CHAPTER XVI

TULASIDASA: THE CULTURAL HAR -
BINGER OF MEDIAEVAL INDIA.
Education and culture are an expression of the soul of a nation. A system of Culture suite the nation that has evolved it more than any other. In mediaeval history of India the nation wide culture of India was dying down because of the misinterpretation done by the priests of both the communities Hindu and Muslim in wrong process of thinking. Religion was predominant all over the world in the mediaeval age. Religion had brought peace and blessing on mankind. But in mediaeval age, the fruits of the labour of teachers of religions were devoured by ignorant interpreters of both the hemispheres. The conflict was rampant among the religious sects. The teachings of religious leaders, teachers or prophets had influenced societies of different countries and they have their social impact. But Cultural degradation came down in the history of mediaeval age and it was a worldwide phenomenon. In India, sectarian view and orthodox custom consumed the Cultural heritage of India. Ramananda, progenitor of the Bhakti movement of the mediaeval India saved the country from the spiritual and cultural death. When the followers of Ramananda were trying to elevate
the position of the downgraded population of India, Tulasidas, a mystic saint of India of classical school tried to rouse the consciousness of the degraded class of people of India.

Swami Yatiswarananda, a rsavant and senior monk of Ramakrishna order had passed right remarks on the fundamental unity of India through the religious ground: "Our saints and sages, our holy women, were born in all parts of the country. They may speak different languages but they place before us the ideal of realising the eternal relation between the external soul and the eternal god. Their teachings form part of our entire spiritual heritage, our common spiritual knowledge. The more we recognise this the more our hearts will beat to the same spiritual tune and bring about a grand union, essential not only for the progress of India but of the whole world itself". **

Tulasidas: his early story and influence of Bhakti movement on him.

Tulasidas's birth date is not yet ascertained by the historiographical point of view but some historiographer stressed much on the declaration of Baba Beni

** The Spiritual life and meditation - Swami Yatiswarananda, Bangalore, 1978, from 'Preface'.
Madhavadasa, generally known to all Babaji as follows:

'When the sun was in its own house (Leo), Jupiter was in Cancer, with the Moon in (one of the four) moveable Zodiac signs (Cara rasi), the planet Mars was in the seventh house, Saturn in the eighth house, during the time or Abhijit (Nakshatra) in the pleasant hours of the evening Tulasidas was born on the banks of the Yamuna, it was the month of August (Sravana) in Samvat 1554 (A.D. 1497).

But generally it is believed that he was born in 1532 A.D. 1.

He came of an orthodox Brahmin family in an obscure village in Uttar Pradesh. His family was the worshipper or Rama in the dualistic system of the Indian philosophy. The ancestor of Tulasidas shifted their place of residence from the village Pateji to a hamlet naming Rajapur in the district of Banda on the bank of the Yamuna. His father Atmaram Dwivedi was a pious men. Atmaram was a village chief and the people used to call him as a Rajguru or the royal priest. Tulasidas, himself gave an account of

1. The spiritual life and meditation Swami Yatiswara-nanda.
his heredity and a high birth of him. The mother of Tulasidasa was also a devoted lady and her name was Hulasî Devi. In the medieval Indian social structure, particularly the society of the Hindu community had gone down from the seat of culture to the lowest dungeon of ignorance. Folk cultural system was taken permanent place by replacing the higher cultural hereditary of the Hindu people. In human oppression on the lowly born people was regraded as ways and means of saving the prestige of high born Hindus, but they were not aware of their philosophy of religious life. Superstitions were so rampant that even the learned men of the society did not dare to protest against the animalism of the people in the name of religion. The first born male child of the pious spouse Dvedi of the family touched the earth and light of the sun like healthy child of five including the two series of his teeth. Even the new born baby sounded something like that of the pronunciation of Rama. The female attendant of the nursing mother thought it was the sign of evil omen. They brought the matter to the elderly person. The mother frightened. The old villagers were consulted. The astrologer passed their opinions. After prolonged discussions, it was
decided by the village chieftain to wait and see, if
the baby lived for three days. His mother died of
shock. Before her death she handed over the child to
the maidservant of the family, Munia. With her all
ornaments and jewellery Munia took away the child.
And finally she succumbed to the mental injury because
of her separation or she breathed her last days on the
eleventh day (ekadasi) day. Her physical remains was
consigned to the flames on the bank of 'Yumana.

