



## Mahindra Kabira Festival's day 2 strings Kabir's poetry into music, conversations and journeys through Varanasi's bylanes

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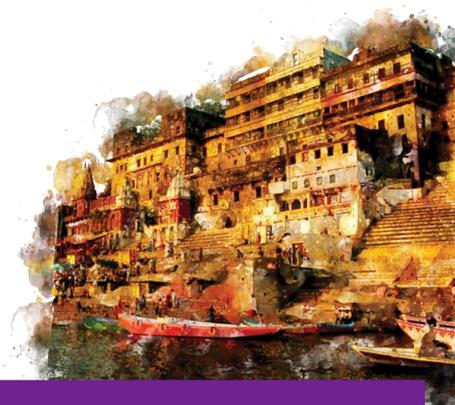
**Varanasi, 11 November 2017:** After a magical reception at Brij Rama Palace yesterday, the Mahindra Kabira Festival opened early on Saturday morning at the Darbhanga Ghat with the meditative sound of *santoor* by the young Kumar Sarang, complementing the serenity of the morning as the sun rose on the river Ganga. An artiste of the Benares Gharana, Kumar Sarang began his performance with Raag Ahir Bhairav. He played two brandishes in jhaptal (10-beat cycle) and teen taal (16-beat cycle). He was accompanied on the tabla by Shrutisheel Uddhav.

This was followed by Rashmi Agarwal's hypnotic, crystal clear voice and compositions of Kabir and Baba Bulleh Shah whose teachings were very similar. The songs included *Sadho dekho re jag baurana, Naiharawa unka na bhav, Jheeni jheeni beeni chadariya* and many more. Her emotive, expressive and soulful singing was an absolute delight for audiences. Accompanying her were Shanti Bhushan Jha (Tabla), Baddu Khan (Harmonium), Amar Sangam (Guitar) and Satish Solanki (Percussion).

As the audiences enjoyed the regaling of the musicians, a *panditji* crafted unique mixes of *ittar* to complement the ragas being sung, dabbing them onto a *phaa* (a bud of cotton) and presenting to each guest a whiff of this magical potion which added to the wonder and ambience of the morning with the shimmering rays of the sun on the water and the disarming musical melodies. Special Benarasi *kullhad* chai and *chewra* (puffed rice snack) were served followed by the delicate and delicious *malaiyyo* or *nimish* (cloudy milk froth desert sprinkled with *kesar* and pistachio) to end the morning session on a sweet note.

Music paved the way for an invigorating literary session at the ghat which started with Ankit Chaddha presenting a compelling *dastangoi* (traditional Urdu storytelling) on Kabir. His narrative was based on historical research and folk lore around the 14th century Bhakti poet and interspersed with his *khadi boli* poetry featuring popular references and stark and pithy descriptions. The *dastan* took the listeners on a journey in search of finding Kabir within oneself.

*Speaking about his performance, Ankit Chadha said, "In the times that we are living in, Kabir needs to be heard more, Kabir needs to be read more and Kabir needs to be sung much more and I'm glad that an initiative like Mahindra Kabira Festival is happening and Kabir is coming back to the city of his birth. Being by the banks of Ganga and that too in Varanasi where Kabir lived was a very special feeling. The audience was lovely and I enjoyed performing and through it all I could imagine Kabir around us."*



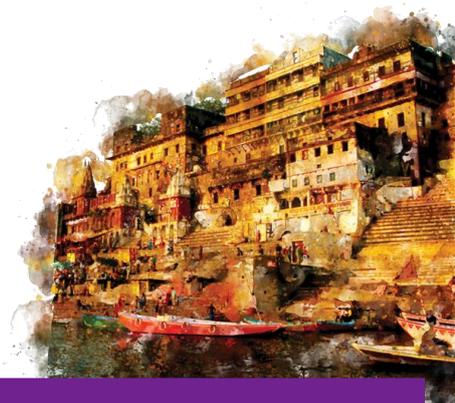
This was followed by a conversation between Sanjoy Roy, M. D. of Teamwork Arts and Abha Dalmia who has been working painstakingly with the weavers of Benares to revive the weaving industry. Talking about weaving and Kabir, who was a weaver himself, Abha Dalmia said, "I think Kabir's weaving taught him a lot about synchronisation of life. He wove his thoughts truthfully into life. It was while weaving that he would sing his now famous couplets."

