

## 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.