



## English Translation of Episode 2: A Poet's Taleem

Voiceover in English, amid ambient conversations from Bachu Seth Ki Wadi.

Woman 1: You come here to enjoy. It is my job to make you fall in love with me. If I don't show you love, how will you feel love for me?

Woman 2: All my family members have cut off all ties from me because I entered this industry. They said, 'We can't kill her because, after all, it's the family blood. We won't be able to kill, so let's cut off all ties.'

Man: At 4 am, when the whistle used to blow, the music would finally stop. Till then, every house would be lit up. But now, no one comes here. People can barely recover their rents. There is no business here, how can people run shops here?

Voiceover in English, amid ambient conversation.

Rani, narrating her own poetry:

Her eyes are enough to intoxicate me;  
I drink each morning, I drink each night  
I get intoxicated just by looking at her eyes  
Even if someone gets me drunk for free,  
I drink only to her name.  
What is the point of getting me drunk?  
What is the point of us, looking into each other's eyes?  
If you can't get me intoxicated,  
Then what is the point of making me fall in love with you?

Voiceover in English, amid Rani's ambient singing.

Host Kunal Purohit: So, how long did your taleem (education) in Mujra take?

Rani: I started training when I was 10 to 11 and I am still singing, still learning. When I was a child, my guru started with making me do riyaz (daily practice of singing/playing music) every day for half an hour, an hour, or even more.



Sometimes, he would teach me to sing in tune with the tabla. Then, he would ask me to practice my singing by controlling my breath. Sometimes, it would take hours and hours. If I didn't get it right, I would keep doing the same thing for hours and hours. (Laughs)

Then, slowly, I started doing my own riyaz, even without my guru. I learned how to play the harmonium and would sing along.

Host Kunal Purohit: You learned the harmonium by yourself?

Rani: I started with the basic, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa (Do Re Mi Fa So). I started off with that and then, slowly, started all my singing practice with the harmonium.

Host Kunal Purohit: So, when did you start performing mujra?

Rani: I started singing very early in my life. We were very poor, so we didn't really have a choice. So, I started off when I was 11. My sister started when she was 13 or 14.

Voiceover in English.

Host Kunal Purohit: Can you tell me something about the time that you started doing mujra? Like, how many people ... ?

Rani: Those were very good times. Let's say, mujra started at 8 pm. It would then go on for the whole night and sometimes, even the whole morning, without food or sleep. So, often, we would joke that we wished someone, somewhere, dies and the mujra shuts down. Or else, the mujra would just go on! You see, we had a practice of shutting down mujra as a mark of respect in someone in the community died.

Voiceover in English.

Rani: We were very poor.

Host Kunal Purohit: What did your father do?

Rani: He had died at a young age.



Host Kunal Purohit: So, your mother had to shoulder the entire responsibility of raising the children by herself?

Rani: Yes. Honestly, in our industry, mother, father, it's all the same — the mother has to do all the duties.

No [man] comes back to take care of his children. They all walk away. No one comes back.

Voiceover in English.

A clip plays from the Hindi film, *Devdas*:

Man (sarcastically): This celebration has played out so well! An upper-caste landlord family's daughter-in-law is today standing with a courtesan! Wow.

Courtesan: You know this very well and so does the village. That the reason we courtesans are so popular is because of landlords. If there are children in the tawaif's house, that's also because of landlords like you. You might call them sex workers, but, after all, they are genetically from families like yours.

Woman: Just by standing with a landlord's wife, a sex worker cannot become one.

Voiceover in English.

Reema: Today, when wives complain about us, they need to realize: what rights do we even have? We don't have a license to ask for our rights from any of the men who come here and father our children. Can we ever go to a man and ask them to give us what is rightfully ours, when we bear their children? We can't. As against that, even if a man goes to a 100 tawaifs like me, he still belongs to his wife. His wife, still, has all the rights over him in a way that if he does anything wrong, she can take him to task.

So, then, are we the ones wronged, or do we do wrong? Every tawaif is wronged by the men who come here and walk away.



Voiceover in English.

Reema: This is my business — that I run mujra kothas. Now, the police ask people like me to pay up Rs 2 lakh as extortion money if we want to run our kothas. Where will we get this money from?

We will have to earn it the ‘bad way.’ If the government cracks down on the police and ensures that no one asks to pay bribes, no woman will be forced to do ‘bad work.’ But if you ask me for bribes, I will have to earn it the wrong way. It is the government which is, in fact, making us tawaifs into prostitutes. Then, why does the government pretend to care about us?

If I have a large family and I alone can’t feed them, then I will be forced to bring their sisters into their profession.

In my time, I used to start dancing at 11 pm and finish at 12 pm, noon. I used to earn lakhs of rupees, only through my dance. No one would care about my name. They all loved the dance. Now, even if a customer gives us Rs 10, he wants to first see our face. This is how precarious a situation the government has created. But now, even if I push 10 girls into the trade, you still can’t make enough money to survive. The police has ensured this.

The men have realized that the women are desperate. Earlier, the men knew that no matter what they did, women like us would never sleep with them. Now, the men have realized our helplessness.

Voiceover in English.

Reema: They say, if you want to know what love is, come to a tawaif’s kotha. But, do it only till it amuses you. If you love too much, it can kill you.

The people who come here to fall in love are crazy. A tawaif, by the very nature of her job, can never be anyone’s love. She is here to earn money. Even if you cover her with money, it will still not be enough for her. Our needs are not compatible. You are foolish, then, to fall in love with us, aren’t you?



There is no man who doesn't know this and who doesn't know what happens at a mujra kotha. You come here to enjoy. It is our job to make you feel like we love you.

If I don't show you love, how will you go crazy after me? Only when I make you go crazy for me will you spend money on me. If I tell you that I don't love you, will you love me? Will you tip me? You won't.

Voiceover in English. The end.