Munia had a strenuous journey from the village
Rajpur to Haripur which she had started in the dead of
of the night and arrived safely at her old mother-in-
law’s residence at her village. Her mother-in-law took
sympathy in favour of the child and she delighted looking
at his appearance. And supplied the babe with milk from
her cow. She also overshelmed hearing the story of
hardship and ill fate of the babe. Chunia, the old mother-
in-law of Munia gave the babe a household familiar name
of the family. 'Rama Bola' She really was the foster
mother of the babe. But she died of snake bite when her
foster son attained the five years and full five months.
In the stage of his infancy Tulasidasa learnt to walk and
talk. The villager of Haripur sent a messenger to call
Atmaram to bring back his child home. But the influence

2. Tulasidasa - Chandrakumari Handoo, Cal.,1954,p 16.
of superstition worked on him much, though he was a learned man. Not only man like Atmaram, most of the learned men in the mediaeval age were lacking in social sense and had lost the philosophical aspect of the religious life. Atmaram refused to take return of his son. There was none to look after the child because of the tradition of superstitious influence on the Society.

He wandered about, as a destitute toddler and begged food from others, he received unkind treatment from the fellow men of the society. The cruel hand of the society was unkind to Rama Bala. Seeing the miserable condition of poor orphans child, he was picked by Naraharidasa. Naraharidasa was a mystic saint and follower of Ramananda. It is said that Naraharidasa was the family preceptor of Tulasidasa, his father was initiated by Naraharidasa. However the mystic saint took pity for the toddler and he took him to his monastery. In the latter period of his life Tulasidasa paid a heartiest reverence to him. 4.

3. The spiritual life ...... Swami Yatiswananda.

I solute the lotus feet of my given
The ocean of compassion, and god (Hari) in
the form of man (Nara)
Whose words like rays of the sun
Dispel the heavy darkness of overpowering delusion.

(T. by Swami Yatiswarananda)

Tulsidas also studied under the guidance of a learned man of the monastery Sāśa Sanatana for a long period of thirteen years at the instance of his saviour and preceptor Naraharidas. He stayed there upto his age of twenty-six and mastering the four Vedas and the Vedānta philosophy, he returned back to life of a householder at the persuasion of his preceptor. Tulsidas married to Ratnavati, an accomplished and well-trained daughter of Dinebandhu Pattanayak, he was also a pious Brahmin of a nearby village of Tulsidas's ancestral home.

Tulsidas remembered his old days:

Tulsidas was a learned man among mystic saints of mediaeval age. Other saint of the age of
Bhakti era painted the pictures of men and their suffering in mediaeval history of India. They composed in the different dialects of India. Though Tulasidas was a man of scholarship, yet he wrote most of his works in a dialect of Hindi language in 'Audhi'. His intention was to benefited the mass and raise their level of consciousness. He remembered his miserable condition of his childhood days. He was seer and thought over the sorrowful plight of destitute children of the country before the four hundred years age. Tulasidas only reserved his thought for himself but he utilised his thought for the conscious people of all ages. He said:

Nurtured in sin, and suffering humiliation through extreme poverty,
My possessions were a dirty and patched guilt
an earthen water-pot. 5

He emotionally accused God (in the form of a protector 'Bramha') Mother and Father, giving birth to me in the world cast me of, Even Bramh did not give me a good destiny, Lowly and cowardly, spurned by all longed for the piece of bread in the mouth of God. 5


