

Sikh Soc

*London School of
Economics and Political
Science*

**Annual Report
2011-2012**

The *London School of Economics and Political Science* Sikh Society promotes activities that appreciate the culture, history and ideology of the Sikh way of life.

OUR VISION

To raise awareness and provide education about the Sikh way of life to as many people as possible in a fun and friendly way.

OUR VALUES

Openness, acceptance and humility.

OUR AIMS

To provide a platform for Sikhs at the LSE to discuss and practise Sikhi as well as to raise awareness about the religion amongst the wider university community.

INTRODUCTION

[Report from University Sikh society President 2011-2012]

This year was an exciting year for the Society. It saw the Sikh-Punjab society being separated into the Sikh Society and Punjab society. This year also saw the creation of Nishaan; the Sikh society network, with LSE Sikh Society being a founding member.

The society hosted and attended a wide variety of events with particular highlights being the 'Sikh Taboos' and 'Nishaan Paintballing.' By being a part of Nishaan, society members were able to meet students from other universities which would not normally have been possible.

Sikh society was also active around campus by taking place in the inter-faith stall as well as delivering a short talk at the annual holocaust remembrance service. Hopefully this helped create greater awareness about Sikhi.

LSE Sikh society also took a lead on sports for women by initiating netball in the second term. We hope the oncoming committee will carry this on.

This year we also carried out some general house-keeping duties for the society. The ramaals and chuniya we inherited were a mish mash of colors and were torn and smelly. We threw these away and had new matching ones made. We also had a pull-up banner made for the society. These should hopefully last the next 5-10 years.

Finally I would like to thank the committee this year. They were extremely supportive and created a very positive working environment.

Gurmaher Singh Kooner

MEMBERSHIP & OFFICERS

SELECTION PROCESS

Elections took place in June 2011. All of the positions were uncontested and in June we had a committee of 8 members. Over the summer we managed to bring 3 more people into the committee. First year reps and postgrad reps were brought on board at the start of the new term. This was the first time elections took place in the summer prior, previously they would take place in October of the new term. We would highly recommend future committees to employ this procedure as it allows the society to plan and raise funding over the summer opposed to having to rush at the start of term.

SOCIETY OFFICERS

President : Gurmaher Singh Kooner
Vice-President: Gurmeet Kaur
Vice-President: Gurpreet Singh Virk
Treasurer: Pavneet Kaur Padda
General Secretary: Jasdeep Singh Kochhar
Social Secretary: Khushpreet Kaur Cheema
Publicity Officer: Gurdeep Kaur Grewal
Inter-faith Officer: Kimberjit Kaur Kooner
Events Team: Naveen Kaur Kler
Events Team: Nikita Kaur Maini
First Year Rep: Sabina Kaur Ranger
Post Grad Rep: Jessie Singh

SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

[Number of paid members, general attendance figures, cost of membership and data collected through membership]

62 paid members, membership was £2 for the year

STUDENT SERVICES

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Sikh studies classes were run for three weeks on LSE campus by Naujawani.com. These were later moved to City University as we felt it was unfair on City Students travelling so far to LSE when not many LSE students attended classes. The classes were promoted to LSE students with emails containing the syllabus being sent out. Students initially seemed very interested but this interest perhaps died down when the university workload picked up.

WORKSHOPS

The first workshop of the year was held on the 29th of November 2011 and was entitled 'Sikh Taboos.' This was an open debate where students would be able to discuss issues and ask questions that many in the elder generation would often shy away from. Satinder Singh chaired the discussion and provided his own input at times. The turnout for this was around 12 people and included students from different years and religions. The event was deemed as being very successful.



