

Sikh Soc

Imperial College London

**Annual Report
2008-2009**

The Imperial College Sikh Society promotes activities that appreciate the culture, history and ideology of the Sikh way of life.

OUR VISION, VALUES & AIMS...

(Prior to the commencement of the academic year 2008/2009)

- Develop the previously irregular "simran sessions" into a weekly occurring event.
- Increase the attendance at these gatherings.
- Add a discourse component on Sikh ideology and philosophy to each simran session.
- Expand the annual Imperial College Sikh Society Collaborations Dinner (Inter London Uni Sikh Soc Dinner).
- Establish links with other London Sikh Societies (including Hertfordshire Sikh Soc).
- Establish strong links with IC Hindu Soc, IC Tamil Soc and in particular, IC Punjabi Soc.
- Abolish misconceptions regarding the incompatibility between Sikh and Punjabi societies.
- Serve our student membership with career advice, academic support and pastoral care.

INTRODUCTION

ICSS had an exponential growth in 08/09 in terms of the number of people attending events and the weekly simran sessions. Prior to this the Imperial Sikh soc was relatively unheard of, but by the end of the year, it was considered a strong Sikh student society in London, much like UCL and Kings.

Weekly simran sessions played a big part in this, taking the following format: meet around 5; relax and network; start simran around 5:15 (usually with a guitar) until about 5:30; engage in ardas; 'discuss' a particular topic about sikhi – randomly selected – led by senior officers. The debates would get quite passionate (never abusive or violent) and everyone seemed to enjoy observing and participating. Every discussion seemed to go off on a tangent, but vitally before finishing each session, a senior officer would summarise the expressed notions and put forward evidence for and against each. This allowed the attendee to go away with a balanced viewpoint and numerous thoughts. Although these discussions were never well structured, they were certainly stimulating, in all likelihood due to the level of intellect and knowledge of the students (not necessarily sikhi related knowledge).

Those who found a particular aspect of a discussion interesting would probably have wished to pursue research into that topic or any relating issues and we found that often they did not know how to go about doing this with experienced guidance. We believe that a Sikh soc needs to provide the opportunity for their students to 'study sikhi in a structured, organised, sequential manner' so that their understanding and knowledge can reach a higher level.

The Cha n samosa opening event was also a lot bigger than the previous year, in terms of attendance. The Collaborations dinner event also made an increase in turnout, albeit a relatively small one. But more importantly, the dinner allowed the Imperial Sikh soc to become more involved in the network of sikh students in London and work towards greater collaboration and harmony at least within the locality.

MEMBERSHIP & OFFICERS

SELECTION PROCESS

In order to be considered, students must be a member of ICSS and a registered student in the following year. Prospective candidates email the current president stating the position(s) that they wish to run for, along with a brief manifesto. After the deadline for applications, an email is sent to ICSS members with information about each candidate and their manifesto. Each member has a vote which takes place at the AGM (you can also vote by email if you can't make the AGM). The person with the most votes gets elected.

SOCIETY OFFICERS

Co presidents

Harinder Singh Sokhal and Onkar Singh Rehal

Co vice presidents

Navdeep Singh Alg and Natasha Sandhu

Secretary

Harpreet Kaur Chhokar

Treasurer

Gurdeep Singh Seyan

Publicity Officer

Gurdeep Singh

General Committee member

Aveleen Singh and Gurpal Singh Liddar

SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Number of paid members: 35

Average attendance for weekly simran: 10 - 15

Cost of membership: £3

We collected email addresses throughout the year from members and attendees.

STUDENT SERVICES

ACADEMIC STUDIES

None

WORKSHOPS

Only one - Mohan singhs lecture titled 'Surviving at home' - common taboos in sikh/Punjabi households, as part of BOSS's Sikhi Survival Series (Sikhi week). It wasn't really a workshop as such. The speaker delivered a lecture, followed by attendees asking questions.

ASSISTANCE

BOSS provided us with free freshers packs for students.

ACTIVITIES

SPORT

None

ARTS

None

WELL-BEING

Meditation for mental wellbeing was regularly offered as part of the simran sessions.

SOCIAL LIFE

FRESHERS WEEK

We set up a society stall amongst the many other clubs and socs during freshers week. We decorated it with attractive items and portrayed photos from previous Sikh soc events to show that the society was quite active, fun and popular. We used this opportunity to distribute BOSS freshers packs and also gave out free lollipops. We tried to get as many people working on the stall as possible to make it look friendly, welcoming and speak to students. We also sent some members around the freshers fair wearing Sikh soc t-shirts to advertise and encourage sign-up.