6. 
Mother and father abandoned me at birth
And bereft of good Karma (action)
The creator made my path a tormented one

Without the Name (of God) I wandered
Greedy to fill my stomach.
Even sorrow suffered to see me my misery
Like a dog I licked many a leaf-plate
But my stomach was never filled
From door to door I went begging
Baring my teeth (in a painful attempt to smile)
Falling at the feet (of those from whom I begged).
There are kind people who are powerful,
And can destroy the short comings and misery
of the world in its ten directions
But none of them spoke to me
My parents abandoned me, as the snake,
That gives up its offspring at birth,
Why should I be angry?
Whom should I blame?
It is all my own misfortune
People feared to contact my shadow.

He also accused the parents and reminded them
of the negligence of duties from their parts also their obligation
to their children.
Tulasidas was an erudite scholar. From his early days of his life he was out of touch of homely atmosphere. So he was psychologically inclined to his wife with affection. One day in their prime of youthful stage his wife Ratnavali went away from their home because of a pressed urgency for her father's illness and she could not sought the permission of her husband. Afteremoracing the householder life, Tulasidas used earned their livelihoodly by practising the priestly jobs. One day returning home, he found that she had left for her father's place. As he was passionately fond of his wife. He went to his father's -in-law's house even being uninvited at the dead of night. Ratnavali said : 'If half of your devotions to this skeleton, of skin and bones was given to Rama, you would surely overcome the fear of the world'.

Great is your love for this body of mine composed of bone and flesh. Had you offered half of that love to Rama, you would have been spared from worldly troubles and have attained salvation.

These sharp but wise words placed his heart like an arrow and brought a new light to Tulasidasa. It awakened him to the unreality of the terrestrial world and worldly bondage or false love and also to the reality of the supreme spirit manifest to him in the anthropomorphic form of Sri Rama.

His preceptor Naraharidāsa was the disciple of Anantananda, a direct disciple of Ramananda.

The impression of his boyhood and influence of his two saintly teachers suddenly peeped in his mind. In an emotion he expressed his advice of his preceptor which he coined at his early stage:

'If you have your spiritual welfare at heart
And wish to realise God.
Keep away from gold and women
Says Narahari.'

After leaving the house of his father-in-law, Tulasidasa went to the confluence of the Ganga and the Yumana at Prayag - a holy place of the Hindu. He took holy dips there and took the vow of a renouncer according to the vaisnava system of Ramananda school and snapped all his ties with the mundane world. Mataprasad Gupta,
a noted critic of Hindi literature states in his book 'Tulasidasa' that Tulasidas added 'dasa' an extra word in his 'sanyasa' name like other Vaishnavas those who renounced world. He quotes the following the line in supported of his statement:

My name is Tulasi,
I am an ignorant fool, but an known as your servant (dasa) And deceitful fool, you have accepted me
My name is Rām Bola and I am a servant of
King Rāma.

His pilgrimage:

After renouncing the world he determined to tour India on foot. He went to different parts of India to enhance his power or conception in the greater field of life. From the town Allahabad he passed to Ayodhya where he stayed for four months in rainy season. Then he proceeded to the holy city of Jagannath at Puri. From Puri he went to Rameswaram. Then he slowly moved towards the west coast of Dwarka, a holy place of Krsnaite Vaishnavas. Then he trod the snowy paths of the Himalayan range and visited the holy shrine of Badri Narayana. His intention of
the pilgrimage was to escape from sectarian views. Though he was of Ramavite sect and finally settled in the City, holy of Varanasi, a marked place offor saivite sect.

He heartly disregarded the differentiation in the religious groups. When he was at Vrindavan, a Vaisnava of Krsnavite school teased him knowing him a bigoted warshipper of Rama. So he told him :
'The Kṛṣṇa Avatar (incarnation of godhead) is the greatest; Rāma is only a partial incarnation'. Hearing this, Tulasidāsa replied in his inimitable way :
'My soul was full of love only for the son of Dasaratha, and admired his incomparable beauty. Now that you tell me of his divinity, my love is increased twenty-fold'.