The second workshop of the year was entitled 'Succeeding in the Corporate World – A Sikh's musings' held on the 5th of March 2012. This talk was delivered by Hardev Bhamra, he works for Procter and Gamble. Hardev Bhamra found the society email address online and sent a speculative email which we fortunately read. Hardev felt that career development and mentoring was severely lacking within the Sikh community. As for the event, the turnout was low at just two people; this can be put down to one main reason - the event was in the last week of term when study pressure is understandably high. Those who did attend found the talk to be very informative and Hardev to be a passionate speaker. We look forward to working with Hardev again in the future and have passed his details onto over Sikh societies. We also feel career development is important for Sikh students. Many students at the LSE wish to pursue careers in law and finance and are often from backgrounds where parents cannot offer suitable guidance.

The third and final workshop of the year was entitled Exploring Your Potential and was delivered by the Sikh Research Institute in collaboration with Nishaan. Harinder Singh was the speaker. The turnout for the event was very good with approximately 20 attending from the universities around London as well as people tuning into the live webcast on Nishaans Ustream channel. The talk was very well received and was deemed a success.

ASSISTANCE

None was given. The LSE Islamic society does provide mentoring with older students guiding younger ones. A similar system could be implemented by the Sikh Society in the future.

ACTIVITIES

SPORT

The Sikh society sent a team to the Kings College 5 a-side football tournament at Catford Powerleague. The President (Gurmaher Singh) scored an absolute screamer.

The society also thought it would be good to set up sports for women. At the moment while there are the occasional football tournament for men, there exists no sports for women.

In comparison, societies such as the Hindu Society have huge annual sports tournaments organized by the NHSF. A large number of Sikh students take part in this. Behind the LSE there are netball courts owned by the council. These cost £20 to hire out for the hour. We promoted heavily on various London university Sikh societies facebook walls as well as created an event. At the first practise there was a turnout of 7. At the second practise there was a turnout of approximately 6, but they were different people. At the third and final practise there was a turnout of 5. There are a number of reasons attributable to the low turnouts. Firstly it was started late in the second term so students may have become busy with their study commitments. Also each week we had a new face show up, there was a lack of consistency with people coming. Also the booking fee of £20 an hour proved quite expensive for the society and was not sustainable. For the future it would probably be best to book out the LSE sports hall in the basement of the Old Building. Although this hall isn't the correct measurements for netball, the hall is hired out at no charge. For future committee members reading this report, please block book the hall at the start of the first term as the hall is very much in demand. Also make use of websites such as doodle.com to try and see when everyone is free. The society has purchased two sets of netball bibs, two balls and a storage bag. Also in future it would be wise to start up netball early in the first term, this year it was started late in the second term and the enthusiasm for it wasn't there but this was a valuable trial and learning experience for us.



ARTS

Members of the LSE Sikh society attended 'Collaborations- The Sikh Variety Show and Dinner' which was organized by Nishaan. Acts on the night included Mandeep Sethi, Inkquisitive Illustration, Pohir Dhadi Jatha and many others. The event being a student only one, we were able to meet and network with students from many different universities. All had a wonderful evening.

WELL-BEING

Mental well-being was provided through Simran sessions.



SOCIAL LIFE

FRESHERS WEEK

The society took part in the universities freshers fair held on the 29th of September 2011 at Victoria House. One of the committee members brought a box of Jalebis to give to passers-by and to attract interest. We also distributed freshers packs to those who signed up, these were kindly provided by Naujawani. The day went well with the only problem being the poor layout and venue. The area was too small for the number of people so a lot of people turned away at entrance. The venue became very hot through the number of people and the fact that it was in a poorly ventilated basement. We hope that in the future LSE keep freshers fairs on campus.



Our freshers welcome event was entitled 'Lassi @ the LSE' and was done in collaboration with the Punjab society. The event provided an opportunity for freshers and returning students to meet as well for the committee to inform members about upcoming events. Refreshments included mango lassi as well as Samosas kindly provided by Naujawani.com.



CELEBRATIONS

We held our annual society dinner at the Pizza Express in Holborn. There was a very good turnout of around 20 people. The Pizza Express in Holborn is an ideal place for events such as these as they have a very spacious group dining area downstairs and they allow you to book in advance. Initially we had thought about going to the Nandos in Holborn but we were unable to make a reservation as they were too busy.



