

Interview Patashi Devi

My name is Patashi Devi. Lakari is my father's place of origin.

0:11 I My two sisters and I sing, of whom one is Bhagwani and Manbari, the second.

0:19-35-1:05 All three sisters are singers but one doesn't sing since her husband died.

Did your father Binja Ram recite phad?

1:10 Yes, he did. My elder brother is also a singer and reciter.

1:28 My mother's name was Sujna. Before the death of my father, she would sing with him. Her brother's name is Toru Ram.

1:52 *At what age did you realise that recitation was your traditional occupation and that you should do this?*

2:04 At the age of 5, my father died and my mother also so I went with my brother and saw this and realised that I should learn this *phad*. 2:23 I used to go along with them and came to know the *phad*, first, just a little and then more and more. In this way, I learnt recitation.

2:34 *What was your grandfather's name?* I don't remember but he was a reciter as well. My granddad did this and all the members of our family were in the same profession.

2:39 *At what age did you marry?* At 11. 2:55 At 12, I came to my in-laws' family. When I arrived, I saw that my father and mother-in-law were also engaged in the recitation of *phad*. 3:20 When I saw them doing this, this inspired me to learn epic recitation and so I began studying.

3:34 *How old were you and your husband at your first performance?*

I was 12 and he was 18...It was in the village of Musar.

At your first performance, did you make any mistakes?

3:55 I made a few but my mother-in-law and elder sister-in-law corrected me.

Have you ever seen a single woman reciting?

4:05 Yes, I did see my mother (but actually she was singing with another man)

4:21 *Did you ever see a man alone sing?* No.

4:23 A man alone can recite religious songs throughout the night but he cannot recite *Pabuji kei par*.

4:51 *Who trained you in recitation and pitch?* My ancestors. My mother used to sing at low pitch but I learnt to sing high pitch when I came to my husband's family. He taught me. 5:17 The *bhopa* would start the singing and then I would pick up the words and start.

5:22 *Who taught you the techniques of breath control and high pitch?* I started practising short stanzas at low pitch and then proceeded to longer stanzas at high pitch.

Did you feel any physical discomfort when reciting? At the beginning, yes. My ribs hurt... but this wore off but this wore off and now I feel very happy singing epic.

5:41 *When you were reciting epic at low pitch and then later at high pitch did you ever feel any qualitative difference in your devotion to Pabuji?* No, no difference. With practice I am able to sustain high pitch. When my mother-in-law and elder sister were reciting, this motivated me to opt for this profession.

6:10 *Did you find any competition with your mother-in-law regarding recitation?* No, my mother-in-law was a very loving person. And she always cared for me and told me that this would be very important for my income in future.

6:34 *Did you ever forget the words in performance and find your mother-in-law correcting you?* I never remember this happening. She told me that if I forgot any line...I should join in with her in the singing. I also remember that if I got confused... my mother-in law would start singing with me.

6:54 *Do you recall any time when you replaced your mother-in-law and sang with your brother-in-law?* No, as per tradition, I can only sing with my brother or my son in addition to my husband.

7:23 *Can a woman waft incense on the screen?* 7:42 Those women who pray regularly to Pabuji can do this, but only them.

8:00 *Have you ever seen any charismatic action performed by a woman devotee of Pabuji?* Those who are regular devotees are always benefitting from his grace, whilst those who are not, are not blessed in the same way.

Did you ever feel the blessing of Pabuji in your own life? I have lived in this village all my life and I have had to earn my own bread. My whole life revolves around Pabuji. My son recites, our whole family recites...

8:36 *Is your daughter-in-law conscious of the fact that she should bathe before going to prayer?* 8:42 A woman has to take care of cleanliness before prayer and my daughters-in-law do this. Those who obey the rules are always blessed by Pabuji.

8:56 *When you were at your father's house, which sections of the epic did you know?* ...When I finally learnt the whole epic, I was able to start singing throughout the night.

Did you ever recite for more than one night? Yes, I did this two or three times in nearby villages.

9:20 *How do patrons approach you?* If someone comes to us with *akha*, we recite. It becomes a commitment.

9:54 *What do you accept as 'akha'?* If someone comes to us with an offering of *bajra* (millet), wheat or *gur*, or 51 rupees (this amount brings prosperity), then we are 'booked'. We will go off and recite. We recite for those patrons who come first: first come, first served.

10:36 *Why do people give you 'akha'?* To serve to the mare of Pabuji (Kesar Kalmi) and the money, in honour of Pabuji. But we actually give the food to peacocks or consume it ourselves.

10:57 *When you came to your in laws, how many people there could recite?*

11:07 Bhanwar Lal and my eldest sister-in-law could sing all night.

What is the difference in attitude of your mother-in-law to those sisters-in-law who recite and those who did not? Were there any conflicts? 11:37 My mother was a kind lady who took care of everyone but those who are learning to sing epic, they received more attention. Those who did not sing had to grind the grain, cook and feed the children. Those who sang did not.

12:42 *When you start to sing the epic, why do you stand with a lamp?* 12:53 We need to illustrate the scene on the *phad*. If the *bhopa* does not sing with a lamp highlighting the scene... the performance is incomplete.

13:02 *When you recite, why do you keep your back to the phad?* If we do this, we *bhopi*'s are deprived of the blessings of Pabuji and this is considered inauspicious. We should stand at 90 degrees to the screen. It is disrespectful to Pabuji to keep your back to the screen because he is a Rajput of the Rathore clan. He is a deity so we cannot do this.

13:41 *Why do you cover yourself with a veil (qunqat) when you recite?* Male elders are watching. People in the village will gossip if I don't. I have to wear it.

14:08 *When you perform in a veil, don't you feel suffocated?* Although we do not have any problem, it is very hot.

