains, to Garuḍ, is afraid of faith, for the latter is particularly cherished by Rāma while illusion is nothing but a dancing-girl. And not only is faith superior to illusion, but it also surpasses such masculine virtues as jñāna (wisdom), viraga (detachment), tyāga (austerity), and vijñāna (scientific knowledge).⁷ Hence, only devotion to Rāma is able to set Māyā's victims free.

The source of that all-pervasive power of Māyā is to be sought in the act of creation itself. The following passage, for instance, presents Māyā, which is identified with Sītā, as Rāma's creative energy:

You are the guardian of the bounds of revelation, O Rāma, Lord of the world, and Jānakī is illusion, who at the nod of her gracious Lord creates, preserves or destroys the world. 8

Several times, our poet makes the point that Māyā's deceiving and pernicious influence is all-pervasive. A case in point is Sātī's doubt, which is attributed to Hari's illusive power, thus making Sātī's efforts to dispell it quite useless. Likewise, Sugrīva attributes his neglect and luxury to Rāma's Māyā: "Lord, it was no fault of mine, Your illusion, divine master, is irresistible, and only, O Rāma, when you show mercy is it dissipated".⁹

⁷ Idem, C. 110 - C. 111, pp. 488-489.

⁸ H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, Ch. 5, p. 212.

⁹ H.L.A.R., Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, C. 21, p. 334.

In a passage which is difficult to reconcile with Tulsī Dās' denial of the bhakta's reabsorption into the Impersonal,¹¹ Rāma expounds the following views with regards to the difference between God (Īśvara) and the individual soul (Jīva) and the meaning of illusion (Māyā):

'I' and 'Mine', 'You' and 'Yours' are illusion, and this has won control of all individual souls. The senses and their objects, as far as mind extends, all this, brother, know to be illusion. Now hear a distinction within illusion -- knowledge and ignorance, these two. The latter is exceeding evil, pain itself, under whose influence the soul has fallen into the well of transmigration. The former creates the world, and subject to it are the elements of nature. This is sent forth by the Lord; it has no power of its own. Knowledge is that wherein is no thought of self; it sees in all alike the Absolute. He, dear brother, may be called perfect in detachment who has abandoned all religious aims and the three elements as nothing worth. That is called the individual soul which does not recognize illusion or God or its own true nature. He who dispenses bondage and release, and is beyond all being, and sends forth illusion, is God. 12

Thus, if both the individual souls, the senses and their objects are illusion, not to be considered as entities, it would appear that Tulsī Dās tends towards the advaita position where only Brahman is real, and that all notion of time or space is Māyā.

Any attempt to reconcile this position, which has strong advaita implications, with Tulsī Dās' dualistic theology is

¹¹ H.L.A.R., Lāṇḍa-kāṇḍa, C. 110, p. 425.

¹² H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 14, pp. 304-305.

probably futile.* Overlooking rigid consistency in speculative theology, his dominant preoccupation seems to hâld on to the personality of Rāma: "The wisest ascetics discard theological speculations and simply adore".¹³

Bhakti is all important. The rest, history and nature, are quite secondary. Twenty-seven aeons have gone by since Ehuṣuṇḍi, the votary crow, has found faith in Rāma; each of these aeons has had its special characteristics. Yet, says the crow, these changes "have no effect on him who devoutly loveth the feet of Raghupati".¹⁴ Rāma-bhakti is the only ultimate value. Only through it can one liberate himself from the fleeting flux of historical events and the illusory fascination of natural phenomena.

Related to the concept of Māyā is that of fate; both have a dominating effect on human existence.

Fate is often associated with Vidhi, that is Brahmā,¹⁵ who, in spite of his benevolence, is often made responsible for man's predicaments and even for their sins:

The ways of God (Vidhi), exclaims queen Sumitra, are very contrary and hard to understand; he preserves his creation and then destroys it; his purposes are as meaningless as a game played by a child. ¹⁶

¹³ H.L.A.R., Lāṅkā-kāṇḍa, 85 (70) 95, Growse's translation.

¹⁴ H.L.A.R., Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 100, p. 480.

¹⁵ Macfie, J.M. The Rāmāyan of Tulsidās, pp. 40-48.

* See Appendix, Note 2.

When Rāma falls at Kaikeyī's feet, he comforts her, "laying all the blame on fate,¹⁷ destiny (Karma) and providence (Vidhi)".¹⁸

Here, we see Tulsī Dās blaming both Brahmas and Karma for the same sin. Elsewhere, Tulsī Dās identifies Karma and Destiny (Daiva): "I am most hapless. Just when I should serve you, fate (Daiva), see Vaudeville: "le destin") has sent me to the forest... Fate (Karma) is relentless and I am not to blame".¹⁹

The fact that Vidhi (Brahmas), who acts like the force of Destiny or Fate (Daiva), and Karma are juxtaposed and equally held responsible for the same situations and immoral acts is not considered as an inconsistency by Tulsī Dās. On the contrary, such a view is in keeping with a traditional Hindu doctrine. The following passage, for example, taken from the Sribhāṣya of Rāmānuja, shows how the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosopher saw in the law of Karma, whose action is as implacable as that of Destiny, an expression of the moral will of Brahman, who, because he wants to lead every soul to liberation, cannot tolerate evil:

¹⁷ "Time" and "fate" are used interchangeably in most of the Hindu popular literature. (See Khan, B. The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana, p. 247.) "Time" is the field in which these actions are working out to their inevitable end". (See: Macfie, J.M. The Rāmāyan of Tulsīdās, p. 46.)

¹⁸ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 244, p. 260.

¹⁹ Idem, C. 69, p. 189.

The divine Supreme Person, all whose wishes are eternally fulfilled... having engaged in sport befitting his might and greatness and having settled that work is of a two-fold nature, such and such works being good and such and such being evil, and having bestowed on all individual soul bodies and sense-organs capacitating them for entering on such work and the power of ruling those bodies and organs; and having himself entered into those souls as their inner Self abides within them, controlling them as an animating and cheering principle. The souls, on their side, endowed with all the power imparted to them by the Lord and forming abodes in which he dwells, apply themselves on their own part, and in accordance with their own wishes, to work either good or evil. The Lord, then, recognising him who performs good actions as one who obeys his commands, blesses him with piety, riches, worldly pleasures, and final release; while him who transgresses his commands he causes to experience the opposites of all these. 20

Even if, to a greater degree than Vālmīki,²¹ Tulsī Dās insists on the implacable power of Destiny or Karma, it does not follow that man is deprived of his moral freedom and responsibility, as the following passage, taken from the last book of the Rāmcaritmānas, will testify:

It is great good fortune to be born as a man, a blessing scarcely to be won by the gods, as all the sacred books declare. The human body is an instrument for pious practices, it is the gateway to deliverance; and those who have been born as men and still have not won heaven suffer torment in the next world, and beating their heads

²⁰ Srībhāṣya, in Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 48, edited by Max Müller, Motilal Bavarisidass, 1942, first published in 1904, p. 498.

²¹ "Why do you extol destiny which is powerless and weak"? See: R.V., Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, pp. 23-27.

in vain remorse, falsely assign the blame to fate (Kāl) and destiny (Karma) and God (Ishwar)" 22

Thus, no matter how much man revolts against the inevitable, ultimately he will have to admit that his present condition is the fruit of his won actions. So long as he has not achieved total purification, he is subject to the order of Māyā.

& & & & &

Having seen how Tulsī Dās conceives of Brahman and Māyā, it seems proper at this point to give a more systematic presentation of his views regarding the human condition, as it is idealized in the perfect society.

²² H.L.A.R., Uttara-kanda, C. 41, p. 453.

CHAPTER III: THE IDEAL SOCIETY

A. The Government, the Caste System, the Individual

For Valmiki, social order has to do primarily with the material organization of the community, the well-being of its citizens, the latter's loyalty to their ruler, the ruler's dedication to his subjects, and the integrity of the caste system.

