

## Tabla legend Kishan Maharaj dead

Pandit Kishan Maharaj, one of India's best-known classical percussionists, passed away in this temple town after battling a brain stroke for five days. He was 85.

The leading tabla exponent was pulled off life support systems Sunday night. He had suffered a stroke Tuesday and efforts had been on to stave off brain death.

Kishan Maharaj is survived by a son and three daughters.

Sources here said the tabla legend suffered the stroke when sarod artist Pandit Amjad Ali Khan and his family, including sons Ayaan and Amaan, went to meet him a day after the Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh, an important musical event in the town. Kishan Maharaj also attended it.

'He was sitting on a sofa and then he suddenly passed out. We took him to a hospital, where we tried to revive him for five days,' Sandeep Das, one of Kishan Maharaj's most senior disciples and Grammy nominee, told IANS here.

Kishan Maharaj was born in 1923 in a family of professional musicians. He was trained in classical music by Pandit Hari Maharaj, his father. After his father's death, Pandit Kanthe Maharaj, his uncle, took him under his wings.

Kishan Maharaj was conferred the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan.

'After shahnai maestro Bismillah Khan's death, he was the lone surviving classical music legend in Varanasi,' said Anshuman Pandey, a music aficionado associated with Kishan Maharaj for more than a decade.

Kishan Maharaj, who had a distinctive style of his own, was known for his ability to play cross-rhythms and produce complex calculations. He could accompany any instrument, be it sitar, sarod, dhrupad. He was equally at home accompanying a dancer.

The percussionist was considered in the same league as his contemporary Alla Rakha. He had played with almost all the leading classical musicians and performers in the Indian hall of fame.

'He played with Birju Maharaj, Sitara Devi, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, Bismillah Khan, Bhimsen Joshi, Ustad Faiyaz Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan - almost everyone of his time,' Das said.

Das, who had been Kishan Maharaj's disciple since the age of nine and lived with him for 11 years in Varanasi to learn the tabla, has fond recollections of his guru.

'I feel that more than teaching tabla, he taught a way of life. He trained me to become a complete human being,' said Das, who has performed with the Silk Road Ensemble and the famous Chinese cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

Recounting his days as a 'shishya' (pupil) in Kishan Maharaj's 'gurukul' (school), Das said the tabla legend taught him to sweep the floor as part of his training.

'It didn't make sense to a nine-year-old at that time, but now I realise that it was not about sweeping the floor, but it was about focus and concentration - the ability to do small things correctly if you wanted to do big things correctly,' Das said.

According to him, Kishan Maharaj was one of the strictest gurus, a stern disciplinarian, serious about punctuality and a perfectionist.

Apart from tabla, the master percussionist had several passions, including poetry and art (he was an accomplished painter), said renowned kathak dancer Pandit Birju Maharaj.

'Right from childhood, (since the age of 11), when I started dancing, Kishan Maharaj had been the percussionist of my choice. He followed the action and then decided on the rhythm (taal),' Birju Maharaj told IANS.

'He was also a distant uncle as all of us, the musicians of Kabir Chowk in Varanasi (home of Pandit Birju Maharaj's in-laws), are related. He took his 'talim' (training) from one of my great-uncles. Kishan Maharaj knew a lot about music. He had the history of Indian classical music on his fingertips,' the kathak maestro said.

*Madhusree Chatterjee ( © IANS / India eNews)*