

Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of Andre Padoux (Suny Series in Muslim Sp)

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century. More than ten thousand lines in length, this devotional epic poem recounts the adventures of Rām, with an elaborate set of frame stories that allow the incorporation of additional mythic material and further theological reflection as Śiva tells the story to Pārvatī, the crow Bhusundi to Viṣṇu's vehicle Garuḍa, the Upaniṣadic sage Vāṇavalkya to Bharadvāja, and Tulsīdās to his audience. Within his telling of the tale, Tulsīdās seeks to cultivate deep devotion to Rāma but also to reconcile and integrate Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva devotion, *nirguṇ* and *saṅguṇ* perspectives, and *advaita* and *bhakti* religiosity. Situated within a vast stream of both Sanskrit and vernacular literature surrounding Rāma, Tulsīdās is clearly influenced not only by Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (though his Rāma is thoroughly divine unlike Vālmiki's great but very human hero) and the South Indian telling of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* or "Spiritual Rāmāyaṇa" (incorporating *advaita* ideals with Rām seen as both an incarnation of Viṣṇu and the personification of Ultimate Reality or Brahman and portraying only a shadow of Śītā rather than Śītā herself being abducted by the demon Rāvaṇa) but also by the Kṛṣṇa tradition in his portrayal of Rām's childhood (Lutgendorf 1991; Richmond 1991).

Tulsīdās's *Ramcaritmanas* is extremely popular and the subject of regular recitation, both personal and public, and full-scale enactment as well as an expository tradition of *katha*. The Rāmliḷā carried out every year by the Maharāja of Banaras is the most elaborate, lasting a month with various specific locales on the eastern shore of the Ganges in Ramnagar identified with particular episodes, and all the characters played by carefully selected and prepared young *brahman* boys (Hess and Schechner 1977; Lutgendorf 1991). With this vernacular telling, Tulsīdās made the story of Rāma accessible to all, apparently upsetting some within the *brahman* community of his day in his seeming desecration of a sacred text. Stories attest to the *Ramcaritmanas*' full acceptance as sacred literature of the highest level, however, after the volume rose miraculously to the top of a stack of Sanskrit scriptures under which it had been placed and locked in a temple overnight (Lutgendorf 1991: 8–10).

Though brahmanic opposition may have occurred, Tulsīdās's telling also contains passages that affirm the existing social hierarchy at numerous points, some seemingly aimed at keeping women and *Śāstras* alike "in their place," and also recount some actions on the part of Rām, problematic for one who is said to be God, which generate a literature addressing the resulting doubts that arise (Lutgendorf 1991: 392–409). Tulsīdās is praised and the *Ramcaritmanas* embraced by people of multiple religious orientations, offering a point of meeting between members of divergent *sampradāyas*, in line with the synthetic and inclusivist nature of the text.

A second saint who falls outside of the institutional structure of *panths* and *sampradāyas* is Mīrābāī, said to have lived in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹ A daughter of a *rājput* royal family in Marwar (western Rajasthan), she was forced to marry into the family of the rulers of Mewar (southern Rajasthan) to cement a political alliance. But her love was only for Kṛṣṇa, and her marital family tried to kill her when she did not behave as a woman of her

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