

**WEDDING CEREMONIES IN AZERBAIJAN
(ON THE BASIS OF MATERIALS COLLECTED FROM SALYAN AND
NEFTCHALA REGIONS)**

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ABSTRACT: *In the article is talked about the ceremonies of wedding traditions held in Azerbaijan. Such ceremonies and their stages held in Salyan and Neftchala regions situated in the south-east of the country are systematically analyzed here. Besides, questions of other Turkish people's wedding ceremonies are also cursorily touched.*

KEYWORDS: Azerbaijan, Salyan, Neftchala, ethnology, folklore, wedding traditions, khinayakhdi

Every nation has special ceremonies. People hold the ceremonies according to their national psychology, way of ethnic thought and national-moral values. There are more similarities between ceremonies held in Azerbaijan and other Turkish people's ones. In this article we will deal with the wedding ceremonies of Azerbaijani Turks lived in the south-east part of the country. We should note that, for globalization reasons at present, some wedding traditions are forgotten and instead of it, inclination to innovations are noticed in the territorial ceremonies including wedding rituals.

The wedding is consists of several levels: *elchilik* (match-making), *nishan* (engagement), *qiz toyu* (wedding organized by the girl's family), *khinnayakhdi* (decorating hands with henna by girls and women), *oghlan toyu* (wedding organized by the boy's family) and *elgordu* (meeting the bride after several days of the wedding). First of all, parents who want to marry off their son, get to know whether, their son has a beloved or not. If yes, they go to the girl's home to ask in marriage. Sometimes, boy's mother or sisters own the act of girl approving. It is not a simple task. The girl should be nice, intelligent, well-bred, orderly and tidy. But recently, the parents mostly woo for the girls that approved by their sons.

After the approval, boy's parents inform the girl's parents that, they will woo. Three or five respective mens among the elder relatives - matchmakers go to the girl's home to ask marriage. They say: "To the command of God and the word of the Prophet, we are coming to ask marriage your daughter." The girl's parents don't usually say "yes" during the first visit. They say "We will advice with our elder relatives then we will answer you." If the girl or her parents don't accept, then they say to the matchmakers "Your lost thing is not found in us." But if they accept, after several days they inform the matchmakers to get the positive answer. Declaring his agreement, the father of the girl says "*Allah mubarek elesin*" (God bless) to the matchmakers. After this, sweet tea is brought to the table. Having sweet tea founds kindness among relatives. This ceremony is called *khatirjamliq* (affirmation) in Salyan and Neftchala regions. In some regions of Azerbaijan, for the girl are brought a ring, *kelagayi* (silk kerchief) and sweets after the affirmation ceremony. This process is called *belge*. The other questions such as *mehr* (marriage) and *bashliq* (bride-money) are also discussed during the *belge* process. The elders are here as in the roles of negotiators. The amount of *mehr* is noted in the *kebin kagizi* (marriage contract). *Mehr* is an amount of money paid to the wife by husband in case of divorce. *Bashliq*

is a kind of payment received by girl's parents for her wedding preparations. This payment is called in various ways in the different regions of Azerbaijan. For example, *sud pulu* (payment for mother's milk), *qiz pulu* (payment for the girl), *kharj* (expense), *yol pulu* (fare), *rah pulu* and *bahashir* (2,214). But today, we cannot see such traditions.

These processes follow the day of engagement. Both in girl and boy's homes are done preparations for the engagement. The boy's side buys an engagement ring, necklace, earrings, bracelet, expensive silks, textiles, bridal mirror and other things. All these things are put into trays called *nishan khonchalari*. There are also other trays which are filled with different sweets. All these *nishan khonchalari* are brought to the girl on the day of betrothal. The girl's family also prepares for the betrothal; a ring is bought for the boy.

On the engagement day present the relatives and friends of the boy. In former times, the sister or one of the other relatives used to fasten the ring on the girl's ring finger. But now, this act is done by the engaged couple themselves and after it, they are considered betrothed.

While the fiancée in her father's home, the boy's family should bring *bayram* (festive) *khonchalari* and presents to her during all holidays. In the Moslem Feast of Sacrifice Holiday, boy's family brings a ram to the fiancée's house. During the national holiday of *Novruz* traditional sweets such as *shekerbura*, *pakhlava*, *shorqogali* and other presents are put to *khonchalar* and taken to the girl's family.

