



MEDIA RELEASE

Varanasi resonates with Kabir's verse and wisdom as the 4th edition Mahindra Kabira Festival begins

Varanasi, November 23, 2019: The iconic Shivala and Guleria Ghats of Varanasi reverberated with soulful strains of music inspired by Kabir, as the 4th 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** is a unique celebration of the 15th-century poet-saint Kabir. In its 4th consecutive year now, it is an immersive experience for attendees who spend two days imbibing Kabir's syncretic world view and the lyrical aspect of his teachings through a programme of poetry, music, talks, heritage walks, local foods, and more.

A gala Opening Reception at Guleria Ghat, held on 22nd November, gave an ample glimpse and flavour of the following two days. Hindustani classical duo **Rahul & Rohit Mishra's** performance was a perfect blend of *khayal*, *thumri*, *tappa*, *dadra*, *chaiti*, *kajri*, *hori*, and *bhajan*. Belonging to the **Benares musical gharana**, Rahul and Rohit conveyed the essence of Kabir's teachings through a magnificent amalgamation of various forms of Hindustani classical traditions.

The Festival began with invigorating Morning Music at Guleria Ghat today. Stirring musical performances by renowned sitar-player **Neeraj Mishra** and Delhi-based Hindustani classical vocalist **Ujwal Nagar** accompanied the serenity of the early morning at the *ghat*, as the sun rose in the incomparable city of Varanasi. The compositions that both the artistes played depicted the value accorded by Kabir to a 'Guru', a teacher in life and verse, who helps discard religious exclusivism. Niraj Mishra created an enigmatic environment with Sitar recitations including popular *thumri* numbers like '*Hamri Arariya Pe*'.

Ujwal Nagar said, "*Kabir is not only about spirituality, his philosophy covered a much wider range. Not limiting himself only within the spiritual periphery, Kabir tell us about human values, society, avoiding divisiveness etc.*"



“When it comes to Kabir’s teachings it is a perfect combination of rhythm, melody and literature”, he added.

The day advanced with a curated Heritage Walk through the by- lanes of the city by expert chroniclers, **Saurabh Chakraborty and Devesh**, unlocking the city’s mysteries, and helping the attendees in understanding the gentle passion of Kabir’s philosophies and embrace a love for the unknown as they criss-crossed the narrow lanes of Varanasi. The Heritage Walk commenced from the Guleria Ghat and weaved through narrow *gulleys*. The afternoon on the first day at the Mahindra Kabira Festival also offered an exploration of the mystical city through another Heritage Walk.

Literary discourse paved the way for a revitalising tete-a-tete accompanying lunch at Guleria Ghat. **KC Shankar** and **Vicky Ahuja** from Mumbai-based **Jashn-E-Qalam** presented two timeless folktales with enchanting solo performances. The late Vijaydan Detha, popularly known as Bijji, celebrated the complexity and richness of Kabir through the wit and wisdom of his storytelling. **Jashn-E-Qalam** artistes expressed the various emotions and moods of the mystic poet through their heart-touching recitals, based on Vijaydan Detha’s work.

As the sun set at the Shivala Ghat, the Evening Music programme began, featuring a diverse range of musicians with the aim of making Kabir's verses accessible to all. Performances began with a sublime ‘Flute Symphony’ by **Pt. Ajay Shankar** Prasanna. The cross-genre flute medley that experimented with the sounds of the wind regaled audiences, who soaked in every note.

“Kabir has been the most righteous poet with his writings being much relevant to the contemporary world, although they are ages old. I feel, music is the right medium which we can use to depict his teachings and philosophy”, said, Pt. Ajay Shankar.

The Evening Music started with a performance by students of DPS Varanasi at Shivala Ghat and the day ended with an enchanting performance by **Ustad Kamal Sabri**, representing a 400-year-old illustrious family of *sarangi* exponents – **the Sainia Gharana of Moradabad**. The maestro presented the poetry of the enigmatic Kabir, as well as Indian classical *ragas* through his *sarangi* leaving



audiences spellbound. Ustad Kamal Sabri presented compositions like ‘*Man Lago Yaar Fakiri Me*’ dedicated to *sant* Kabir.

Talking about the festival, Jay Shah, Vice President, Head – Cultural Outreach, Mahindra Group, said, *“The 4th Mahindra Kabira festival has had a great beginning with a soulful opening reception and ethereal morning music. So far, we have had young musicians showcase their virtuosity worthy of great praise. The Mahindra Group is delighted to be able to promote young talent.”*

Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director of Teamwork Arts said, *“We need to remind ourselves of the gift that nature and the universe has given us – of talent, love and beauty, that can well reverse narrative of hatred that surrounds us.”*

On Sunday, the Festival will begin with Morning Music at 6:30 am at Guleria Kothi Ghat where flutist **Rakesh Kumar** will collaborate with Indian classical violinist **Sarada Prasan Das** followed by the performances of renowned Kabir-panthi **Shabnam Virmani** and musician **Swagath Sivakumar**. The Heritage Walks from Guleria Ghat are scheduled for 10 am and 3 pm. The Literature Session will feature novelist and academic **Purushottam Agrawal** and columnist and curator **Sadhana Rao**. The Evening Music, commencing at 6:30 pm, at Shivala Ghat will include performances by **Omprakash Nayak**, **Pato Banton** with **Antoinette Hall** and **Kristin Hoffmann** of the group **Unity Earth**. The Evening Music will conclude with an electrifying collaboration between neo-folk fusion band **Kabir Café** and Sufi folk singer **Mooralala Marwada**.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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