EXCURSIONS

On the 12th of October 2011, members of the LSE Sikh society took part in 'The Sikh Soc Battle.' This was a paintballing tournament organized by Nishaan in Effingham.

CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

MAJOR EVENT

The major event of the year for the LSE Sikh society was scheduled to be the Kirtan Darbar in collaboration with Nishaan. In the Nishaan meetings it was agreed that every month a different university would host a Kirtan Darbar. We had contacted Bhai Jagpal Singh Kanpurvale to do Kirtan. Langar had been arranged but we encountered problems with the LSE facilities staff. The only room they were willing to give us was the LSE quad where LSE regularly holds club nights. We felt this venue was inappropriate for hosting a Kirtan Darbar as the SU bar was next door and the floor of the Quad was regularly covered in alcohol. The reason being that food is not permitted in other venues. We therefore decided against holding a Kirtan Darbar. In the future years perhaps once the new interfaith room is made in the new student union building, LSE too could host Kirtan Darbars.

ACTIVISM

Being a member of Nishaan, students from the LSE took part in 'Seva Day' alongside other Sikh Societies. The event involved preparing sandwiches at Shepherds Bush Gurdwara and distributing them to the homeless across Central London. The turnout from LSE students could have been better however.

The Society Facebook pages were also used to spread awareness about the #pledgeorange campaign and to create awareness about the on-going situation with Balwant Singh Rajoana.

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

MODES

For promotion of Lassi at the LSE, posters were put up around the halls of residence by committee members. Bankside house tends to have a higher Sikh population than other halls, for future reference. The main mode of communication was by the Facebook page. For future we recommend setting up a Facebook group as you can add people to it yourself opposed to suggesting them to like the page. We also sent out weekly emails to members telling them about events on and off campus at other Nishaan universities. The problem with emails is the way the LSE emailing system for societies is set up; societies can only email those members which are signed up. This means that second and third years who have not renewed their membership are unable to receive the emails. Facebook is the recommended option as Facebook is checked more often than email.

PARTNERSHIPS

WITHIN LSE

The Sikh society was invited to hold our freshers welcome event jointly with the Hindu society, as had been done in the previous year. We decided against it as we felt it could send out a mixed message about the Sikh identity. Having our own welcome event would also let it be a smaller, more private affair so we could meet freshers on a more personal basis.

The President and the Interfaith officer attended Inter-faith meetings organized by the chaplaincy. One of the key issues discussed was the building of the new Student Union building which was opening in 2014. The new Student Union building will have a large multifaith prayer room with storage cabinets so we will no longer have to carry items from our accommodation to university. We could also hopefully use the multifaith prayer room to host our own Kirtan Darbar in the future.

As a part of LSE interfaith week the Sikh society also had a stall alongside other faiths on Houghton Street. On our stall there were introductory books to Sikhi, the 5 K's as well as light refreshments. The stall was a success with many people coming to ask questions, this was very good for raising awareness about the Sikh faith.



The LSE Interfaith body had organized for different faith societies to go into local primary schools and talk about an 'object of prayer' in assemblies. Unfortunately LSE Sikh society were unable to send volunteers for this as none were available. In the future, for whoever reads this, I strongly urge you to send volunteers to this event as it is great for raising awareness about Sikhs.

As part of the annual Holocaust remembrance service, different faiths were asked to read a short passage from their respective religious texts. The Sikh society was also in attendance and read the following passage.

(Rag Asa, pg. 360)

Having attacked Khuraasaan, Babar terrified Hindustan. The Creator Himself does not take the blame, but has sent the Mugal as the messenger of death.

There was so much slaughter that the people screamed. Didn't You feel compassion, Lord? || 1 || O Creator Lord, You are the Master of all. If some powerful man strikes out against another man, then no one feels any grief in their mind. || 1 || Pause || But if a powerful tiger attacks a flock of sheep and kills them, then its master must answer for it. This priceless country has been laid waste and defiled by dogs, and no one pays any attention to the dead. You Yourself unite, and You Yourself separate; I gaze upon Your Glorious Greatness. || 2 || One may give himself a great name, and revel in the pleasures of the mind, but in the Eyes of the Lord and Master, he is just a worm, for all the corn that he eats. Only one who dies to his ego while yet alive, obtains the blessings, O Nanak, by chanting the Lord's Name.

