



Raja Rustam Khan of 1760 & Poonch's Dashnami Akhara

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Dashnami Akhara Poonch has remained the centre of spirituality from 17AD when it was established by a Muslim Raja Rustam Khan of Poonch in respect of a spiritual sadhu. During the rule of Dogra Rajas of Poonch from 1852 to 1942 this place was also a centre of power where Raj Tilak was given to the Rajas of Poonch. In 1872, Chhari Yatra towards Swami Buddha Amarnath for the first time was started by Raja Moti Singh of Poonch. During the Raksha Bandhan festival, Dashnami Akhara Poonch becomes the centre of religious tourism as thousands of pilgrims reach the Akhara to participate in Chari Mubarak Yatra which starts from Dashnami Akhara Poonch and leads towards Baba Buddha Amarnath temple Mandi headed by Swami Vishav Athama Ji Maharaj.

This year the annual yatra shall proceed towards Mandi on 16th August when a big function shall be organized at Dashnami Akhara Poonch. Akhara complex is spread over 26 kanal area and there is an old Hanuman temple, a Shiv temple, a building where food is served, an ashram building of Mahant of the Akhara, Samadhi Sthal, an inn for pilgrims, old well, water tanks, a kitchen garden and a piece of cultivation land. The complex is located to the south of Poonch town. It touches Bag Deodi gate of Poonch from northern side and Shanker Nagar Mohalla Poonch falls in the south of shrine complex.

Dashnami Akhara had remained centre of power when Poonch was principality of local Dogra Rajas from 1852-1947 AD. The new Rajas of Poonch would be coronated in Dashnami Akhara temple and then they were taken in a procession to Poonch fort for taking oath as Raja of Poonch. The Mahant of Akhara was known as Raj Guru. The local Rajas used to visit Akhara along with families to get the blessing of the Swami. If one turns the leaves of history, one finds that Raja Moti Singh (1852-1892 AD) started shifting his Darbar for about two months from Poonch town to Rajpura Mandi in summer season. It was this period when the ancient temple of Buddha Amarnath, Rajpura Mandi, got importance. This Raja had started the pilgrimage of Chhari Mubarak from Poonch to Baba Buddha Amarnath. Dashnami Akhara Poonch is also a symbol of tolerance and composite culture of this place. This temple was constructed by a Muslim Raja Rustam Khan Rathore of Poonch during 1760 to 1787 AD. There is an interesting story behind the construction of this temple.

As per Tariq-e-Aqwama-e-Poonch written by Mohammad Din Farooq, Raja Mohammad Zan Khan of Poonch was killed in a revolt in 1749 AD and his minister Latief Ullah Khan became the Raja. Latief Ullah Khan tried to kill Ali Gohar Khan, the son of the deceased Raja Mohammad Zan Khan Rathore, but he escaped. In the meantime, Latief Ullah Khan fled from Poonch town and took shelter in Kahuta village which is 12 kilometers from Poonch located in the foothills of Haji Peer. Ali Gohar Khan changed his life style and his identity from locals. One day when he was grazing goats on the slopes of Haji Peer, a Hindu hermit after crossing the pass of Haji Peer, entered Kahuta village of Poonch area. He was



extremely thirsty and searching for a water spring. He saw Ali Gohar who was grazing goats in that area and requested him for some water. Ali Gohar told that water spring was far away from that place and then offered fresh goat milk to hermit. Hermit got impressed by the kindness of Ali Gohar and after knowing his family background he blessed him that he will become Raja of Poonch very soon. Then he suggested Ali Gohar to go to Kashmir, get help from Kashmir Governor and capture Poonch. Then the hermit left for Poonch and started meditation at a place that is at present the Akhara site.

Ali Gohar along with the directions of hermit left for Kashmir in 1760 AD along with his mother. At that time Kashmir was taken over by Afghans who were against Aslam Yar Khan, the Mughal Administrator of Poonch. Afghan Governor welcomed Ali Gohar Khan, gave him a big military force and designated him as Raja of Poonch.

Ali Gohar along with Kashmiri force reached Poonch and after a small resistance from Aslam Yar Khan captured the principality. Then Ali Gohar came to know that the hermit which had blessed him is residing in a small hut in the town, Ali Gohar decided to immediately meet him.

Following the suggestion of the hermit Ali Gohar became Raja of Poonch under the title of Raja Rustam Khan Rathore in 1760 AD. Raja Rustam Khan constructed a hut for hermit, Pacca temple and allotted large estate for the hermit. This temple later on became famous as Dashnami Akhara Poonch. During the period of Raja Rustam Khan the old Hanuman idol was installed in the temple. After the death of Raja Rustam Khan (1760-1787 AD) Poonch

remained under the rule of Muslim Raja Shah Baz Khan, Bahadur Khan and Ru-alla-Khan Sangu up to 1819 AD. These Rajas gave full respect to Dashnami Akhara shrine. When Moti Singh (1852-1892 AD) became the Raja of Poonch Swami Jawahar Giri was the Mahant of Akhara.

Keeping in view his spiritual power, Raja Moti Singh designated Swami Jawahar Giri as Raj Guru. Moti Singh also sanctioned more estates and property to the shrine and constructed the temple in Akhara where saints and seers used to stay. After Jawahar Giri, Swami Shama Nand, Swami Shankra Nand, Swami Padama Nand, Swami Satya Nand etc remained the Mahants of this shrine.

The main function is organized in Dashnami Akhara Poonch two days before the Raksha Bandhan. The religious rituals start from early morning in which thousands of devotees, pilgrims, sadhus and local people from Jammu province and other areas participate with devotion. After the Yajna and Sermons delivered by the head or Mahant of Akhara the religious procession starts at 9 am.

A contingent of police force salutes the holy silver coated Chhari Mubarak and then the Mahant leads the procession that comprises of sadhus, pilgrims and thousands of local people of Poonch town and other villages. Local people including Muslims of Chandak and Mandi town offer refreshment to yatries. In this way the function becomes the symbol of composite culture of this soil. Suitable arrangements are made by several organizations for proper boarding and lodging of pilgrims. Proper security and other arrangements in and around the Akhara complex are also made by the administration.



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