CELEBRATIONS

We held the ICSS AGM at a local Indian restaurant. Occasionally, members who wanted to do so, went out for a meal after simran sessions.

EXCURSIONS

The society arranged for students to travel to UCL Sikh soc events such as their annual campus langar, simran sessions and Sikhi week event

The same was arranged and offered for students to attend Kings Sikh soc Roben Suite kirtan and simran sessions. This added to our development of inter-university Sikh soc collaboration.

We took an active role in the London Sikh students Akhand path at Shepherds Bush gurdwara in Feb/March 2009. The akhand path was organised by BOSS and a number of London Sikh Socs (mainly Kings and UCL) in which students were supposed to run the whole akhand path, and have the chance to do langar sewa and undertake a rawl of reading Guru Granth Sahib. It was a good opportunity to bond with the students from other Sikh socs and develop our strategies for collaborative London Sikh socs. However, there was considerable interference from Sikhs who were not from London universities or studying at university at all which made for a tense atmosphere and reduced chances of working with other students.

In contrast, the year before was a much better event because it was solely run by London Sikh soc students – it was more welcoming and there were more structured sessions – yoga, learning how to do parkash of Guru Granth Sahib etc. There was also a homeless food run on the Friday in which all the Sikh soc students prepared the food together; again this was a chance for bonding and working together as students and was a great success.

CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

MAJOR EVENT

ICSS Collaborations – inter uni sikh soc dinner – 9th November 08.

Purpose?

- Make money!
- Serve as networking event where all the sikh socs could promote their own events and etc etc

In brief...

It was only in its second year and it was a sell-out (in fact we exceeded capacity)

From 110 odd the previous year we increased the attendance to 130/40... although admittedly a lot of the ppl there were from IC Hindu soc, Punjabi soc, Jain soc, Tamil soc etc.

See accounts for how much money raised

ACTIVISM

None

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

MODES

Email was the main mode of contact; we used it for everything. We took a decision to send emails to members' official university address as we knew that it would be the one address that students always check.

For unique events we used everything at our disposal: text messages, posters, repeated emails, facebook, telephone calls and verbal announcements at prior events.

For weekly simran sessions we'd usually just send an email, sometimes as late as the day before, as well as sending text messages too.

PARTNERSHIPS

WITHIN IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

The committee and a few other Sikh soc members attended dinner events from Jain soc and Hindu soc as well as similar events. We also forwarded general event email messages from them to our membership and they did the same for us.

NATIONAL BODY

BOSS held a meeting between the presidents of various Sikh socs before the start of the academic year in 2008/2009 where we discussed plans for the year. Following this meeting there was no real dialogue between the society and BOSS for which both sides are equally to blame.

In addition to the free freshers packs, BOSS provided us with a list of speakers whom we could call on to deliver a lecture and provided the langar free of charge for the workshop during Sikhi week.

EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

None

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

SUMMARY

In short, it is fair to say that almost all of the objectives set out prior to commencement were achieved. Although a discourse component was implemented into weekly simran, there were a few significant limitations, which are described below, in "The Future" section.

ACCOUNTS

The starting balance from the previous year...Approx £400

Grant received from IC union = £50

Turnover from Collaborations = £1100+

Expenditure for Collaborations = £700

Expenditure for Cha and samosa = £48

Miscellaneous expenditure = £40

Balance at end = £762

THE FUTURE

From my experiences of not only ICSS, but also other London Sikh Societies, it has become evident that Sikh Students devote a commendable amount of time, energy and even their own money into developing their Sikh socs to make them bigger and better. A question I asked myself at the end of the year, however, was where do we go from here?

It's all good spending all this time on room bookings, recruiting keertani, providing 'langar' at these weekly events, stressing over how many tickets you've sold / how many people will turn up for your next event but to what end?

It seems that Sikh socs currently aspire to be no more than 'aesthetically pleasing', even if they don't realise it themselves. What I mean by this is that the current opinion of a successful / 'good' Sikh society is one who has the most turnout at weekly simran and one who has / recruits the best kirtanee. What do the students studying at degree level really gain from this in the long term?

So we've got more people turning up to simran every week... great. What now? It would be a shame to see ICSS fall into the same trap that every Sikh soc does at some stage and make it all about the weekly simran.

Going back to the discourse element – although there was a definite intellectual input to the discussions, sadly very little of this input was based on knowledge of Sikh ideas, philosophy, history, etc.

Therefore, it is my strong belief that we should provide systematic teaching of sikh philosophy etc. at a level that is appropriate for undergraduate students at a world class institute such as Imperial college – i.e. provide something that other societies or the gurdwara doesn't provide... should this not be our goal?

Onkar Singh Rehal (ICSS Co-President 2008-09)