He has praises for the "admirably planned" streets of Ayodhyā, and its thoroughfares, which extended for sixty miles. He also draws attention to its "beautiful and massive gates and numerous markets", adding that "its fortifications were planned by skilful engineers and artificers", the city being "enclosed by strong fortifications and a deep moat, which no enemy... could penetrate".¹

He notices with satisfaction that the citizens were happy, virtuous and satisfied, free from sickness, sorrow, famine and danger.² Wealth and aesthetic adornments are not frowned upon, on the contrary.³

¹ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 18.

² Idem, p. 8.

³ Idem, p. 18.

He praises the inhabitants for being devoted to the king and the state⁴. Not only do the king's counsellors conform to his commands in obedience and loyalty, but he in turn consults them and waits for their approval before taking certain important decisions.⁵ He extolls the king "who, even while sleeping, is yet awake to the ordering of his kingdom".⁶

Social order also depends on the integrity of the caste system. Vālmiki notices with satisfaction that no one in Ayodhyā was born of mixed castes, that the warriors were subjected to the learned brahmāns, and the merchants to the warriors.⁷ Likewise, he mentions that the citizens were invited to attend the sacrifice, "being received in a becoming manner according to their caste". He specifies that invitations were sent to the brahmans, the warriors, the merchants, the lowest caste".⁸

Finally, mention is made in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana of the importance of subduing the enemy, observing the sacrifice, and entertaining the strangers with fitting hospitality.⁹

⁴ Idem, p. 20. See also, pp. 47, 107.

⁵ Idem, p. 24.

⁶ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 71.

⁷ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 20.

⁸ Idem, p. 33.

⁹ Idem, pp. 47, 107.

Tulsī Dās rejects none of the above aspects of the social order. In a passage devoted to the description of Videha, he praises the fine markets, handsome squares, well-planned streets, and spacious stables for horses and elephants.¹⁰ One gathers that the citizens were well-to-do from details like "wondrous jewelled balconies", "thriving traders", "streets sprinkled with fragrant perfumes", and many others.¹¹ The poet describes the king's subjects as "graceful, pure and good, wise and accomplished", while he notes with satisfaction that Jansaka's ministers were loyal to their king.¹²

Although Tulsī Dās refers less often than Vālmiki to the caste system, he does not reject its merit since, for instance, he expresses admiration for the caste-mark which Rāma Lakṣmīni wore on their brows.¹³ Likewise, he deploras the fact that some people neglect their caste duties.¹⁴ Yet, in spite of the rigid distinctions he at times maintains between castes¹⁵ he teaches that differences due to birth are not ultimate, since faith is above caste distinction.¹⁶

¹⁰ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 210, p. 98.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² Idem.

¹³ Idem, C. 230, p. 105.

¹⁴ Idem, C. 172. See also Uttara-kāṇḍa, D. 96-D. 103, pp. 476-479.

¹⁵ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 32, p. 317.

¹⁶ Idem, D. 36, p. 319. See also Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 84, p. 471.

Yet, with Tulsī Dās, the ideal city is seen in a new perspective. Ayodhyā owes its excellence not so much to Daśaratha's administrative talents as to the fact that because of Rāma's presence it is "altogether lovely, granting all success and is the source of every blessing".¹⁷ Ayodhyā is to the devotees a home where they can enjoy Rāma's company: "This city, exclaims Rāma, is the city of perfect bliss, granting its citizens a home with me hereafter".¹⁸ Wherever Rāma goes, his presence enhances the beauty of the setting, be it the forest¹⁹ or the city. Thus, if the poet deals at length with the beauty of Videha, it is because of Rāma's presence in Janaka's kingdom.²⁰

Hence, Tulsī Dās' insistence on the physical beauty of the city,²¹ in contrast to Vālmiki's Rāmāyana, which lays much more stress on its orderly organization.²² Ayodhyā, as pictured by Tulsī Dās, is a city where the "beauty of all the worlds" is to be found.²³ What a wondrous context to express adoration to Rāma! Is there a more propitious place for

¹⁷ Idem, Bala-kāṇḍa, C. 35, p. 22.

¹⁸ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 4, p. 433.

¹⁹ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 137 - C. 138, p. 217.

²⁰ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 216 - C. 241, pp. 100-110.

²¹ Idem, C. 210, p. 98.

²² R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 17-22.

²³ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 210, p. 98.

children to teach parrots to say 'Rāma'!²⁴

Besides the qualities already referred to with regards to the attitude towards the government, and the caste system, Vālmīki enumerates the following qualities he likes to see in the individual.

The ideal man is like the sage, the king, the son, or the wife who finds delight in the welfare of others.²⁵ His spirit fixed in the fulfillment of duty, honour, and truth,²⁶ he never breaks his word,²⁷ nor is he an atheist.²⁸ He practices austerities, self-control, and values the virtue of chastity²⁹ and non-violence.³⁰ Versed in all branches of learning, the ideal king is "vigilant, conversant with what is happening and virtuous, establishes his throne in perpetuity".³¹ Even while sleeping, "he is awake to the ordering of his kingdom, who manifests his anger or approval at a fitting time".³² His main virtues are self-mastery, forbearance,

²⁴ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, D. 27, p. 446.

²⁵ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 19, 46, 105, 124, 153, etc...

²⁶ Idem, Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, p. 196.

²⁷ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 19, 51, 52, 56, etc...

²⁸ Idem, p. 20.

²⁹ Idem, pp. 19, 22, 26, 55, 70, 100, etc...

³⁰ Idem, Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, p. 218. See also: Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 18.

³¹ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 105.

³² Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 71.

loyalty, fixity of purpose, good-will, and heroism.³³

Tulsī Dās pictures the ideal man as one who, like a mango tree, which bears both flower and fruit,³⁴ excels in both speech and action.

He gives a more elaborate description in two long lists of virtues, the first in a dialogue between Rāma and the sage Nārada,³⁵ and the other in a dialogue between Bharata and Rāma.³⁶

The first list enumerates the following virtues:

The saint is:

- without the 6 disorders: lust, anger, greed, delusion, jealousy, and pride
- without sin or wrong desire of boundless wisdom
- content and abstemious
- a devotee of truth, scholarly, ascetic
- patient, supremely wise in the ways of righteousness
- virtuous, free from the troubles of the world
- undisturbed by doubt, holding dear neither life nor home, but only Rāma's lotus feet
- equable and calm, persistent in right conduct
- straightforward and charitable to all
- regular in prayer and penance and vows
- subdual of sense, restraint and religious observance
- devoted to the feet of his guru, Govinda and brahmins
- perfect in detachment, discernment, humility and spiritual wisdom with right knowledge of Veda and Purana.

³³ Idem, Kiskindha-kāṇḍa, p. 71.

³⁴ H.L.A.R., Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, Ch. 15, pp. 410-411.

³⁵ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 43 - C. 44, pp. 322-323.

³⁶ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 36, pp. 450-451.

He desires praises of others, not his own
 He loves Rāma most sincerely
 He displays no pride or self-conceit or arrogance, nor
 ever set foot upon the path of vice
 He stands unmoved, possessing naught, perfectly pure and
 tranquil
 He sings or listens to Rāma's sportive acts
 He is unselfishly devoted to the good of others. ³⁷

To these, the second list adds the following virtues:

The saint:

- sorrows over another's sorrow and rejoices
in another's joy
- is the enemy of none
- is without intolerance, exultation and fear
- is devoted to Rāma in thought, word, deed
- desires nothing
- is continent and joyful
- is simple, friendly, and shows devotion toward
the Brahmins. ³⁸

Can anyone expect to find so many virtues in one person?

The Rāmcaritmānas presents two such persons: the devotee and
Rāma.

As we studied Tulsī Dās' version of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, we
saw that whereas Vālmīki presented Bharata as the perfect
brother, Tulsī Dās presents him as the ideal devotee, whose
main virtues, besides imitation and love for Rāma, are detach-
ment, humility, and mercy towards others.

³⁷ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 43 - C. 44, pp. 322-323.

³⁸ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 36, pp. 450-451.