He never disregarded the religious ways of different religious sects. He composed a two-line poem (i.e. doha) and declared :

Sav se basiye sav se "crasiya
Sav ke ligiye nem
Hanji Hanji karte rahiye vaith apka tham.
'You should take part with all, you should behave like a gentleman with others, you should utter the manifold name of god. You should give consent of your in the religious matter. But finally should cherish your thought in your own way'. He had his power of tolerance, and taught others tolerance.

Idea monism of Tulasidasa in the universalism:

Tulasidasa made the anthromorphic from of Rama, son of Dasaratha as a vehicle of religious experience and spiritual realisation. He uttered in the two-line poem about the monistic outlook of him after his realisation of truth.

Sav van tulsi bheyo, sav paharbheyo salgeram /
Sav pani gangs bheyo, sav ghatme biraje Ram //

'Treat all the plants as holy basil plants, think all the hills and stones as Salagrama (a form of Visnu). All the waters as the manifestation of the holy river, the Ganga. The Lord of the universe resides in all things'.
'Fire is in the every stone and fire comes out of after striking by the rod. Similarly the Almighty lives in everything. The realisation of god depends on the advice of a worthy teachers'.

In one of his composition in a Sanskrit verse he also praised both form and formless god.
Thus he spoke:

Bhagami bhavavallabha kuyoginam sudurlavam
Savaktelpadapam samastasavyamanpanham /
Aruparupabnupatim natohamubrijapatim
Prasida dehi me vibho padjavaktimasu

Tulasidas: Ramayane III, Hamastotra 10

'I offer worship unto Thee, O Lord of love, whom the worldly-minded cannot search but who art to the devotees the wistfulfillingtree, and the object of worship to all Lord of the universe. Thou art formless and yet with forms. Have mercy upon me. O Lord, and pray, promptly grant me devotion to Thy lotus feet'.
His great love for God transformed into love for humanism.

His divine realisation filled his heart with love and sympathy for his fellow beings and he was wished to share with all the blessings which himself received from the spiritual practice. In his creative work on the 'Rama-Latitmanas' and the great second work 'Vinaya Patrika' revealed his great heart following and compassion for all living beings.

Once a murderer came on pilgrimage to Varanasi and he cried in repentance and was walking in the streets asking for alms. Thus he spoke: 'For the love of Rama, give alms to me a murderer'. Tulasi-dasa heard the cries of lamented person and call him to his monastery, gave him consecrated food, and religiously declared him a purified. This enraged the orthodox Brahmins of the locality and they asked about the possibilities of the condonation of homicide. Tulasi-dasa replied politely: "Read your own scriptures and learn about the Divine Name of the Almighty".

His unique creation: Ramacaritmanas

One of the unique creations of Tulasidas
was the Ramacaritmanas in the 'Audhi' dialect of Hindi language. Tulasidasa from his boyhood days heard much of the songs composed on the godhead of Rama and his consort Sita. Due to his spiritual love for Rama, an anthromorphic conception of his dualistic approach of god consciousness, he composed the great poetical work for his own consolation to the benefit of the masses to remove the real meaning of worshipping god in a society.

His choosing the people's language for his writings:

Following the footstep of his predecessor Ramananda, a pioneer sage of the Bhakti movement, Tulasidasa also wrote his works in Hindi dialect. First he used to compose verses praising the Almighty in the form of Rama in Sanskrit. But he later switched over to composing poems in local dialect to reveal the essence of truth of religion to the common people. Once a proud Sanskrit learning man came up to him and asked : 'Rev. Sir, you are learned in Sanskrit. Why then do you compose an epic poem in the vulgar tounge ? Tulasidasa replied : 'My language in the vernacular tongue is imperfect but it is better than the Nayika -
-:(251) :-

varnana (the amorous descriptions of heroines) or you Sanskrit-loving pundits. 'The scholar asked him for clarification : 'Tulsidas replied : 'If you find a jewelled vessel full of poison and an earthenware one full of ambrosia, which will you accept and which will you refuse'.

