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During a recent visit to California I visited Gurudwaras at Yuba City, Fremont and San Jose.

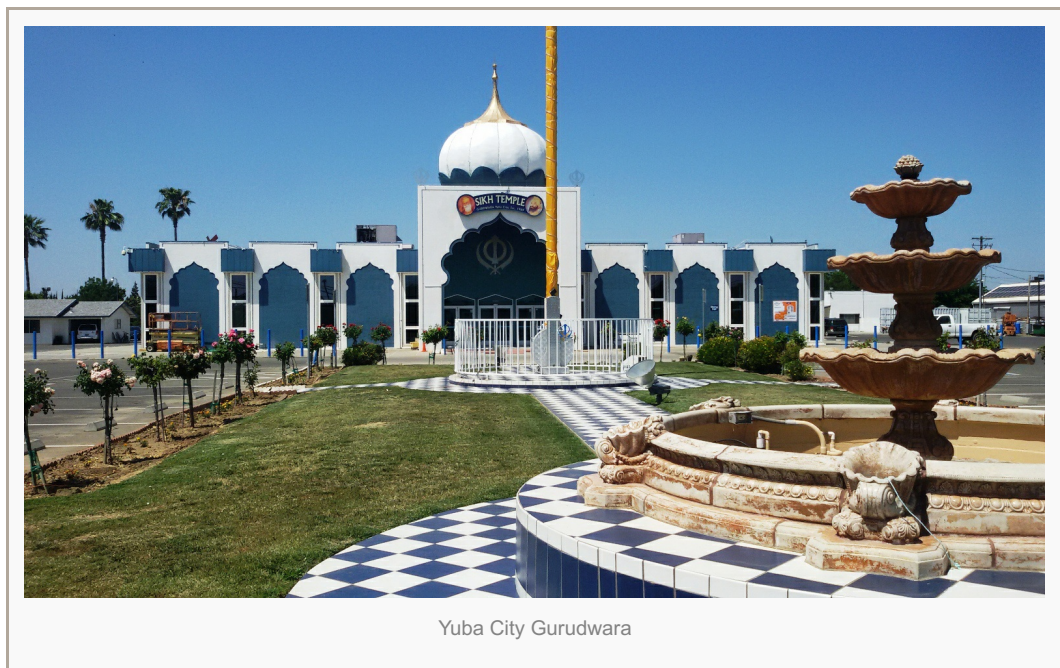
The Yuba City Gurudwara was made in 1969, Fremont in 1978 and San Jose renovated in 2004. The first two are relatively simpler structures whilst the third, built at a cost of \$ 32 million, is probably one of the best gurudwaras worldwide, definitely a must see.

To view pictures of San Jose Gurudwara head to: <http://www.esamskriti.com/around-world/San-Jose-Gurudwara.aspx>

The purpose of this article is to share key observations made during a visit to each Gurudwara and briefly state how the British created a Hindu Sikh divide in Punjab.

The Fremont and San Jose gurudwaras display photos of Bhindrawale prominently.

Fremont has pictures of Martyrs on wall of the entire langar hall. At entrance a banner showed 29th April 1986 as



Yuba City Gurudwara

'Khalistan Liberation Day'. A sign said gurudwara'Dedicated in the memory of the Martyrs of Khalistan'.

When I spoke about some Sikhs demanding Khalistan, the 92 year old Dr Gulzar Singh Johl of Yuba City said, *'If these NRI Sikhs are so concerned about the people of Punjab why do they not go and live there? If Sikhs cannot manage their gurudwaras peacefully how will they run a country?'*

Like in India Gurudwara politics does get violent. According to a 2012 media report, *"Two men were arrested in connection with stabbings during a large brawl outside the Yuba City, California, gurdwara that emerged from an election dispute."* <http://www.sikhnn.com/headlines/2368/two-arrested-stabbings->

yuba-city-gurdwara.

The very scenic and beautifully designed San Jose gurudwara is an oasis of peace. Walls on langar hall display boards which expound the tenets of Sikhism from a cultural and religious standpoint: for example, titles are Kirtan, The Khanda, Sikh Women, Sikh Marriage, Heaven and Hell, and the three Pillars of Sikhism. The material is essentially drawn from the Sanatana Dharma tradition though there was no reference to it.

Jyoti Subramaniam has reviewed what was written on the four boards referred to above and has given a corresponding Hindu viewpoint in this



San Jose Gurudwara



Langar Hall, Freemont gurudwara

article. <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Unity-between-Sanatana-and-Sikh-Dharma-1.aspx>

The deeper intent behind these boards is to tell the world that Sikhism is different from Hinduism, and that it does not suffer from any of the social ills that Hinduism allegedly does.

A senior Sikh expressed anguish that people of other dharmic faiths, meaning Hindus, had come to photograph the Sikh Temple at Yuba City whilst Sikhs did not!

Another told me there was no caste system in Sikhism, that gurudwaras were open to all. **My pointer on the well known animosity between Jat and Khatri Sikhs or treatment of Mazhabi (Scheduled**

Caste) Sikhs went unanswered.

A third said that Sikhism and Islam, as monotheistic religions and religions of the book, had more in common than Sikhism and Hinduism. I asked if he was ok with Sikh girls marrying Punjabi Muslims. I was met with silence.