However, in both stories the incarnation par excellence of the ideal man is obviously to be found in Rāma. In the opening lines of the Valmikian epic, he is pictured by Sri Nārada as the personification of integrity, versed in the duties of life, grateful, truthful, firm in his views, benevolent to all beings, learned, eloquent, handsome, patient, powerful, wise, conversant with the ethical code, free from envy, fully self-controlled, and omniscient, although this last point (omniscience) is contradicted by later passages.³⁹ Placing his father's will and the welfare of others before anything else, he seeks to be useful and friendly to all.⁴⁰ Equal to Brahmā and Viṣṇu, he is the supporter of the universe, the subduer of those who contravene moral laws, and the inspirer of virtues in others.⁴¹ However the view that such passages where Vālmiki speaks of Rāma as a divine being are later adjuncts is corroborated by those numerous passages where Rāma is shown as not entirely free from ignorance, anger, fear, grief, and despair.

He does not hide the fact that Rāma, being subject to human frailty, has to be instructed in many things, namely in the science of Bala and Atibala, a collection of sacred

³⁹ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 150.

⁴⁰ Idem, p. 153.

⁴¹ Idem, pp. 3-4.

formulas which allowed him to manifest supreme energy,⁴² in the origin and genesis of the river Ganges,⁴³ and in a method — unknown to the gods — how to use the celestial weapons received from Viśvamitra.⁴⁴ Likewise, he shows his hero to be a prey to grief, fear,⁴⁵ despair,⁴⁶ and violence.⁴⁷

The Sanskrit poet nonetheless shows his hero's super-strength by showing him breaking the bow,⁴⁸ destroying demons⁴⁹ especially those who hinder the sacrifice.⁵⁰ He is also shown as an obedient son of his father's will,⁵¹ devoted to his Guru and God,⁵² firm in his own vows,⁵³ and anxious to bring happiness to others.⁵⁴ He never returns a harsh answer when treated with contumely, and never hears nor voices anything against dharma. Surpassing his father in the art of warfare, he pays due regard to the responsibilities of the warrior caste.⁵⁵

The above analysis warrants the conclusion that in Rāma, Vālmīki intends to present a model not so much of divine saviour, but of a royal hero.

⁴² Idem, p. 54.

⁴³ Idem, p. 76.

⁴⁴ Idem, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁵ Idem, pp. 208, 231.

⁴⁶ Idem, p. 123.

⁴⁷ Idem, Kiśkindha-kāṇḍa, p. 19

⁴⁸ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 133.

⁴⁹ Idem, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Idem, p. 69.

⁵¹ Idem, p. 60.

⁵² Idem, p. 158.

⁵³ Idem, p. 151.

⁵⁴ Idem, p. 153.

⁵⁵ Idem, p. 158.

With Tulsī Dās, the picture drawn above of the saint finds its concrete living expression in Rāma. If the poet does not hesitate to attribute to him such divine qualities as the omniscient,⁵⁶ the Supreme Spirit,⁵⁷ the Lord of all,⁵⁸ Very Bliss, transcending all illusion, knowledge, speech and sense,⁵⁹ he nevertheless shows him displaying human qualities, that could be imitated by his devotees. He is shown, for example, as being respectful of rites⁶⁰ and lovingly devoted to his guru,⁶¹ Ruled by love and modesty,⁶² he is not ambitious for dominion, an upholder of righteousness, who cares naught for carnal pleasures.⁶³

Nevertheless, Tulsī Dās is careful to avoid presenting a too "human" picture of his hero. The emphasis on Rāma's super-human qualities accompanying the account of his birth⁶⁴ and his youth;⁶⁵ the tendency to minimize Daśaratha's doubts concerning his son's might⁶⁶ as well as Rāma's dependence on his guru for both power and knowledge;⁶⁷ his efforts to

⁵⁶ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 53, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Idem, C. 119, p. 59.

⁵⁸ Idem, C. 13, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Idem, C. 200, p. 93.

⁶⁰ Idem, C. 223, p. 103.

⁶¹ Idem, C. 215 - C. 216, p. 100

⁶³ Idem, C. 50, p. 182.

⁶⁴ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 188-C. 196, pp. 87-91.

⁶⁵ Idem, Idem, C. 196 - C. 203, pp. 91-94.

⁶⁶ Idem, C. 206, p. 95. Compare with R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 49-52.

⁶⁷ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 58-59.

enhance Rāma's importance as the central figure from the earlier stages of his activities;⁶⁸ and also to eliminate from the picture such weaknesses that could make him appear subject to human frailty;⁶⁹ his delight in stressing Sītā's rapturous love for her spouse;⁷⁰ his constant reminder that the young prince's superior perfection, rather than tradition, is the decisive factor in the designation of King Daśaratha's successor;⁷¹ his systematic efforts to embellish not only Rāma but the other members of the royal family, at the expense of Rāma's enemies, for instance Rāvana;⁷² all these are aimed at presenting a picture of Rāma worthy of his divine excellence.

If it is not false to affirm that Rāma is, in Tulsī Dās' eyes the saint par excellence in the sense that he is the only possessor of the virtues enumerated above, it is nonetheless clear that he wants to present his hero as more than a man, to the extent that he transcends human nature. He therefore acts as if he were a man:

When Rāma acts like a man, he does so in sport. When he is weary, when he swoons, when he finds it difficult to defeat Rāvan, when he asks questions as if he did not

⁶⁸ N.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁹ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 45 - C. 46, p. 180.

⁷⁰ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 226, p. 104.

⁷¹ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 183, p. 235.

⁷² Idem, Lankā-kāṇḍa, C. 6 - C. 8, p. 369-370.

know, some explanations must be found. It is said that it was Rama's pleasure that it should seem so. And to that extent, his incarnation is not real. 73

Yet, if Rāma is a divine saviour, he is nevertheless pictured in the Rāmaritnāma as a model proposed for human imitation. And if Tulsī Dās does not explicitly attribute to his hero all the virtues of the saint, one may quite safely assume that his intention to suggest it is doubtless understood.

If the prosperity of society depends on the quality of its government, on the integrity of the caste system, and on the excellence of each individual, it can be said to depend more fundamentally on Dharma, which is described as that which holds the universe, and hence society, together.

B. Dharma

Observance of one's dharma is of primary importance in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, where it is often expressed in terms of rites, traditions, scriptures, and law.

The efficacy of practices of austerity is especially underscored in the Bāla-kāṇḍa. King Daśaratha obtains four sons "as a result of the sacrifice".⁷⁴ The rites of birth

⁷³ Macfie, J.M. The Rāmāyan of Tulsīdās, p. 149.

⁷⁴ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 29.

are carried out scrupulously.⁷⁵ One cannot manifest anger during the sacrifice.⁷⁶ The mid-day Soma pressing takes place according to ordinance.⁷⁷

Vālmiki's respect for tradition finds expression especially in his constant reminder that Rā should be his father's successor as king of Ayodhyā for the "throne should belong to the eldest son".⁷⁸ Even if Rāma possesses the qualities that would by themselves make him worthy of the honour,⁷⁹ it is tradition, here, that is the decisive factor. It is also according to tradition that Rā offers water to his ancestors.⁸⁰

Likewise, sacrifices are performed according to traditions⁸¹ and Scriptures.⁸² Kings offer the traditional welcome "as enjoined by the Scriptures".⁸³ Hanumān is praised by Rāma for being versed in the Rg Veda and conversant with the Yajur and the Sama Vedas.⁸⁴

Dharma is occasionally expressed in terms of law.⁸⁵ Thus, Sītā's first motive for wanting to follow her husband to the forest is observance of the law.⁸⁶ The counsellors of King Daśaratha pass judgment on their sons if they break the law.⁸⁷

⁷⁵ R.N., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 46.

⁷⁶ Idem, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Idem, p. 35.

⁷⁸ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 355.
See also: pp. 400, 419, etc.

⁷⁹ Idem, pp. 160-164.

⁸⁰ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 76.

⁸¹ Idem, p. 32.

⁸² Idem, p. 23.

⁸³ Idem, p. 30.

⁸⁴ Idem, Kiśkindha-kāṇḍa, p. 175.

⁸⁵ Idem, p. 71.

