

## Varanasi resonates with Kabir's verse as the 5th edition Mahindra Kabira Festival begins

- Performers include Padmashree Malini Awasthi, Ranjani and Gayatri, Jumma Khan, and M. K. Raina many more.
- Heritage Walks covering Alamgir mosque, a place where Kabir found his Guru Ramananda, the Tailang Swami Math, Bharatendu Harish Chandra (Shakespeare of India) house

The imposing Guleria Ghat of Varanasi reverberated with soulful strains of music inspired by Kabir, as the 5th edition of the **Mahindra Kabira Festival** commenced in the holy city. Conceived by the **Mahindra Group** and leading performing arts and entertainment company, **Teamwork Arts**, Mahindra Kabira Festival presented a magnificent line-up today.

Sharing his thoughts on the Festival, **Jay Shah, Vice President, Head – Cultural Outreach, Mahindra Group** said, "While programming the Mahindra Kabira Festival, we have paid good attention to diversity in various forms. We have a large number of women performers. We have the doyens as well as the youth. A good mix of musical genres - classical, folk and contemporary. We have geographical diversity as well with artists representing Hindustani and Carnatic Music. Our aim is to bring forth different expressions and approaches to Kabir."

**Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts** said, "The 15th-century spiritual seeker and philosopher: Sant Kabir - spoke of a common-sense approach to life and the need to constantly break boundaries. It is this wisdom that the annual Mahindra Kabira Festival celebrates each year through music, food, heritage walks and talks."

The Morning Music programme started with a melodious and soulful santoor recital by young musician Divyansh Harshit Srivastava. Srivastava performed a vibrant rendition of Raag Bairagi Bhairav which perfectly bonded with the serene backdrop of the mighty Ganga. A disciple of renowned santoor player Padma Shri Pt. Bhajan Sopori of Sufiyana Gharana, he said, "You don't get the vibe of Banaras and its ghats anywhere in the world. The 'Banarasipan' and its 'Khaan-Paan' are exclusive to Banaras. Banaras is a spiritual place and a great poet like Kabir can only be born here. It gives me pride to tell people that I belong to Banaras. It is one of the oldest cities in the world. Banaras is the perfect example of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam."

'Timeless classics of Kabir and Meera along with the gems of Chhayawad Hindi poetry' is a unique initiative by the founder - Chinmayi Tripathi, and aims to create a bridge between classic, timeless poetry and contemporary music. With the rising sun as backdrop to the Mahindra Kabira stage, the musical duo Chinmayi and Joell created a unique musical narrative

highlighting the relevance of Kabir's poetry relevant to the contemporary world. The duo performed timeless classics of Kabir and Meera along with the gems of Chhayawad Hindi poetry including Bhala Hua Mori Gagri Phooti, Jara Halke Gadi Hanko Mere Ram Gadi Wale, Karna Fakiri Phir Kya Dilgiri, Udd Jayega Hans Akela, Tu Ka Tu. "My interest and love for Kabir has been since my childhood. Being a native of Malwa and growing up listening to Prahlad Singh Tipaniya automatically pushed me towards Kabir's philosophy. In the band we try to create our own versions of Kabir's poetry and present in a different way."

Today's programme also included an exclusively curated Heritage walk which took the participants to the places around the spiritual winding lanes of Varanasi. The walk covered Alamgir mosque, a place where Kabir found his Guru Ramananda, the Tailang Swami Math, Bharatendu Harish Chandra (Shakespeare of India) house.

The afternoon sessions were started by a talk by educator and spiritual mentor Umesh Kabir, who has lived out Kabir's philosophy in the Kabir Chaura Math, Moolgadhi Ashram in Varanasi for the last 20 years. He recited various dohas of Kabir explaining their meaning as a philosophy of life with respect to nature, human beings, and interpersonal relationships. He emphasised the importance of Kabir in our lives through this session. explaining about Kabir in a traditional manner Kabir said, "There are any misconceptions about Kabir like, people often wrongly interpret Kabir and I try to correct them in my own way." The afternoon also saw a quirky and fresh performance by Jumma Khan along with his band of Mewari Musicians. Khan said, "Our performance of Koi Kya Jaane Saheb Lagan is a bhajan of Kabir Das Ji. Kabir Ji's bhajan is full of mystery. The mystery in his words puts people in a state of wonder. To understand Kabir, one needs to listen behind the words as it's very difficult to understand the simplicity of Kabir." He regaled the audience with some of his popular numbers with his single-stringed instrument – Bhapang, namely Gyan ka Gutk, Tarr, Karigari Re Kalyug.

Opening the Evening Music, the Sunbeam Bhagwanpur Choir presented a soulful performance. This 25-student-strong choir presented an ode Kabir through Meera, Raheem and Khusro and conveyed the message of Oneness and Inclusivity. A few of the performances by the choir were: Mrig Ko Samajho Aur Charao (Kabir Das Jee), Ud Jaega Hans Akela Jag Darshan Ka Mela(Kabir Das Ji), Sakal Hans Mein Raam Biraaje (Paaramparik), Kya Lekar Aayon Re Bande Kya Lekar Jaega (Rajasthani Bhajan/ Lok Geet).

Pratima Gupta, Director of the school said, "The choir's performance was of a stream of consciousness set across all religions. Not only Kabir, but the choir took a rendition from all sects. Their thought was showcased through their performance in recital form. Two of the

compositions were of Kabir, but with that what the message tells is that all religions, all saints, all human beings are moved by the same thought of love, oneness and brotherhood.”

Eminent Indian classical vocalist Nirali Kartik started her performance with Raag Jog which was a perfect fit for the Festival evening; as the Raag said, it was about detachment, being a jogi & a Sufi. Her performance included some much-loved musical numbers including Lagan Bin Jaage Na Nirmohi. She concluded with Dheere Re Mana.

Renowned folk singer Padmashree Malini Awasthi performed Moko Kahan Dhunde Re Bande, a beautiful musical piece in the evening. A torchbearer of India’s rich folk and classical musical traditions, Awasthi said, “Mahindra Kabira Festival is a platform which connects your soul to Kabir and Kashi is the place where Kabir used to live and spread his wisdom through his music. When an artist sings from heart at Kashi Ghat and is sitting on stage, their body and mind embodies Kabir.”

The evening concluded with spellbinding performances by celebrated Indian classical vocalist and violinist duo Ranjani-Gayatri. The highlight of their performance was Kabir’s beautiful poems, compositions from the Carnatic tradition, and bhajans - Nari Tum Juthe, Janam Gawayya, Ghat Mai Panchi Bolta, Moko Kahan Dhunde Re. They said, “In our art, we try to explore the oneness in thought that has been echoed over and over again by all the great saints and wise enlightened souls of India.” They also presented a Tamil number on the famous poetic work Tirumantiram based on Lord Shiva’s glory. “The precise, powerful, and dramatic way in which Kabir expresses himself is what we love about him. The devotional core of Kabir is the same as the devotional core of the elevated philosophies of a lot of saints from Karnataka,” they added.

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Every year, we produce over 25 performing, visual arts and literary festivals in several countries including Australia, Egypt, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the UK and the USA as well as many eclectic festivals across India. We produce the world's largest literary gathering: the annual Jaipur Literature Festival; JLF international now travels to the US, UK, Canada, Qatar and Australia and we have recently launched several digital series - JLF Brave New World, JLF First Edition, JLF Voices of Faith and JLF WORDS ARE BRIDGES. Our musical extravaganza, Bollywood Love Story - A Musical, continues to tour the world with sold-out shows everywhere it is held.

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