The day progressed with a City Walk through the bylanes of the city, specially curated to orient attendees to Kabir's city, Varanasi. The walk traversed through the Panchganga Ghat where five sacred rivers: Ganges, Saraswati, Yamuna, Kirana and Dhupapapa converge to form a magical montage of spiritual beauty and on whose steps Swami Ramanand is said to have initiated Kabir, and onto the striking Alamgir Mosque followed by the Mangala Gauri temple where Ustad Bismillah Khan *sahab* would often serve the goddess with his *shehnai* and then to the Jain temple in Bhelupur dedicated to Shri Parsavnath. Another exploratory walk took participants to places of significance to Kabir including the Kabir Mat and a visit to the weavers of the city.

The Evening Music performances were held at the Chota Nagpur Bagheecha near Assi Ghat featuring a diverse range of musicians stringing Kabir's poetry into their unique musical styles. The evening began with Rajasthani musician Nathoolal Solanki playing the *shankh* followed by a performance by Vishnu Mishra from the Benaras Gharana. As the evening progressed, duo Bindhumalini & Vedanth sang songs written by mystic poets of the Sufi and Bhakti traditions through a beautiful amalgamation of Carnatic and Hindustani musical styles that these two artistes have respectively been trained in. Post this, vocalist Mahesh Ram presented the poetry of many mystic poets in the folk style of the Meghwal community. The day ended on a high note with veteran Shubha Mudgal performing songs based on Kabir's *dohas* in her powerful and enchanting voice, leaving audiences wanting more.

On Sunday, the festival will begin with Morning Music at 6:30 am at the Darbhanga Ghat where singer Harpreet Singh will perform followed by vocalist Sucharita Gupta. The literature session will begin at 10:30 am and will have author Vinayak Sapre take audiences through an unconventional interpretation of Kabir's couplets while applying his transcendent wisdom to aspects of personal finance, mutual fund investments and the stock market. The afternoon will have a second round of the City Walk and Kabir Walk followed by *arti* and Vedic Chants at Assi Ghat at 6:15 pm which will also mark the beginning of the Evening Music. The Evening Music performances set against the backdrop of the setting sun on the river at Assi Ghat will include Nathoolal Solanki on *nagadas*.

Folk and contemporary fusion duo Maati Baani will then follow the Harpreet Trio to culminate in a headline performance by Kailash Kher.



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Entry: Free Registration for Morning and Evening Music Performances and Literature Afternoons on Saturday and Sunday.

For more information on the Festival please visit

<http://mahindrakabira.com/delegate-experience/>

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**For media queries, please contact:**

**Teamwork Arts**

Vidushi Khera: +91 9810498106, [vidushi@teamworkarts.com](mailto:vidushi@teamworkarts.com)

**Zimisha Communications**

Imtiaz: 9810227818, [imtiaz@zimisha.com](mailto:imtiaz@zimisha.com)

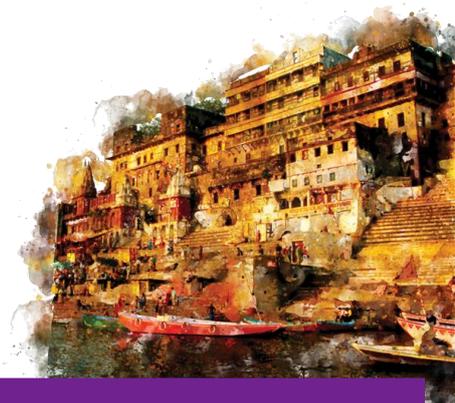
Santosh: +919990937676, [santosh@zimisha.com](mailto:santosh@zimisha.com)

Anushree: +919599840520, [pr@zimisha.com](mailto:pr@zimisha.com)

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

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