⁸⁶ Idem, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Idem, p. 22

The kings are often reminded of their duties, particularly the protection of their subjects;⁸⁸ the knowledge with dharma⁸⁹ and hospitality.⁹⁰

Dilipa, a warrior, is praised for being fully established in the duties of his caste, and possessed of the highest dharma.⁹¹

Dharma is also identified with the king (Daśaratha),⁹² with forbearance, "noble virtue par excellence",⁹³ and with friendship based on loyalty and justice: "The greatest of virtues is friendship that is rooted in loyalty and justice; he who fails in these is not fixed in his duty".⁹⁴

Vālmīki often speaks on an unwritten duty which is the equivalent of the will of one's sire.⁹⁵

One is severely penalized for not speaking in accordance with dharma.⁹⁶ Only Ravana dares to encourage Rāma to contravene dharma.⁹⁷

In the Rāmcaritmānas, too, dharma is often expressed in terms of loyalty to rites, traditions, scriptures and law. Great sages are praised for performing ceremonies in accord-

⁸⁸ Idem, p. 59. See also Aranya-kāṇḍa, pp. 41, 15; Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 164-170.

⁸⁹ Idem, p. 71.

⁹⁰ Idem, p. 56.

⁹¹ Idem, p. 92.

⁹² Idem, p. 52.

⁹³ Idem, p. 73

⁹⁴ Idem, Kiṣkindha-kāṇḍa, p. 259.

⁹⁵ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 218, 226, 239, 251.

⁹⁶ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 124.

⁹⁷ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 118.

ance with Vedic rites.⁹⁸ The king is shown preparing for his son's marriage by performing rites as prescribed by customs of his family and the Vedas.⁹⁹

Those who speak in accordance with the Vedas are praised¹⁰⁰ as well as the king who protects his people as the Vedas enjoin.¹⁰¹ The monarch is also expected to listen to the Scriptures.¹⁰² Under the amazed eyes of the multitudes invited to the wedding ceremonies, kings Janak and Daśaratha join "most affectionately in the performance of every Vedic and social rite".¹⁰³ In the same context, when Sītā entered the pavilion, "the lordly sages joyously repeated the Śānti texts, and the family gurus performed all the rites and ceremonies and usages appropriate to that hour".¹⁰⁴ Likewise, before giving his daughter in marriage, "the glorious king performed all social and scriptural rites".¹⁰⁵

We find in the Rāmcaritmānas occasional references to the caste duties. The great sage Vasistha, for instance, tells Bharata that those who do not perform their caste duties should be grieved for.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 101, p. 51.

⁹⁹ Idem, C. 299, p. 133.

¹⁰⁰ Idem, C. 115, p. 57.

¹⁰¹ Idem, D. 153, p. 73.

¹⁰² Idem, C. 155, p. 73.

¹⁰³ Idem, C. 317, p. 141.

¹⁰⁴ Idem, C. 320, p. 143.

¹⁰⁵ Idem, Ch. 34, p. 144.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 172, p. 231.

Yet, for Tulsī Dās tradition is not decisive in determining Daśaratha's choice of Rāma as his successor as king of Ayodhyā. Although Rāma's seniority is mentioned as an important factor,¹⁰⁷ it is his superior perfection which becomes the decisive factor.¹⁰⁸

Likewise, Sītā's will to follow her husband to the forest is not attributed to the observance of a law, but to the love she has for her husband.

Again, there is in Tulsī-Das' version, a difference of emphasis which consists in more frequently relating duty to the personal will of somebody in addition to fixed stipulations of the impersonal dharma. For instance, one is to welcome the influence of the saints.¹⁰⁹ One should approve and act on the word of a mother or father or guru or master.¹¹⁰ Sītā is advised by her mother to do service to her husband, father and mother and the guru, to observe her lord's will and obey his commands.¹¹¹ Women who serve their husband faithfully are promised the highest bliss.¹¹² Obedience to a father's command is considered as one's "highest duty".¹¹³ Rāma declares that those who willingly accept the advice of their mother or father or guru or lord have achieved their life's purpose.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Idem, C. 10, p. 166.
See also: D.31, p. 175.

¹⁰⁸ Idem, C. 3, p. 163.

¹⁰⁹ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C.3 p. 4.

¹¹⁰ Idem, p. 110.

¹¹¹ Idem, C. 331, p. 150.

¹¹² Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, Ś. 5a,
p. 298.

¹¹³ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C.55,
p. 184.

¹¹⁴ Idem, D. 70, p. 190.

When the sage Bharadvāja invited Bharata to eat bulbs, roots, fruits, and flowers, Bharata hesitated for it was not the proper time according to dharma: "Then, reflecting that a guru's word would outweigh his scruples, he...said: 'Obedience to your command, my lord, is my highest duty'".¹¹⁵

Moreover, Tulsī Dās, as we have seen in the preceding pages shows less concern for the duties attached to the king-ly office. This tendency can be verified especially by an examination of the many passages of the Valmikian epic concerning the king's duties, which have been omitted by Tulsī Dās.

This minimizing tendency has to be examined more closely. It would appear, in effect, that in spite of Tulsī Dās' respect for dharma, he seems to regard the neglect of one's duty as acceptable when there is a conflict with bhakti. This is suggested by the conduct of the citizens of Ayodhyā, and particularly by that of Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, and Bharata.

In the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, the people are shown leaving the children and old men at home in order to bear company to Rāma. This was not approved of by Rāma, who "repeatedly instructed them in their duty, but they loved him so much that they refused to turn back".¹¹⁶

Likewise, it is said that whenever Rāma happened to pass by a village, people all "forsook their household duties and

¹¹⁵ Idem, C. 213, p. 247.

¹¹⁶ Idem, C. 85, p. 196.

came running out to see (him)"¹¹⁷ Nowhere do we see any sign of disapproval on the part of the poet. As to Rāma, if he disapproves, he nevertheless shows much understanding. At no time do we hear of any real punishment for such "disobedience".

The same message is implied in Sītā's decision to follow her husband to the forest. This decision is taken against the will not only of her mother-in-law, but also that of Rāma himself: "

My will is this, that you should serve my mother; it were in every way for better, lady, that you should stay at home. There is no other duty higher than this — to do reverent service to the feet of your husband's parents... The reward of submission to the duty which both guru and scripture impose can easily be won. ¹¹⁸

Yet, Sītā maintains her decision and Rāma goes along with her. It is to be noticed that whereas in the Valmikian story Sītā is discouraged to follow her husband mainly because of the dangers of forest dwelling,¹¹⁹ in the Rāmcaritmānas she is urged to stay back mostly on grounds of duty towards her husband's household. If she is allowed to follow Rāma, it is in spite of her duty.

The case of Lakṣmaṇa is quite similar to that of Sītā. First, he is told by Rāma that "those who willingly accept the advice of their mother or father or guru or lord have achieved their life's purpose... Stay, then, and be a comfort

¹¹⁷ Idem, C. 114, p. 208.

¹¹⁸ Idem, C. 61, pp. 186-187.

¹¹⁹ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 234-236.

to them all; any other course, dear brother, would be very wrong... Stay, then, and regard this as your duty".¹²⁰

Here again, Lakṣmaṇa is allowed to follow Rāma in spite of his dharma, that of being a comfort to the people of Ayodhyā. In the Valmikian corresponding passage, Lakṣmaṇa obtains Rāma's consent after proving that in fact there was no duty for him to stay in Ayodhyā. There is therefore no real conflict between dharma and bhakti.¹²¹

Bharata's conduct is basically identical to that of Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. He is told most solemnly, in the presence of all the sages, ministers and nobles to act in obedience to the king's command: "The king, proclaims Vasistha, has given you the throne and you must honour your father's word".¹²² To this, Bharata replies by admitting that "the advice of a guru, a father, a mother, a master or a friend should be cheerfully followed, as for the best; and to ponder whether it be right or wrong is to fail in duty and incur a load of guilt".¹²³ Nonetheless, because he feels he is responsible for Rāma's forced exile, he determines to leave the following morning to seek Rāma and ask him to return to his capital.¹²⁴

The course of action is thus evaluated by the great sage Bharadvāja:

¹²⁰ H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, D.70 - C.71, p. 190.

¹²¹ R.V., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 241-242.

¹²² H.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 174, p. 231.

¹²³ Idem, C. 177, pp. 232-233.

¹²⁴ Idem, C. 183, p. 235.