In the introduction of the Ramacaritmanas Tulsidas himself vindicated in choice of the dialect in Hindi.

"I am confident of one thing - that the good will be gratified to hear me though fools may laugh. If my homely speech and poor wit are fit subjects for laughter, let them laugh; it is no fault of mine. If they have no understanding of true and pious worshippers of the Lord, the story of Raghuvir will be sweet as honey". 10

In the verse no.140 the poet defended his writing

in the spoken vernacular :

'This is a pure centre suitable for the practice of yoga,' 10

Japa, austerity and yajna.
The worldly man who sees its external form only may find it ugly.
Tulasi proclaims loudly that the language of the people living here is courteous. They use such phrases as, "I am at your service" and address others endearingly.
To the devotees of Rama, the Sita-bata (where Tulasi practice penance under the banian tree) is more than the wish-fulfilling tree of heaven (The latter gives the three ends of life - prosperity, righteousness and the satisfaction of desires)
While the former gives all the four ends - including salvation ".

Beni Madhavadasa, a saint and hagiographer of Tulasidas rightly said how the Rama-Garitmanasa influenced the educated people of that time and the illiterate masses of all ages ;
Seven ships (Cantos) were prepared to row us across the ocean of the world, to wash away arrant hypocrisy and establish the pure and highest religion. To destroy the accumulated sins of Kali (iron age) and show the beauty of devotion to God. To erase sectarianism and dissension and teach the lesson of love. To create enthusiasm in the hearts of holy ones and increasing the joy of the good, to explain how devotion to Hari depends upon Hari and to point the way to the Vedic path (the monistic path).

It is said that even the Muslim or the medieval India showed their heartiest respect to Tulasidas for his creation, and devotion to God and also love for the fellow-beings.

A wealthy man of position was an admirer of Tulasidas, his name was Nawab Abdul Rahim Khan, a minister of emperor Akbar. Maharaja Mansingh and his brother Jagat Singh also were his admirers. Once a
poor Brahmin wanted some money because of his daughter's marriage. Tulasidāsa had nothing to help him but he sent him to Khankhananana, composing an interesting letter in Couplet 12. Nawab provided the Brahmin with sufficient funds to give his daughter in marriage. It is said that the Nawab himself also composed the following couplet in praise of the Rama-Caritmanas : 13

The pure Ramacaritmanas
Giver of life to the holy ones,
Is like the Vedas to the Hindus,
But is verily the Koran to the Muslim.

Emperor Jahangir was one of his admirer, one day he offered heavy purse to the saint. But Tulasidāsa refused the purse politely and said : 'One who wants to cultivate devotion to the Lord should never seek to accumulate riches. The contemplation of money and its attendant anxieties soil the mind and render it unfit for meditation on the Lord'.

Once a curious man asked him a question on coming of great people to him, while in the time of miseries there was none. Tulasidāsa promptly replied to him and said :

'Once I used to beg and could not get even a cracked cowrie in alms. Then no one wanted me but Rama, the Cherisher of the poor, made me a great price. Previously I used to beg from door to door for alms; now even kings worship my feet. Then it was without Rama; now Rama is my helper'.

Political awareness of Tulasidasa:

Tulasidasa was a learned man. He was aware of the political events which were taking place in the periphery or his surroundings. He used the word 'poor' not to mean 'an unfortunate', but to indicate an oppressed class of people. In the vinaya - Patrika Tulasidasa said one of his prayers:

'Lord Rama, my honour is in your hands
you are the protector of the poor,
I surrender myself at your feet
I have heard of the sinner
whom you have reclaimed'.

