

Interview Santosh Devi, Jaisalmer

Shouldn't you wear a 'kurti' to sing Pabuji ki par?

I am wearing a Raika costume instead... because I like the colours. This is a *bhopi's* dress. Young men used to wear *dhotis* but now they wear pants and a shirt. Every tribe, Rajput, Meghwal... has a distinctive style but nowadays you can wear what you like. You don't have to dress according to caste any more.

What's your name? My name is Santosh. My inlaws' family is from Sikar. I am originally from Datta Ramgarh village near Gacchipura in Nagaur.

How long have you been married?

Almost 20 years.

Which members of your father's family recite the epic?

All of them including my father. His name is Ladu Ram *Bhopa*. My mother was also a good singer. She used to sing with my father. Her name was Meera (the name of a devotee of Lord Krishna).

How many siblings are there in your father's family? 4 sisters and 2 brothers.

Do your sisters also sing epic? Only 2 of them. They have the same knowledge as me of *Pabuji ki par*. Their names are Rasslal and Bugga. One sister is married in Osian and married to a family in Sikar. Both sisters recite and sing Pabuji with their husbands. The other sister and myself sing *bhajans* (religious songs) as well as the epic.

Who was singing epic when you got married? When I came to my inlaws' family after marriage, my husband (Hari Ram) was a farmer so I was mainly engaged in agriculture.

When you were working in agriculture didn't you feel you should be singing instead of working on the land?
No....

Did your mother ever try to rekindle your interest in singing? Yes, my mother always tried but I was never interested in singing for tourists.

3:13 *When did you come to Jaisalmer?* 20 years ago.

What songs do you sing? 'Banjari Nomad', 'Saffron', 'The Peacock'.

Where did you learn these songs? Here. I learnt them from artists here.

But the Peacock song is a traditional song of the Kalbelia tribe... Yes –we can't just sing Pabuji. Other people sing these songs so why can't I?

When you sing a song that does not belong to your tradition, how do you feel? When the *bhopa* recites the epic and he forgets a bit and adds something else, they don't worry about this so why should I? They sing half epic and half religious songs.

Can you speak English? Yes.

Do you know the epic as well as your mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Parvati? No but I can sing some of the parts. I don't have full knowledge of the *ragas* but the episode of the she-camels I can recite.

How did you learn this episode? In my childhood, my mother used to sing and my elder sister-in-law and so I learnt it.

You have been here for 20 years. In your 20 years here, have you ever seen a person possessed by Pabuji? There is a Brahman priest in a temple nearby in the village Bhu where there is a priest who prays to Pabuji. He's not a *bhopa*

Have you ever visited that village? Not so far.

Are there many devotees of Pabuji in this area? Not many. Those who understand Pabuji pray to him. There is no temple.

Do you worship Pabuji? We don't have a temple but we do have a small statue to Pabuji

Do you know of any bhopi or bhopa who was possessed by Pabuji? I knew of just one who died years ago. I don't know his name.

When did he die? Several years back.

What happened to his body when he was possessed? His body would start trembling violently and he would reveal his charismatic power by answering.

He would heal inflictions of the evil eye by giving you the remedy on a chit... wheat or black thread, or he would hold some grains of wheat in his hand... 'read' the seeds... and proscribe the remedy.

Have you ever seen a bhopi possessed by Pabuji? Pabuji would not possess a woman's body. Only the mother goddess, Mataji. Pabuji is a Rajput, a deity of the Rajput *kshatriyya* clan. He could not come to a woman's body.

Do you know any Bhil bhopa who was possessed by Pabuji? Not in my village –perhaps in others.

07:11 When you recite Pabuji, does it happen that Pabuji enters a man from another caste? If a person is a devotee of Pabuji, caste hardly matters. No. I have never seen this though sometimes it happens when we recite the epic that other peoples' bodies are possessed, but not the *bhopa*.

7:42 Are your children engaged in the same profession? No they do different jobs. They can't play the *ravanhatta*.

How long has your husband been playing the ravanhatta? From the very beginning.

But you told me he was a farmer? He used to do both.

So was Hari Ram taught by your father-in-law? Yes. I also told my son to learn the techniques of epic recitation but they refused.