Had you reigned, you would not have been at fault, and Rama would have been well content to hear of it. Now, Bharata, you have acted very rightly... for devotion to Rāma's feet is the source of all good fortune in the world. 125

Likewise, Rāma does not condemn Bharata even if "in my folly, I (Bharata) endeavoured to annul my Lord's word and my father's, and assembled a host and came hither... I have been altogether presumptuous, and my Lord in his love has accounted my presumption service". 126

At the end, though, Rāma makes his will known. His father's command is to be respected:

Obedience to the command of parents, guru or master upholds all righteousness, as Śeṣa upholds the world. Obey, then, this command, and cause me to obey it too, and so, dear brother, be the guardian of the Sora Race. 127

Here again, the Valmikian version differs in that it does not, as in the Rāmcaritmānas, present Bharata's refusal of the throne as an act of disobedience to his dharma. On the contrary, since no one but the eldest son can be made a king, Bharata considers it his duty to refuse the throne and bring back his brother from the forest. 128 "How should a son of Daśaratha become the usurper of a crown?" 129 Moreover, the

125 Idem, D. 207, p. 245.

126 Idem, C. 298, p. 282.

127 Idem, C. 306, p. 286.

128 R.V. Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 254-255.

129 Idem, p. 359.

king's decision to send Rāma into exile is questionable, as it is due to a loss of judgment¹³⁰ and to the enslavement of passion.¹³¹

The case is different in the Rāmcaritmānas, where Bharata considers it his dharma to accept the crown but cannot accept it because this would impede him from being "in the service of Rāma".¹³² This must be understood in the sense that Bharata considers himself cut off from the affection and approval of Rāma: "Lakṣmaṇa, he laments, has crowned his life with happiness, seeing that he has left all to cleave to Rāma's feet; but I was born to banish Raghubir to the woods".¹³³ Only when communion with Rāma can be restored, by the latter's rehabilitating words, will he be able to accept his duty as provisional regent.

Bharata was greatly comforted, for the kindness of his master had put to flight his pain and sense of guilt. His face was cheerful, his soul no more disconsolate; he seemed like a dumb man to whom Sarasvatī had granted the gift of speech. Again doing loving obeisance, he folded his lotus hands and said, 'Lord, I am as happy as if I were to journey with you; I have reaped the reward of my birth into this world. Now, gracious Lord, whatever by your command, that will I reverently and dutifully obey. 134

Thus, we may say that whereas in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana the conflict between the written dharma and the unwritten

¹³⁰ Idem, p. 410.

¹³¹ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 185.

¹³² R.L.A.R., Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C. 178, p. 233.

¹³³ Idem, C. 182, p. 235.

dharma (i.e. the king's will) was resolved in favor of the latter, in the Rāmcaritmānas the parallel conflict revolves around two different poles: dharma and bhakti, priority being given to the latter.

Both the people of Ayodhyā, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa are shown by the approving poet to have neglected their duty in order to follow Rāma in his sylvan retreat out of devotion for him. As to Bharata, he is shown in the Rāmcaritmānas to consider as of secondary importance strict fidelity to dharma — that of obeying his father's command — without communion with Rāma, which is of decisive importance. It is only after his brother "had put to flight his pain and sense of guilt" that he could accept his duty in obedience to his father's command.

In general, therefore, it may be concluded that bhakti is prior to dharma; it is its justification and its inspiration. To that extent, we may say that dharma and bhakti-varga go hand in hand, and that Tulsī Dās has, as Macfie observed, linked religion (bhakti) and morality (dharma): "He has made religious enthusiasm the inspiration of right living... Devotion to Rāma must produce good men".¹³⁵

However, there are cases when bhakti can dispense one of dharma. When the two seem to be in contradiction, one must assume that dharma, and never bhakti, should be sacrificed.

¹³⁵Macfie, J.M. "The Rāmāyan of Tulsīdās, p. 186-187.

Thus, without denying that Rāma is a hero of dharma, Tulsī Dās' first aim is to present him as the supreme pole of attraction of his devotee's love and affection.

Turning now to the means more immediately related to salvation, the next chapter will examine, in its first part, the views of Tulsī Dās on the Brahman, the Guru, and the Sires, and in the second part, his views on bhakti, which plays a dominating role in the Rāncaritmānas.

CHAPTER IV: SALVATION

Just as Tulsī Dās does not abolish the importance of Dharma, so his views on Rāma-bhakti as the supreme means of salvation does not lead him to suppress the importance of the Brahman, the Guru, or the Sires as valid intermediaries between Rāma and his devotees.

A. The Authority of the Brahman, the Guru, the Sires

The preeminence of brahmanhood is clearly upheld in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana. Rāma is seen bestowing immense wealth on the Brahmins.¹ Brahmins advise the king how to perform the sacrifice.² Indra is distressed at having killed a Brahman.³ Rāma is asked to subdue the demons "for the good of the Brahmins and the cows".⁴ Vālmiki shows concern over the superiority of the Brahman over the Ksatriya: "Accursed is the warrior's might, the real might is the spiritual might".⁵ Brahmanhood is also seen as a promotion: the virtuous Visvāmitra acquires through asceticism the rank of brahmanhood,⁶ thus making him worthy

¹ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 8

² Idem, p. 23.

³ Idem, p. 57.

⁴ Idem, p. 59.

⁵ Idem, p. 114. See also pp. 110, 113.

⁶ Idem, p. 47. See also pp. 130, 148.

and capable of delivering man of his offence.⁷

Obedience to the Guru is also valued in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, where Vālmīki's disciple, Bharadvāja, is described with admiration as "obedient to the command of his Guru".⁸ King Daśaratha has his plans approved by Vasistha, his Guru,⁹ who plays a central role in the royal court.¹⁰

Vālmīki speaks with respect of the duty one has to obey the command of his sire. Thus, he shows Rāma ever obedient to his father,¹¹ refusing the throne "preferring to carry out the command of his sire".¹² Likewise, he is full of deference and devotion to his mothers.¹³

With Tulsī Dās, the preeminence of the Brahman is even more forcefully brought out. The Brahmins solve all doubts that spring from ignorance. They are called "gods on earth"¹⁴ and are put on an equal footing with the gods when the poet exclaims: "With folded hands I do homage to the feet of gods and Brahmins".¹⁵

Even if the Brahmins are usually mentioned after the gods,¹⁶ Tulsī Dās shows them more respect than to the latter, towards whom, as we have seen, he occasionally directs hostile shafts.

⁷ Idem, p. 48.

⁸ Idem, p. 9.

⁹ Idem, p. 29.

¹⁰ Idem, pp. 32 ff.

¹¹ Idem, pp. 8, 25.

¹² Idem, p. 5. See also pp. 60, 153.

¹³ Idem, p. 153.

¹⁴ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kānda, D. 33, p. 317.

¹⁵ Idem, Bāla-kānda, D. 14, p. 11.

¹⁶ Idem, C. 183, p. 84.

The poet calls himself a servant of Paraśurā, a Brahman: "How can a servant fight with his master? Cease from your fury, noble Brahman".¹⁷ He sleeps at the feet of a Brahman, a sign of love and devotion.¹⁸ He goes as far as declaring that a Brahman is to be revered though he be devoid of goodness or virtue, but a Sūdra never, however virtuous and learned".¹⁹

Likewise, the role of the Guru is more highly valued in the Rāmcaritmānas. In an opening homage which finds no parallel in the Valmikian version, the Guru is called Hari in human form, who heals all life's ills, brings forth joy, disperses ignorance, and grants mastery of all perfections.²⁰

One's Guru is to be kept informed on all actions of his disciple: "Lord there is a saying...that if a man hides aught from his Guru, his soul finds no enlightenment".²¹ He is also to be consulted on important matters. Whereas Vālmiki showed King Daśaratha consulting his counsellors with regards to the nomination of his eldest son as regent,²²

¹⁷ Idem, D. 281, p. 235.

¹⁸ Idem, D. 357, p. 160.

¹⁹ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 32, p. 317.

²⁰ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, Ś. - C. 2, p. 2-3.

²¹ Idem, C. 45, p. 28.

²² R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, p. 23.