In a doha (a two-line poem) he said:

Vin Wan nakri vin sayer
mile ahar daridra ghat, jas swapatsha Raghubir.
If the Almighty is in favour or you, you will get firewood without the forest, you can have a sufficient mean in the hut of a poor man and water may be available in the desert.

In another poem he praised the poor condition for higher spiritual gain:

A man rasana saph karo dharo garibi ves
Sital bolō lai calo, sav hi tomara desh

'Oh my mind, you restrain your tongue, use the garb of a poor man also use sweet tongue (words). If you adopt such manner, all countries will be yours'.

Tulasi ye samsar me, panchho ratan hai sar /
Sadhu sang harikatha, daya, deero upkar //

'Oh Tulasi, you should know the followings activities are essential parts of a true life'. Seeking of the company of the saint, repeating the name of the Almighty, practising mercy, giving charity and doing good to others'.

He was also aware of the social consciousness.
Kanho dhan dham hai, kanhoko pariwar /
Tulasi aise deen ko, Sitram adhar. //

'Une may have money or palace to reside, some one also have his members or his family, but the poor man like Tulasi seeks shelter under Sitaram'.

Magh pauk din me, aise ho kowlagi hon /
Tulsi man Ram, yao garib ko gham //

'Like sunny weather of winter for poor men as they like, as such Rama-nam is beloved to Tulasi'.

Jnan garibi hari bhajan, komal bacan adokh /
Tulsi kabhu na chhoriye, chhama sil santokh //

'Oh Tulasi, you should never give up the habits or devotion to god, sweet words, forgiveness, ethical trend and pleasing mood.'

He also condemns outer stratification of castehood as Guru Nanak said :

Cari jat mile Hari bhajye, ek baran ho jai
(Jaisa) Asta dhatums paras lagaye ek mulke bikai.
'If all castes (four varnas of Hindus) pray to the Lord in accumulating themselves, then all will turn in same community like the eight types of metals make a precious material'.

Tulasidāsa said :

**Hat pat ganiya janha, ho jai baran bicar /
Tulsi kahe Hari bhajan bine, cari jat camar //**

'It is useless to count numbers of caste, it creates only the differentiations, Tulsi says without serving god, all men go a degraded caste'.

**His general influence on the illiterate people of the age :**

Once Emperor Akbar put a question to Surdasa, a poet of the mediaeval age of the Bhakti era. He asked him : ' How does your poetry compare with that of Tulasidāsa ? '. Surdasa was a great soul with all of his humiliation, unhesitatingly he replied : ' He is a greater poet than I '. The great Mughal Emperor asked him to explain truthfulness of utterance in surprise. The Surdasa explain the matter to him and told : ' Your majesty, Tulasidāsa's poetry are not merely poetry. The common man
is totally unfamiliar with the 'Vedic mantras'. So by common consent, suitable lines of the 'Manasa' have been substituted from the Vedic text. 15

His end came:

During the reign of Jahangir (1605-1627 A.D), the Punjab was in the grip of deadly plague for many years. This disease spread next to the east also. In his 'Kavitawali' he personally lamented over the disease. It is clear from the verses of the 'Human Bahuka' that Tulasidasa himself couldn't repulse the attack of such deadly disease. However he recovered finally succumbed to weakness and passed away peacefully in 1623 at his ripe age of ninety one years on the bank of the Asi Ganga on the Saturday, the third of the dark fortnight, in the month of Sravana (July).

His self-surrender to the will of the Almighty:

The final step in the path of the devotionalism is the soul's surrender to the supreme spirit. Ordinary people make ego-centre of life. Teachings of the

15. Tulasidasa - Chandrakumari Handoo. p 78
Tulasidasa is to love the human being and the creatures which are around us as the loving creation of the Almighty. In the practical field of life, he implemented the way of 'Shakti' vehicle of service to the humanity.
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