14:17 *Did your mother-in-law perform in a veil?* Yes.

Who was the first person in your community to recite without a veil? No one.

14:35 When I recite wearing a veil, I perform better. If I perform without a veil, there are more distractions.

14:57 *Did you ever suggest to your husband where you start the recitation?*

15:07 Yes, sometimes...Kesar Kalmi's episode or Gogaji and Pabuji's wedding...

When you start from the beginning of any episode, is it considered a bad omen? No.

How long have you been doing this? As you can see, I started at the age of 12 and now I am 40 or 50.

16:08 *Which specific days are favourable for epic recitation?* 16:15 You can recite on the 6th, 7th or any moon day... but you must avoid the 11th. *Why?* Because this is the day Pabuji would fast. We do not perform then since Pabuji does not accept food that day.

17:10 *When you recite, do your patrons offer you food?* 17:29 First, we make offerings to Pabuji and then we consume food.

Where do you make these offerings? In the temple or in the place of recitation.

17:34 *What do people donate when you recite the epic?* Sometimes 3000 rupees, sometimes more, sometimes less. It depends on their economic status.

17:58 *What other kinds of donations do you get?* *Dhoti* for the *bhopa* and *kurta* and *tinal* for the *bhopi*. And also money on the plate. 18:30 Other types of donations include animals and goats... but we do not accept cows.

19:03 *Why not cows?* Pabuji sacrificed himself to safeguard cows...so we do not accept them.

19:10 *When your husband used to offer incense, did he recite specific mantras to Pabuji?* Yes
[child in frame] When we start the *phad*, we start with Gogaji's wedding... Kesar Kalmi...

19:43 *Is there any performance in which patrons offer more?* People donate for the episodes they like.

Up to what age did your mother-in-law recite? Until her death. *Did she ever feel any physical problem?* No.

20:48 *How do you manage to sing high pitch without moving your lips very much?* 20:54 We sing without moving our lips very much. We feel empowered when we do this.

21:20 *Did you ever face any problem when you did this?* No.

Did you ever observe Pabuji's spirit appear while you were singing? 21:44 Sometimes this does happen to devotees of Pabuji. People in the village present their problems and the spirit suggests the cure or solution to the problem.

21:57 *You have been reciting for many years –how many times have you observed this?* 4/5 times 22:32 Pabuji's temple is nearby and Mata-ji's as well.

22:52 *You are telling me about Mataji. Did it ever happen with Pabuji?*

22:54 Yes, Pabuji's spirit used to appear in the *bhopa* Bhanwarji, a Rajput. He would go into trance. [Hands] He would tell what's wrong and suggests a remedy-- for example, pouring milk around the perimeter of the village...12:48. .. or for keeping our cows alive, sprinkling milk around, or if the water becomes brackish, this is an antidote for that.

23:50 *Do people pray to Pabuji for the safeguarding of their fields?* Yes, they make a wish and invoke Pabuji to bring the rain, or for marriage. And normally it happens and then, the epic is recited. In the case of drought or famine, they wish for Pabuji to bring the rain.

24:40 *Who are your main patrons?* All main castes: Rajput, Brahman, Jat...

Meghwal also? No, not Meghwal (cobblers). We can recite for Lohars but not for Meghwals. They take away dead animals. We follow our ancestral tradition. We recite for carpenters and Lohars (blacksmiths), but not for cobblers or the Sansi tribe... since once some cows died...

Do Raika come to you for recitation? Raika herders feature in the epic and are our main patrons.

What is the difference between reciting for Rajputs and Raika? 25:40[hands c/u-26:00] Rajputs are politically powerful. The Raika are economically powerful.

26:00 *Do they give more money than Rajputs?* Yes.

26:20 *Do Raika perform a special kind of prayer during the epic?* They are regular devotees. 26:31 Raika pray to Pabuji. They pray for their animals to stay healthy

What do Raika do when their animals fall sick? 26:50 They pray to Pabuji and tie *tantti* on their animals' ankles.

What are tantti? Anklets made of thread, tied with seven knots.27:04 They also make a vow that if their animal recovers, they will organise a recitation of Pabuji.

Do you remember when you last sang epic for Raika? 27:35 In a nearby village called Sapansar. There is a Raika *dhani* near Sapansar.

How do you arrange to perform there? They offer us *akha* and we go off to recite.

What do you get as akha from the Raika? A goat or a sheep and up to 5000 rupees. They also offer us pick-up and drop. 28:55

Amongst the female audience which is the favourite? The stories of Kesar Kalmi, Black Saffron... 29:38

What is the Raika's favourite? Pabuji's wedding and the story of Harmal Devasi...29:52 They offer us an incentive. They say, 'If you sing well, we will call you back again'.

29:58 *What help did you receive from your husband Mohanji in learning the epic?* Most of it I learnt from him. We used to practise after dinner every night.30:31 Mohanji made a big difference in my life.

30:42 *Why are you Bhils so devoted to Pabuji?* Because we are Nayak... and therefore, we are devotees of Pabuji. (Samdar: Our ancestors, Chandoji and Dheboji, were Bhil. We are their successors. When Pabuji Maharaj was going to heaven, he gave them his blessings. They grabbed onto a piece of his coat and so he said, 'Take half for your costume, and half for your painted screen... Singing my epic story is now your livelihood and profession'.)

33:07 *What happened to Pabuji? Did he die?* There was a battle. He had gone to retrieve the cows that were stolen. Pabuji killed all the Khici clan and then there was a fight between Pabuji and the Bhatias. He alone survived...

Why was he the only one left?

[Samdar] There was a war. When he died, Kesar Kalmi rode him to heaven just as we see on the screen...