Tulsī Dās has him consult his Guru, Vasiṣṭha, before his counsellors.²³ It is likewise he who bestowed the name of each of the king's four sons.²⁴ Following the same trend, Rāma and his brother Lakṣmīni are shown, much more in the Rāmcaritmānas than in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, highly devoted to Viśvāmitra, their Guru, and submissive to his will.²⁵ Disrespect to the Guru is called a heinous sin,²⁶ and distrust in his word ruins the hope of winning happiness or success.²⁷ However, should the latter teach the doctrine of the impersonal, he must be resisted.²⁸

If the trilogy "god, brahman, or guru"²⁹ seems to form a natural association for Tulsī Dās, he does not hesitate, at times, to raise the parents to the same dignity. Thus, one of the characteristics of sinners is to pay no respect to "mother, father, guru or Brahman".³⁰

By upholding devoted submissiveness towards "mother, father, guru, or Brahman", as well as to the gods, albeit with reserve for the lesser gods, Tulsī Dās gives an indication of his efforts to harmonize the beliefs of traditional Hinduism with his doctrine of the bhakti-marga.

²³ H.L.A.R., Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 188, p. 87.

²⁴ Idem, C. 195, p. 91.

²⁵ Idem, D. 225-D.226, p. 103.

See also: C. 304, p.135.

²⁶ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, D. 106, p. 481.

²⁷ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C.80, p.42.

²⁸ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, C.106-107, pp. 485-486.

²⁹ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C.183, p.84.

³⁰ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, C. 38, p. 451.

B. Bhakti

In the several means he had suggested to obtain deliverance, Vālmīki had laid the seed of the bhakti movement which found its culminating expression in the Rāmcaritmānas.

He had seen sacrifice and mortification as means of destroying sin³¹ or to obtain a favor.³² He had upheld the performance of funeral rites for the deliverance of the souls of one's ancestors.³³ He had given examples to show that yogic penances can obtain beneficial results.³⁴ More than once, he had encouraged devotion to Śiva.³⁵

He had favoured the reading or hearing of the story of Rāma as a form of salvific practice, which frees from sin, procures "greatness in (one's) own caste",³⁶ and prepares for heaven.³⁷

He had proposed an exemplar of devotion to Rāma in the person of Sītā, whose tender feelings for her husband she compared to a burning fire, capable of consuming her utterly.³⁸ Likewise, Bharata, who was shown prostrating himself

³¹ R.V., Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 36, 48.

³² Idem, p. 24.

³³ Idem, p. 88.

³⁴ Idem, p. 88.

³⁵ Idem, pp. 56, 89-92.

³⁶ Idem, p. 9.

³⁷ Idem, pp. 8-9, 70, 93.

³⁸ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 165.

at his brother's feet, was said to be full of affection for him.³⁹

Yet dharma, not bhakti, was considered the highest virtue: "I consider loyalty to one's word to be the most rigid personal duty and the essence of all the virtues".⁴⁰

With Tulsī Dās, not only all salvific practices culminate in bhakti, but they are worthless without it. Although he does not exclude the important salvific value of knowledge,⁴¹ prayer, and the performance of all religious duties;⁴² although he said that "there is nothing in the world that cannot be accomplished by penance"⁴³ Tulsī Dās values all these as worthless without Rāma-bhakti: "Caste, family, religion, high degree, wealth, power, connexions, virtue and accomplishments -- a man who has all these but has no faith is like a cloud that has no water".⁴⁴

With an insistence that finds no parallel in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, Tulsī Dās praises the salvific effect⁴⁵ of the telling of the Lake of Rāma's Acts, which, through the grace of Rāma,⁴⁶ removes doubt, ignorance, error, and carries one across the river of rebirth.⁴⁷

³⁹ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 372.

⁴⁰ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 415.

⁴¹ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 15, p. 305.

⁴² Idem, Ch. 2 p. 299.

⁴³ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 163, p. 76.

⁴⁴ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 33, p. 318.

⁴⁵ Idem, Bālakaṇḍa, C. 11, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Idem, C. 38, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Idem, C. 31, p. 20.

Whenever a situation lends itself to it, he attracts attention to the mutual love between Rāma and his brothers,⁴⁸ between Rāma and Sītā,⁴⁹ and even between Rāma and the gods.⁵⁰

Repeatedly, he praises the love of the devotee — whom he calls "servant"⁵¹ — for Rāma particularly through the model he sets forth in the person of Bharata,⁵³ Hanumān⁵⁴ and the crow Bhūṣundi.⁵⁵ Likewise, he extolls Rāma's love for his devotee⁵⁶ particularly the repentant sinner,⁵⁷ as is illustrated by the account of the encounter between Rāma and his devotee, the demon Vibhīṣana.⁵⁸

He stresses quite forcibly the power of Rāma's name,⁵⁹ which, uttered but once, allows one not only to save himself but to become a saviour for others.⁶⁰ He assures his reader that Rāma can, through his mercy, exterminate such enemies as wrath, lust, greed, pride and delusion, whose irresistible might could otherwise overthrow in the twinkling of an eye the souls of sages.⁶¹

When Tulsī Dās speaks of liberation of the devotee by Rāma, he maintains that one retains his personality, thus allow-

⁴⁸ Idem, Ayodhyā, C.10, p. 166.

⁴⁹ Idem, Bālakāṇḍa, C.226-C.227, p. 104.

⁵⁰ Idem, Ch. 31, p. 142.

⁵¹ Idem, C. 21, p. 15.

⁵² Idem, D. 38, p. 25.

⁵³ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C.157-end of Book II, pp.225-294.

⁵⁴ Idem, Kiṣkhindī-kāṇḍa, pp. 324-338.

⁵⁵ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, pp. 431-499.

⁵⁶ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 12, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Idem, C. 16, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Idem, C. 42, p. 358.

⁵⁹ Idem, C. 19-C.28, pp. 14-18.

⁶⁰ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, C.217.

⁶¹ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, D.38, p.320.

ing him an eternity of worship, which is the summit of bliss. Thus, it is because of bhakti that King Daśaratha was not "reabsorbed" (i.e. reabsorbed into Brahman) but was admitted to an eternal state of communion with Rāma:

Daśaratha had devoted himself to worship of the separate object (bhed-bhakti), and that, Umas, is why he had not attained to liberation (mokṣa); for those who worship the personal are not released, but Rāma grants them faith in his own person. 62

It does not follow from the above that man reaps the salvific fruits of uttering Rāma's name irregardless of his inner dispositions.⁶³ Among the nine kinds of bhakti, he mentions, for example, the necessity to be without pride, to have rejected hypocrisy, to have self-control, goodness, and detachment from much business, to be content with what prosperity one has and never even dream of another's faults, to be upright and free from guile.⁶⁴

Compared to the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, the Rāmcāritmānas bathes in a much more intense mystical atmosphere. Such rapturous transports of devotion as the following, for example, are not to be found in the Velmikian version: "Crying 'Rāma! Rāma!' and again 'Rāma! and yet again 'Rāma, Rāma!'

62 Idem, Lañkā-kāṇḍa, C. 110, p. 425.

63 Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 29, p. 19.

64 Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 34, p. 318.

65 Idem, Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, D. 155, p. 224.

the King (Daśaratha) parted from Raghubar, abandoned his body and entered the abode of the gods".⁶⁵

Several other passages could be quoted to show that in Tulsī Dās' version, the dimension of love and devotion is much more emphasized than in the parallel passages of Vālmiki's version. For example, the account of Rāma's breaking of the weapon;⁶⁶ his marriage with Sītā;⁶⁷ the attitude of Rāma's companions while he roams in the forest;⁶⁸ Māricea's secret wish to become Hari-bhakta when asked by Rāvana to deceive Rāma by taking the form of a deer;⁶⁹ Sugrīva's ascetic vow to worship Rāma day and night;⁷⁰ Bālī and Tārā's request for the boon of perfect faith;⁷¹ Swayamprabha's visit to Rāma;⁷² the spies' conversion to Rāma;⁷³ the atmosphere in which the building of the bridge is carried out; Kumbhakarna's waking words concerning Rāma and his own brother who had become Rāma's votary;⁷⁴ Indra-jita's dying words: "Where is Rāma?";⁷⁵ Mando-darī's sentiments of devotion towards Rāma; the meeting of Rāma and the "utterly low-born Nisāda", who fell unconscious for love of his master;⁷⁶ the episode of Rāma's return to Ayodhyā;⁷⁷

⁶⁵ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, D.155, p.224.