NATIONAL BODY

We decided against getting freshers packs from BOSS (British Organization of Sikh Students) from the way they had conducted themselves. We did not like how they had somehow gotten hold of our mobile phone numbers and sent us text messages. We were also put off by how a colleague at another Sikh Society was threatened for taking part in a Bhangra competition.

EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

LSE Sikh Society was one of the founding members of Nishaan.

LSE Sikh society has received support from Naujawani.com in the form of freshers packs, samosas and Sikh Studies Classes as well as general advice. Naujawani.com also facilitated payments from alumni of the society in sponsorship of some our activities.

Sikh Research Institute held a talk at the LSE through the Sikh society.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

SUMMARY

Income was generated through three avenues. Membership fees, alumni sponsorship and through the student union grant. Membership fees were £2 each and 62 people signed up. The logistics of alumni sponsorship fees were handled by Naujawani.com and we had 8 alumni sponsor us £10 each. We received a £120 grant from the student union. When compiling the budget request form with the SU, it is best to be very liberal with your estimates as they can be very tight.

The major item of expenditure was the Pull-up banner with the Sikh society logo on it. We felt this was necessary given all of the other university societies had one and it also helped create an atmosphere of professionalism around the society at fairs and other events. Although expensive we hope this Pull-up banner will be around for the next 10 years at the very least. Netball equipment was also purchased as well as court bookings made. Food and drink costs were also incurred, we kept these to a minimum as our job isn't to feed people. Chuniya and ramaaleh we managed to get for free as a committee member had a family member who owned a cloth shop.

ACCOUNTS

INCOME

£124 MEMBERSHIP FEES

£80 SPONSORSHIP BY ALUMNI THROUGH NAUJAWANI.com

£120 STUDENT UNION GRANT

EXPENDITURE

£120 PULL-UP BANNER

£80 NETBALL BALLS, BIBS AND KIT BAG

£60 NETBALL COURT BOOKINGS

£40 FOOD AND DRINK THROUGHOUT YEAR (INTERFAITH STALL, WELCOME AND SIMRAN SESSION)

FREE- CHUNIYA AND RAMAALEH

END BALANCE: £24

THE FUTURE

This year compared to the previous year, Simran sessions were a lot fewer in number. The previous year there were often sessions where only one or two people would turn up therefore the decision was taken to hold simran sessions fortnightly. But this routine failed to materialise because committee members weren't confident enough to run them. Amongst the committee our pronunciation of Gurbani and knowledge of Sikhi was severely lacking relative to previous years.

Although we were heavily involved in inter-faith events we missed out on one very important one this year which was the primary school visits. We recommend the committee in coming years involves themselves in this.

LSE Sikh society is not an easy society to run. Having spoken to previous committee members, there is a general consensus that at the LSE there are more 'Punjabis' than 'Sikhs.' This combined with how intense study is at the LSE means that often turn-outs to events are very low. What we would recommend next year is perhaps some basic simran followed by a discussion on a given topic or a member of the society giving a small presentation.

The administration of the society this year was very good. Room bookings for the whole year were made in the first week of the first term. The LSE room booking service allows block bookings to be made in advance. We recommend oncoming committees do the same as this allows events to happen at a memorable time in a familiar place.

The main problem with running the netball sessions was the cost of booking the courts. For next year we recommend block booking the LSE sports hall as soon as the committee members receive room booking rights. Netball should also be heavily promoted around other London Sikh societies.

Finally, it is easy to become frustrated with low turnouts to events but it is essential you remember how tough some of the courses at LSE are and people are unable to find the time to attend. The dynamics of LSE is a lot different to those of nearby Kings and UCL. The best thing to do is to keep calm and carry on.