

Q&A with Sidi Goma

Editor: When, where and how was Sidi Goma formed?

Artist: Sidi Goma are a traditional group so we have been performing together in our village since we were children, it's a natural thing to do. In the village the group has a lot more members than 12 of course, but for travelling on tour we have to choose a smaller group. Our group leaders are hereditary - they go back to a long family lineage of Sidi Goma music leaders.

E: How did you learn and begin performing your music and dance in the Sidi community?

A: All members of the village community join into the song and dance at the shrine, men, women and children. So you just learn it naturally, there is no formal teaching process.

E: And how did you begin performing your music and dance to the world?

A: It all started in 2002 with a concert tour to the UK. Prof. Amy Catlin (UCLA, Los Angeles) helped a lot with setting this up, and she also accompanied us on tour. The organiser in the UK was Katerina Pavlakis - she has been developing our international career ever since.

E: Back in Gujarat, are your Sidi music-dance celebrations held only within the Sidi community or do people from other communities also attend them?

A: The shrine to Bhava Gor outside our village is famous in the region and many thousand people come to the annual *urs* (anniversary) celebration; most are Sidis but there are also people from other communities attending, e.g. the Parsi community.

E: In what language do you perform your chants and zikrs?

A: The zikrs are in a mixed language - part Arabic, part Gujarati, and there are a few words of Suahili in there too - we discovered this when we visited East African in 2003.

E: How similar/different are the Sidis' way of celebrating Sufism with music and dance from the African-Sufis' way of doing so?

A: Every Sufi tradition has its own [ceremonial] music and (sometimes) dance. What is [common] to all Sufi traditions is the use of music and dance to [get] closer to God, to 'taste' the divine through musical joy and ecstasy.

E: Is Sidi music and dance traditionally performed by men only?

A: This is not correct - the whole community performs music and dance, including children and women. In the nearby shrine of Mai Mishra (sister of Bhava Gor) only women are allowed into the inner shrine, at the shrine of Bhava Gor, only men are allowed to the inner circle.