⁶⁶ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C.260, pp.116ff.

⁶⁷ Idem, C.267-C.358, pp.128-161.

⁶⁸ Idem, D. 121, p. 210.

⁶⁹ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 24, p.312.

⁷⁰ Idem, Kiskandha-kāṇḍa, C.7, p.327.

⁷¹ Idem, Ch. 1, p. 329.

⁷² Idem, C. 25, pp. 335-336.

⁷³ Idem, Sundara-kāṇḍa, D.51, p. 361.

⁷⁴ Idem, C. 64, p. 396.

⁷⁵ Idem, D. 76, p. 402.

⁷⁶ Idem, Ch. 37, p. 430.

⁷⁷ Idem, Uttara-kāṇḍa, Ch. 2, p. 434.

⁷⁸ Idem, C. 11- Ch. 6, pp. 437-450.

the crowning ceremony;⁷⁸ all these suggest a degree of Bhakti not to be found in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana.

Following the same trend, some episodes with an intense atmosphere of Bhakti have been added by Tulsī Dās. For example, the long account, in the Bāla-kāṇḍa, of Umā's doubts, not to be found in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, culminates in Bhakti: "All her critical doubts were resolved; she began to love and trust in Raghupati's feet".⁷⁹ Likewise, the strange episode about a young ascetic, who some believe to be the poet himself, recognizing in Rāma "his own adored divinity"⁸⁰ has been added by Tulsī Dās. Again, the encounter of Rāma with Vālmīki, in the latter's hermitage, where Vālmīki enumerates Rāma's divine qualities,⁸¹ finds no parallel in the Sanskrit epic.

Tulsī Dās enhances still more the atmosphere of Bhakti by introducing devotees who did not appear in the parallel passages of the Valmikian version. For example, only Tulsī Dās reports that Janaka's whole court paid a visit to the exiled Rāma, adding that thanks to Bhakti, no one "felt the least fatigue and weariness from their journey".⁸²

On the other hand, Tulsī Dās shows less concern for the duties of the kingly office, than did his predecessor, Rāma

⁷⁹ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 119, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Idem, Ayodhya-kāṇḍa, D. 110, p. 206.

⁸¹ Idem, C. 126- C. 127, pp. 212-213.

⁸² Idem, C. 275, p. 273.

⁸³ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, C. 5, p. 164.

is not first and foremost the perfect king, attentive to his Dharma, but the supreme hero of Bhakti, concerned above all with his votaries' love for him. For instance, whereas Vālmiki had shown King Daśaratha summoning Brahmins and the leading elders of the chief towns and villages awaiting the result of their deliberations on the succession to the throne, Tulsī Dās shows him saying "If it meets with my counsellors' approval", but in fact only Sumantra is heard voicing his consent.⁸³ Likewise, he omits most of the organizational details⁸⁴ given in Vālmiki's version⁸⁵ with regards to the preparation for the legal coronation.

In the same trend, he leaves out important passages of the Valmikian epic dealing with the duties of a king, such as the opening section of Book III,⁸⁶ as well as the reminders by Rāma's elders of his royal duties.⁸⁷ Quite significantly, a somewhat lengthy passage in Vālmiki's version,⁸⁸ where Rāma is seen questioning Bharata concerning the discharge of his royal duties is completely omitted in the Rāmaritnāmas. Other similar Valmikian passages are systematically omitted

⁸⁴ Idem, C. 11 - C. 12, p. 166.

⁸⁵ R.V., Yuddha-kāṇḍa, pp. 365-372.

⁸⁶ Idem, Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Idem, Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 166, 169.

⁸⁸ Idem, Bāla-kāṇḍa, pp. 393-398.

⁸⁹ Idem, pp. 47, 107.

by Tulsī Dās.⁸⁹ So is the long list of qualities that would make Rāma fit for the kingly office.⁹⁰ Again, whereas Vālmiki had shown Bharata accompanied by an army as he set out to meet Rāma in the forest,⁹¹ Tulsī Dās makes no reference to such an organized body, which suggests the ruler rather than the object of devotion.

The trend is clear. Beauty, suggestive of Bhakti, and not orderly organization, suggestive of Dharma, is Tulsī Dās' main concern. In Tulsī Dās' eyes, Rāma is not, first and foremost, a ruler and a protector, but the dominant center of his people's love and devotion. He is not merely a great hero prince; he is the incarnation of the Supreme Absolute.

For Tulsī Dās, Rāma is the supreme hero of BHAKTI. With him, loyal devotedness becomes rapturous devotion.

⁸⁹ Idem, pp. 47, 107.

⁹⁰ Idem, Ayodhyā kāṇḍa, pp. 160-164.

⁹¹ Idem, pp. 359-360.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The above comparative study has shown that Tulsī Dās' main purpose is not basically theological, but exhortative. It is, in effect, as a poet and a devotee, much more than as a theologian, that he wants to present his divine Hero, and promote the supreme value of the loving devotion towards this "Absolute made man".¹

With this end in mind, he draws from the main sources of the Hindu tradition, which he studied with intensive care for fifteen years at Benares.² As to his devotion to Rāma, Tulsī Dās is indebted to his Guru, Narahari, himself a descendant of Rāmānanda. While the latter had originally been a follower of the Vaiṣṇava school of Rāmāṇuja, he eventually devoted himself to the exclusive cult of Rāma, which he attempted to reconcile with the advaita doctrine of Śankara, without departing, however, from Rāmāṇuja's theological thought.

We have seen how Tulsī Dās' practical standpoint, is not always consistent with his theoretical standpoint. If his efforts to recapitulate the main trends of the Hindu tradition in his presentation of Rāma-bhakti are liable to

¹ H.L.A.R., Aranya-kāṇḍa, C. 12, p. 303.

² Hill, W.D.P. The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma, introd., p. x.

favor a rapprochement between the upholders of different theological systems or devotional schools, these efforts produce less satisfactory results to the speculative thinker who expects more doctrinal consistency and philosophical coherence.

Chapters I and II of the second part of this thesis have pointed out some of the elements that were not easily compatible, such as the poet's views on Nirguna and Saguna Brahman, his equivocal presentation of Rāma as both the essence of Viṣṇu and his avatāra, and of Śiva as the Absolute, his monistic vocabulary referring to Rāma such as "Neti, Neti", and "Saccidānanda", and his ambivalent attitude towards the lesser gods, particularly Indra.

Nevertheless, there are some basic positions from which he never deviates: i) the Absolute is above all a personal God, who is identified with the incarnation Rāma; ii) the world, a mixture of good and bad, is Brahman's creation; iii) the best way to attain liberation is the bhakti-marga, although this does not exclude jñāna nor dharma; iv) in spite of the lesser gods' weaknesses, it is legitimate to pray to them for help.

For Vālmiki, Rāma is above all like his father the "king fixed in his duty",³ who stands at the very heart of the ideal social

³ R.V., Aranya-kāṇḍa, p. 105.

order. If the subjects are also fixed in their duty, everything will be as it should be, but first the king must set the example of faithfulness to his specific dharma as protector and ruler of his people, to the point that even while he sleeps, he is awake to the ordering of his kingdom.

Tulsī Dās goes further. True, social order he considers important in a city like Ayodhyā, to foster happiness among its citizens. And he acknowledges that fidelity to dharma is necessary to maintain that social order. But neither fidelity to dharma nor social order can in themselves procure happiness without the loving presence of Rāma. Whenever there is a reciprocity of affection between Rāma and his devotee, happiness is ensured, and so is the social order needed to maintain it. Instead of being constantly awake to the ordering of his kingdom. Tulsī Dās' hero is continuously attentive to the loving affection of his devotees.

If Vālmīki had been quite exhaustive when attributing lists of virtues to Rāma, he had nonetheless given sufficient indication that he wanted to present above all a hero prince, model champion of dharma.

Tulsī Dās goes further. His ideal man is not only a wise ruler, but the divine model of all virtues.

If, for Vālmīki, a man is a model of integrity in dharma-marga it follows that he is a model of integrity in the other virtues, so with Tulsī Dās, when a king is the divine hero of

bhakti, it follows that he is a hero of dharma-marga.

