Rahit Maryada means "To live in the constant remembrance of death." It is a code of conduct for living. "Reh," from the verb "reheenaa," means to continue, or to live. Adding "it," it means "lifestyle." "Mar" is derived from the verb "marna," to die, and "yad" means remembrance; thus, "maryada" means "the remembrance of death." A more common translation is simply a code of conduct for living. The Rahit Maryada is made up of techniques and tools to help maintain the consciousness of the Sikh, who is to live like the lotus, with roots entrenched in the mud of the world, but with the flower of consciousness floating upon the surface, pure and spotless.\(^1\) Kahn Singh in his encyclopaedia, *Mahan Kosh*, defines the *Rahit* as the systematic statement of Sikh principles; the way of life lived in accordance with the principles of the Sikh religion.\(^2\) The *Rahit*, defines what a Khalsa Sikh should believe and how he should behave.\(^3\)

The *Rahit* is the Khalsa way of life, the code which (in at least a rudimentary way) practically all Sikhs should observe. It is the system of belief and distinctive behaviour which all who formally undergo Khalsa initiation together with those who informally accept the code are expected to observe.\(^4\) Traces of earliest *Rahit* can be seen in the teachings of Guru Nanak and consequently it underwent substantial changes and emerged in its evolved form under the subsequent Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh, while formally establishing the Khalsa Panth, did give his followers a *Rahit*, a guiding torch to help them tread upon the ideal way of life. The *Rahitnamas* following the emergence of the Khalsa Panth, further took this a step ahead.

\(\text{\(1\)}\) http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/cdb661ad2c7ac234872565b7007b33b3!OpenDocument.
\(\text{\(3\)}\) *Ibid*, p. 106.
The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, is to be taken as a key to the Sikh spiritual and social philosophy. The Rahit Maryada reaches far into the personal life and psychology of the individual Sikh. It also exerts a powerful impact upon the character of the community as a whole. Historically, the individual was lifted out of a state of superstition, ignorance and fear, out of the adherence to empty rituals, out of a restrictive caste system from which there was no escape or elevation, and out of a society which was succumbing to the forces of tyranny and oppression. The individual Sikh was uplifted to a shared equal status, sharing a reverence for One God, the Supreme Creator of all the creation, and an awareness of kinship with every other living creature. S/he was given a right and a means to relate to God in an individual, personal relationship. S/he was given a way to experience God through righteous conduct in the world. S/he was given a way to become aware of God within her or himself and in all of Creation. And finally, s/he was given the means by which s/he could effect change in society and help the downtrodden humanity to lift itself up and fight against oppression and religious persecution. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* is a product of the *Tat Khalsa*’s quest for consistency and for its conviction that Sikhs definitely are not Hindus. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, is thus a late nineteenth-century source of the Khalsa Rahit. Influenced by contemporary patterns of thought (patterns which reflected in considerable measure the rationalizing influence of the British) the scholars of the *Tat Khalsa* undertook an extensive purging, supplementing, and reordering of the received Rahit. The Rahit, must thus be viewed as an evolving system, one which began to emerge during the earliest days of the Sikh tradition. It thereafter continued to develop formally (in accordance with deliberate decisions) and informally (in response to internal influences and external pressures.

The role of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in Sikh worship continued to expand during the nineteenth-century, and it attained a systematized form in the authoritative Sikh code

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6 [http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/e69d391e88115c07872565b7007b33c5!OpenDocument](http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/e69d391e88115c07872565b7007b33c5!OpenDocument).


8 Ibid, p. 113.
of conduct (*Sikh Rahit Maryada*) produced in the middle decades of the twentieth century under the auspices of the SGPC. Nonetheless, the *Guru Granth Sahib* sets forth a view of spirituality that rejects asceticism of any kind and instead mandates an effective fulfillment of the routine obligations of our lives within society. Liberation is attained by living actively as an individual who is also part of a family and a community and is guided by a strict code of ethical conduct (*acharRahit*) built on the values of hard work, charity, and service to humanity. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, the standard manual of Sikh doctrine and behaviour, begins by defining a ‘Sikh’. Gender issues are briefly, but importantly discussed in the later chapters of the S.G.P.C. published *Sikh Rahit Maryada*. Regarding the *Sadharan Path* (Completion of normal intermittent reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib*), the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, writes that every Sikh, man, woman, boy or girl, should learn Gurmukhi to be able to read the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The tenth chapter of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, deals with specific issues like female infanticide, sexual morality and freedom vested with the female members of the Panth as regards wearing of a turban by them. It is categorically stated that a Sikh should not kill his daughter; nor should he maintain any relationship with anyone who has indulged in this heinous crime.

