

# Wedding traditions in Dersim

*Translation by Seyfi Cengiz*

## **Wedding traditions in Dersim**

In her paintings exhibited here, painter Safiye Akgündüz portrays wedding traditions of Dersim as she witnessed in her childhood.

She is from Dersim and contributing a lot to the Dersim cause as the chairwoman of the “Dersim Zentrum 38 e. V”.

## **Before the wedding**

As portrayed at one of the paintings here, the village teenagers can only meet secretly and exchange gifts (such as a handkerchief by the boy and a comb by the girl) which symbolizes their mutual commitment to the future union. In many villages there are certain locations, where the young girls and boys make their wishes. One of the ways to do this is binding pieces of cloths to a tree (“Wishing Tree”) believed to be sacred.

## **The Engagement Party**

The teenagers in love have to inform and get the approval of their families. The first initiative must come from the boy’s family. His parents visit the girls’ father and mother for obtaining their consent. If agreed, the girl wears an engagement ring afterwards.

## **The Marriage Contract Without Paper Work**

Some time later the elders of both sides come together again, this time at the presence of a religious man called “Dede”, to find out the demands of the girl’s parents and relatives from the boy’s side, including the amount and kind of gifts. In case of an agreement, the “Dede” gets the word of loyalty to one another for good and bad days ahead from both the girl and boy. The congregation ends with serving a sweet drink called “sherbet” and/or “niyaz” (buttered bread) to the people.

## **The Henna Night**

Then comes the Henna Night which is held at the girl’s home. This entertainment accompanied by drum and clarinet often lasts late into the evening and is filled with dancing and singing alongside the special food and drink. Prepared dye, called “Hene” in Kirmancki (Zazaki), is used for dyeing the bride’s and groom’s hands by the teenagers who circulate it. A certain couple from the groom’s side is present here and plays a special role until after the wedding. This couple called “Berbi” in local languages teaches the tabu issues of the marriage to the bride and groom by accompanying them.

## **The Wedding Party**

After the Henna Night, the bride has to say goodbye to her family. She takes all her personal possessions (called “cez” in local languages) with her and travels to the groom’s home on a horse in the company of a crowd with drum and flute.

Wedding starts as the bride arrives at groom’s house and may last a few days, even much longer than that, depending on the financial circumstances of the groom’s family. Bride and groom stay in a separate section of the house during the wedding where they are surrounded by young girls and boys who wear their most beautiful clothes for this occasion. On second day the villagers are invited by a house to house visit. For invitation red apples, red handkerchiefs or candles with red colour are used. As a sign of social solidarity people bring gifts with them. They are met with a ceremony and being offered meals and drinks when arrived. On third day the person called “Berbi” prepare the bride and

groom in their traditional dresses. After a short ride around, the bride is taken back to groom's home where she is stopped at the doorstep on horseback. Groom and his "best friend" (locally called "müsahip") rush to the roof of the house with red apples in their hands and through these apples at the bride's head while each holding a piece of white cloth on their mouths. Teenagers around compete with one another to catch the apples thrown. Getting off the horseback the bride steps inside her new home by setting her foot on a wooden spoon and/or on a piece of iron that placed on her way in. She also drives some oil to threshold and nail the adjacent wall. She is followed by the groom who is jokely beaten by his friends as he enters home.

This is how the wedding ends.

### **Post Wedding Days**

The newly weds begin their new life after the wedding. The wedded couple do not appear to the elders for a certain time. About one or two weeks later the bride starts taking care of home work, while the groom does the outside jobs. One of the painting here portrays the elders at the morning prayer as the newly born sun appears. The bride is busy with making buttermilk while the groom takes the animals to the wild. Over time, the bride starts working in the field too together with her husband and with her baby beside her. One of the painting shows her carrying fertilizer to the field and grass back to home with a basket on her back.

### **Note:**

The Wedding traditions that mentioned above were more or less common in former generations of Dersim. These old customs are no longer practiced by the new generations.