The ideal man, for Vālmīki, is one who, like Rāma, unquestioningly obeys first the unwritten law, expressed by his sire's will, and then his other duties, both written and unwritten. The ideal man, in Tulsī Dās' eyes, will be the one who, first and foremost, will give all his affection and faith to Rāma, the incarnation par excellence of the supreme Divine, and who will accomplish his dharma as an expression of his love for his divine hero.

We have seen that Tulsī Dās had generally assimilated Vālmīki's respect for rites, traditions, scriptures, and law. He has also given proofs of a sensibility equal to, or even greater than, that of his predecessor towards the Brahman, the Guru, and the Sire.

The concept of dharma has undergone a more subtle evolution. In Vālmīki's epic the unwritten duty dictated by the king is given priority over all other duties. Regardless of the motive underlying it, the command of Rāma's sire has to be carried out; it carries within itself its own criterion of authority; no matter what its content is, if it is the will of the sire, it has to be obeyed. Hence, the unwritten duty, dictated by the sovereign ruler, takes precedence over all other duties.

Whereas in the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, no one was shown consciously shunning his dharma in order to follow the leader's will, in the Rāmaritmanas, people wilfully neglect their dharma in order to show their loving devotion to Rāma. Although the unwritten duty dictated by the sire's expressed will is finally carried out, it would have been of no value had it not been authenticated by Rāma as an act consonant with bhakti-marga. The salvific loving communion with Rāma becomes the first criterion of dharma.

Normally, one must follow one's dharma, dictated by the accepted rites, traditions, scriptures and law, as well as the unwritten law expressed by the will of the guru, the master, the sire, the husband. But if, out of sincere devotion to Rāma he should choose to disregard his duties, the Lord will affectionately understand and the poet will wholeheartedly approve.

Whereas Vālmiki seems to have no concern for the Mokṣa ideal, Tulsī Dās never loses sight of this supreme goal of all human existence. Where Vālmiki spoke of immortality in heaven, Tulsī Dās speaks of an everlasting communion with the Absolute.

With the acknowledgment in Rāma of the incarnation par excellence of this Supreme Absolute, and with the acceptance of Rāma's incarnation as a proof of his divine love for

humanity, it follows as a normal consequence that man's efforts to attain final liberation should be in the line of loving devotion towards Rāma. While Tulsī Dās does not deny the importance of dharma — which was central in Vālmiki's epic — and the other classical means of liberation such as knowledge, prayer to the gods, the performance of all religious rites, ascetic penance, he still consistently maintains the supremacy of the bhakti-marga, to the point where the original epic has become a manual of devotion. With Tulsī Dās, Rāma the wise ruler had become the Supreme and Loving Absolute incarnate; Sītā the loving wife, Bharata the ideal brother, and Hanumān the devoted servant have become the perfect models of the Rāma devotee; Ayodhyā, the capital, has become the perfect context of loving worship to Rāma, without whose presence the beauty of the city would lose something of its essence.

& & & & &

Tulsī Dās' views on the Absolute as personal and on the possibility for that Absolute to communicate with creation through māyā and particularly through its incarnate form, Rāma, have led him to present a revised image of the ideal man, represented by Rāma and his devotees, and of the ideal

social order, represented by the city of Ayodhya. The same views have also led him to introduce another new dimension to Vālmiki's Rāmāyana which not only pervades the whole story but becomes its dominating trait. Here, the logic is clear: to the incarnate Lord's love for man corresponds man's love for the incarnate Lord. The bhakti-marga is the natural response to God's solicitude for man, personalized in Rāma.

If, in the Rāmācāritmānas, bhakti-marga has been given priority over all forms of authority or dharma, it does not follow, as has already been stated, that these have lost all their value. However, it does follow that their importance has become secondary to that of bhakti-marga.

Henceforward, the one dominating criterion of excellence will be loving devotion to Rāma. Normally, this will not oblige the votary to choose between the line of conduct dictated by the imperatives of dharma — written or unwritten — and the exigencies of bhakti. Should there arise such a conflict, then one should give his preference to bhakti-marga, for it is impossible to err when one acts out of devotion for Rāma.

By following Rāma's expressed will, that he obey his father's command, Bharata finally agrees with joy to replace his brother as regent, an act which would otherwise have

appeared to him as being reprehensible. It was important for him to know that ultimately neither Daśaratha nor even Kaikeyī was responsible for the decision to send Rāma to the forest and replace him by his brother. This decision was to be attributed to "fate", that is to the Lord himself. The apparent conflict between dharma and bhakti was but an illusion, an effect of māyā, on which the Absolute has full power and dominion.

Bharata predicament has found a new solution. He is no longer confronted with the situation wherein he has to conform to the less appealing of the alternatives: obedience to a morally doubtful command to usurp his brother's throne, against the respect for a long tradition whereby the eldest son is the rightful heir to the royal throne.

With Tulsī Dās, Bharata's supreme criterion of decisions becomes the personal will of Rāma. By its very nature, Rāma's will cannot be ultimately detrimental to the bhaktas. Through bhakti-marga, the devotee can pierce the flux of illusion, of which the Lord is the master, and learn the infallible way to complete realisation in everlasting communion with the Absolute.

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A P P E N D I X

Note I

The differences between the two accounts of this episode deserve closer attention.

In the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, Bāli accuses Rāma for having treacherously struck him from behind while he was fighting with another. In harsh words, he expresses his deception to discover that such a behaviour should be that of the Prince so universally acclaimed for his virtue.

By way of justification, Rāma offers a triple explanation:

1. He is in the service of Bharata, ruler of the entire world, whose duty it is to put down transgression. Since, by having marital relations with his sister-in-law, Bāli is guilty of having violated justice, Bharata had to punish him by death: "The man who makes his daughter, his sister or his sister-in-law an object of lust is punishable by death; this is the law".¹
2. Since he had promised Sugrīva, his friend, he would restore his wife and kingdom, he had to honour his pledge.
3. Since Bāli is but a monkey, man has the right to treat him like any other animal, i.e. kill him even if he is already engaged in battle: "What boots it, whether thou didst enter into combat with me or no, since thou art but a monkey?"²

¹ R.V., Kiskindha-kāṇḍa, p. 211.

² Idem, p. 213.

Tulsī Dās does not try to hide the fact that Rāma hit his enemy while the latter was engaged in battle with another. Likewise, although it is considerably shortened, Bāli's reproach is basically the same: "You have shot me like some huntsman".³

Rāma answers by giving this one justification: "A younger brother's wife, a wister, the wife of a son and a virgin maid are all alike; if any look on these with a lustful eye, in the slaying of him there is no sin".⁴

He then accuses Bāli of having, through pride, refused to follow his wife's advice not to fight with Sugrīva, even though he knew that the latter was protected by Rāma's strong arm.

Thus, Tulsī Dās not only leaves out two of the three reasons Rāma had offered in Vālmiki's version to justify his act, but he alters Bāli's motivation for accepting the challenge to fight his brother. For Vālmiki, Bāli accepted the challenge because he was convinced that a virtuous Prince like Rāma would never attack him while he was engaged in combat with another.⁵ The implication in Tulsī Dās' parallel passage is that the guilty Bāli was fully aware that Rāma not only had the power, but also the right and the duty to slay him.

³ H.L.A.R., Kiskindha-kāṇḍa, C. 9, p. 328.

⁴ Idem, p. 329.

⁵ R.V., Kiskindha-kāṇḍa, p. 207.

This is an interesting case, among many others, where Tulsī Dās clearly attempts to rehabilitate his hero by completely changing not the material act itself, but the motivation and the circumstances underlying it.

Note 2

It must be added, here, that Hill's translation of māyā as "illusion" may be misleading. The term māyā may also be used in a theistic sense, denoting the order of creation and the power that brought it into existence. If the vocabulary is at times misleading (e.g. Māyā, Neti Neti, Sacchidānanda, Nirguna Brahman, which are central to the Advaita system), one must always bear in mind that Tulsī Dās will never admit a possible reabsorption with Brahman as the ultimate realization of creation. The goal of human happiness consists in an eternal union with Brahman, personified in Rāma.

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