Another man’s daughter is to be regarded as one’s own daughter and another’s wife is to be viewed as one’s mother. Sexual relations are to be kept with one’s wife alone. A Sikh woman to is to follow similar standards of sexual morality. A Sikh woman is instructed not wear a veil, thus the custom of observing *Purdah* is discouraged

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14 *Loc. cit.*
here. As far as tying of a turban is concerned, though it is mandatory for a Sikh to wear a turban, a woman is however given voluntary choice in this matter. She may or may not tie a turban.\textsuperscript{15} Another debate going around in Sikh studies revolves around the issue of Sikh nomenclature and the \textit{Sikh Rahit Maryada}, categorically states here that a Sikh boy is to add the suffix ‘Singh’ and a Sikh girl, the suffix ‘Kaur’ to his/her name respectively.\textsuperscript{16} The contents of the \textit{Sikh Rahit Maryada} had far-reaching effects, particularly with regard to Sikh female identity. What had during the early years of the twentieth century remained an ill-defined, disjunctive, and even cryptic endorsement of Sikh female nomenclature, had by this time been transformed to the level of \textit{prescription} for Sikh females and fundamental to their very identity. In the new code, the appellation ‘Kaur’ as a specific Sikh \textit{Symbol}, was for the first time officially sanctioned.\textsuperscript{17} The \textit{Sikh Rahit Maryada}, takes a clear stand against the socio-religious evils like dowry, child-marriage, polygamy, infidelity and prohibition of widow-remarriages.

The \textit{Sikh Rahit Maryada}, prescribes marriage of a Sikh girl only to a Sikh male without consideration of caste or sub-caste. It prohibits child-marriage, permits widow-remarriage and enjoins that a Sikh marriage must be performed under Anand marriage rites. The Anand Marriage Act of 1909, gives legal recognition and validates marriages solemnized following this ceremony. A formal engagement or betrothal ceremony takes place usually at the boy’s residence where a few near relations of the girl go with some gifts, which are to be simple in nature and not very lavish or expensive.\textsuperscript{18} Alongside

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\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Sikh Rahit Maryada}; \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 24 :
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\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 25 :
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\textsuperscript{17} Doris R. Jakobsh, \textit{Relocating Gender in Sikh History – Transformation, Meaning and Identity}, New Delhi, 2003, p. 231.
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\textsuperscript{18} http://www.sikh.net/SIKHISM/AnandKaraj.htm :
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Singh Sabha educational objectives, an equally important and perhaps an even far-reaching goal was the displacement and reorganization of tradition, particularly women’s traditions, including rituals, identity-markers and rites. One important example of this process was the passing of the Anand Marriage Act of 1909. The name of the marriage rite was taken from ‘Anand’ meaning ‘the song of joy’ composed by Guru Amar Das at the birth of his grandson. Initially, marriages solemnized by the Anand marriage rite were associated with the Namdhari and Nirankari Sikhs. Gradually, over a period of time the Anand Marriage Act came to represent Sikhism’s distinction from the wider Hindu culture more than any other single entity during the reform endeavour of the Singh Sabha Movement.19 However, the Singh Sabha reformers had to launch a vigorous campaign in order to procure legal sanction for the Anand Marriage Act, which eventually became a Law in 1909. Within a comparatively short time, Anand Karaj had become the standard form for Sikh marriages, a testimony to the determination of the reformers and to the influence which they had acquired.20 The Anand Marriage Act is monogamous. Marriage ceremony is the same for the legally divorced, widows and widowers. Payment or acceptance of dowry is discouraged.21

Regarding the participation of Sikh women in religious and other ceremonies of the Panth, a woman is authorized to act as an officiant in baptism and other ceremonies.22 The six baptized Sikhs who are to administer the ambrosial baptism, may include Sikh women writes the Sikh Rahit Maryada. The only condition here is that they must have taken bath and washed their hair.23 Article XXIV (d), of the Sikh Rahit Maryada, states that any man or woman of any country, religion or caste who embraces Sikhism and solemnly undertakes to abide by its principles is entitled to ambrosial baptism.24

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21 Gobind Singh Mansukhani, A Book of Sikh Studies, National Book Shop, New Delhi, 2005, p.188.
23 Ibid, p. 34 :

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24 Loc.cit :

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The Rahit Maryada reaches far into the personal life and psychology of the individual Sikh. It also exerts a powerful impact upon the character of the community as a whole. Historically, the individual was lifted out of a state of superstition, ignorance and fear, out of the adherence to empty rituals, out of a restrictive caste system from which there was no escape or elevation, and out of a society which was succumbing to the forces of tyranny and oppression. The individual Sikh was uplifted to a shared equal status, sharing a reverence for One God, the Supreme Creator of all the creation, and an awareness of kinship with every other living creature. S/he was given a right and a means to relate to God in an individual, personal relationship. S/he was given a way to experience God through righteous conduct in the world. S/he was given a way to become aware of God within her or himself and in all of Creation. And finally, s/he was given the means by which s/he could effect change in society and help the downtrodden humanity to lift itself up and fight against oppression and religious persecution.\(^{25}\)

The Code of Conduct was directed towards the creation of an ideal Sikh society, consisting of men and women of a high noble character.\(^{26}\) Doris writes that the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, was finally recognized as the definitive statement of conduct for Sikhs, and has remained so to this time. The contents of the *Maryada* had far-reaching effects, particularly with regard to Sikh female identity.\(^{27}\)

\(^{25}\) [http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/e69d391e88115c07872565b7007b33c5!OpenDocument.](http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/e69d391e88115c07872565b7007b33c5!OpenDocument.)

\(^{26}\) [http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/6903fd89fbb72b5872565b7007b33c1!OpenDocument.](http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/d9c75ce4db27be328725639a0063aecc/6903fd89fbb72b5872565b7007b33c1!OpenDocument.)