When Sikhism was spoken about, there was no reference to its origin and close association with Sanatana Dharma. That is when I remembered Khushwant Singh's writings, "*The Adi Granth echoes the Vedanta through most of its nearly 6,000 hymns. There is a new breed of Sikh scholars who bend backwards to prove Sikhism has taken little or nothing from Hinduism. All they need to be told is that of the 15,028 names of God that appear in the Adi Granth, Hari occurs over 8,000 times, Ram 2,533 times.*" (Source:<http://www.outlookindia.com/article/the-poets-of-enterprise/207206>)

If indeed Sanatana and Sikh Dharma have no relationship, would Khushwant Singh have written, "*the roti-beti ka rishta (relationship) between Hindus and Sikhs (breaking bread in common and giving daughters in marriage)?*"

Yet I was happy to see at the Hari Mandir (Golden Temple), many Hindus in San Jose gurudwara.

Notwithstanding the fact that an Akali leader (1940-1960 period), Master Tara Singh was a cofounder of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in 1964, **the process of dividing Punjabis into Sikhs and Hindus, that the British set in motion around 1850, seemed complete atleast in California.**

During a subsequent email dialogue on Sanatana Dharma with some California-based Sikhs, I was surprised with their animosity towards Hindus and Hinduism.

A friend who interacts with Sikhs in the U.K. has expressed a similar sentiment. Given the strong cultural links between the two communities I wonder what is the reason for such animosity amongst NRI Sikhs?

Would Maharaja Ranjit Singh have donated gold for the shikhar of the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir (like he did for Hari Mandir) if such animosity existed between the followers of Sikhism and Sanatana Dharma?

Some told me, but many left unsaid that the killings of innocent Sikhs post Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination had left deep scars. Absolutely. **But that was the Congress party at work, not the Hindu community.**

Yet, none was willing to talk about the killing of innocents, Hindus and Sikhs, during the Khalistani Movement. Note that approximately 21,000 people died in that violent "movement." Refer: *Details of killings provided by South Asia Terrorism Portal:*<http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/How-many-Indians-died-during-the-Khalistani-Movement-1.aspx>

Like cow slaughter is of British origin (<http://www.rediff.com/news/column/the-truth-about-cow-slaughter-in-india/20151016.htm>), so also is the Hindu-Sikh divide a British construct. Here are some excerpts from my 2007 article published by *Hindustan Times*.

"Having experienced the strength of Sikh opposition during the Anglo-Sikh wars and grateful for the assistance received from Sikh princes during the Mutiny of 1857, the British realized that Sikhs could be an effective buffer between Afghanistan and India.

*Therefore, British reduced the number of Bengali soldiers (involved in 1857 Mutiny) to be replaced by loyal Sikhs & Punjabi Muslims. As Veena Talwar wrote: "To prevent the sort of mutiny they experienced from sepoys in 1857, the British organized religiously segregated regimental units from the alleged martial races, Sikhs, Pathans, Rajputs etc. This severely restricted Hindus of other castes particularly Khatri (Punjabi form of Kshatriya), who had served in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forces. Khatri (all Sikh Gurus were Khatri) were arbitrarily lumped together by the British as trading castes. **Many families***

got around this artificially imposed caste barrier by raising one or more son as Sikhs, chiefly by having them adopt the name Singh and grow hair/beard to match". (Dowry Murder, the Imperial origins of a Cultural Crime).

Thus, the enlistment of Sikhs increased steeply. Joining the army was remunerative. Soldiers were well paid, given agricultural land and pension.

Around this time there was a fall in Sikh morale, stemmed by the Singh Sabha movement. Founded in 1873 it soon split into two. One, were Sanatani Sikhs who regarded the Panth as a special form of Hindu tradition. Two, were Tat (true) Khalsa, who believed that Sikhism was a different religion.

The British supported the Tat Khalsa movement by insisting only Khalsa Sikhs (those who sported the 5 Ks) could join the Army. A move to say Sikhs were not Hindus received an impetus in 1898 with Khan Singh Nabha's book 'Ham Hindu Nahin', the passing of the Anand Marriage Act in 1909 as the only approved order for Sikh marriage and the insistence on the five Ks to distinguish Sikhs from Hindus.

After several decades, the Tat Khalsa emerged victorious. It ensured that in 1905 idols were removed from the Hari Mandir, according to W. H. McLeod author of 'Historical Dictionary of Sikhism'. Modern day Sikhism is a creation of this movement.

By about 1920, the movement was overtaken by the Akali Dal, a new political party that gave expression to the revived sense of Sikh identity. The Akalis entered into a dispute with the British for the control of Sikh Gurudwaras. Passing of the Sikh Gurudwaras Act in 1925 signalled their complete victory. The Act's definition of a Sikh leant strongly towards the exclusivists Khalsa view.

By effecting changes in who could own land, the British supported Jat Sikhs who were the prime movers behind the Tat Khalsa movement.

The birth of Akali Dal and its control over Gurudwaras heralded the tradition of mixing religion and politics. Control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee is key to political power in Punjab."

Jat Sikhs dominate Punjab politics to this day. Whenever their supremacy is threatened, there emerges possibilities of violence.

The division of Punjab into Hindu and Sikh is one more reason why Indians must remember the lasting damage inflicted by the British.

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The author is an independent columnist, founder www.esamskriti.com and a Chartered Accountant by education.

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