In some regions, the boy's family sends fruit that appears first called *nobar*, to the girl's home. This tradition is called *bagbashi* (from the garden). (1,90) Some Azerbaijani families don't prolong the term of engagement; they plan to organize the wedding in a short period. The wedding process firstly starts with the girl's wedding. The girl's wedding is called *shirni ichmek* (drinking sweets) or *paltarkesdi* (sewing clothes for the bride) in Salyan and Neftchala regions. *Paltarkesdi* is held in the girl's home. Besides the relatives, neighbors, girl's friends are also invited to this wedding ceremony. In former times (nearly up to years 2000), there used to put up *magar* (a large tent put up for a wedding ceremony) for girls and women in the yard of girl's house. Musicians were invited to the ceremony in *magar*. Firstly, the invited guests used to eat meals at the tables' special prepared, then enter into the *magar* and dance. This festival used to continue nightlong. At the end of the wedding, a singer used to praise the bride. Praise is a process that, the singer calls the relatives, neighbors one by one and they give presents or a little amount of money. Such present is called *khalat*. Presents given as *khalat* are usually different textiles. Generally, invited guests to the wedding bring some money or different presents to the host of the wedding. It is for the purpose of helping new couple in their new life. The following day of the wedding all *khonchalar* are opened. Presents bought for the new bride used to show to the guests one by one: "These are bride's winter clothes, these are summer clothes, etc..." Besides the presents bought for the bride, the groom's side used to buy presents for the parents, sisters and brothers, too. Now, such types of weddings don't exist. The girl's wedding isn't called *paltarkechdi* and they are separately held either in wedding palaces, or together boy's wedding. Parents, who marry off their daughter, give them dowry. The dowry includes furniture, all home things and other ones. Several days before *khinayakhdi*, the dowry is brought to boy's home and placed in the couple's room. The girl's sisters, friends come to put in order all the things. Before several days of the boy's wedding, between the girls and boy's weddings is held *khinayakhdi* ceremony. This ceremony started in former times and continues up to now. *Khinayakhdi* is organized in the girl's home. The boy's sisters and the nearest relatives prepare *khina khonchalari* (henna trays) and come to the girl's home. The boy's sister

or sister-in-law dye girl's hair, hands and feet with henna. The girl's mother gives a present to the one who dyes henna. The guests also can dye their hair with henna. Most of women participated in this ceremony dip their little fingers into the henna. In some regions of Azerbaijan used to organize contests between boy and girl's homes. Such contests were usually held in Nakhchivan region and they called *hakhishta*.

We don't meet contests in Salyan and Neftchala regions, but there are song texts connecting with *khinayakhdi* ceremony.

Well done your throne, bride!
Well done your fate, bride!
You have dyed colourful henna,
Well done your white hands.

Saying these words, the boy's sister takes henna and dyes it brother's feet, too. The wedding preparations in the boy's home are more difficult and grandiloquent. After fixing the date of the wedding, is made a list of guests will be invited. Several days before the wedding, a special man is fixed for inviting guests to the wedding. In former times, the invitation process in Salyan and Neftchala regions was called *khanda gezdirmе* ceremony. The persons who carry *khanda* take trays filled with sugar candy and sweets, and walking from door to door, distribute the sweets everybody and invite them to the wedding. Hosts, who are invited to the wedding, give presents to these *khandachilar* (who invite people to the wedding). Nowadays, this ritual doesn't exist. The hosts of the weddings compose invitation cards and send them to the homes of invited guests. One day before the wedding, all the works are divided among people that they will do during the wedding. One person is assigned to help to the cook, other for serving tea, another for looking after guests, etc. These people are chosen from the nearest relatives. In the evening before the wedding, calves are chopped, sliced and preserved in the refrigerator or cool places. The following day are prepared tasty dishes from this meat for the wedding.

On the wedding day, a car is decorated with flowers and the bride is taken to the groom's home by this car. Till the 1940-50th years of the last century, the bride used to be taken from her father's home by carriage, phaeton, or simply walking. Later, approximately in 1980th years, were used cars decorated with dolls on them for this purpose. At present, brides are taken in cars decorated with flowers to the accompaniment of other relatives, neighbors' cars.

In the middle of 20th century, relatives from the groom's side used to compete with the bride's side teasing them:

The boy's side: To Araz, to your height as khans,
We've come to get our property,
We've come to get the shawl.
We're the boy's side,
We've come to take the bride.

The girl's side: We don't give our property,
We don't give our shawl.

The boy's side: Hey, girl's side!
Take my ailment.

Let the boy's side,
To eat the almond.
The lances of boy's side,
Are hung on their neck.
The girl's side is in sorrow.

Or: We've got a girl from so-and-so,
He implored, so, we've got.
Well cultivated the kitchen-garden,
We dropped the rug on the road.

The boy's side: Her cheeks are rosy,
Her neck are put shawls.
Give us our bride,
Her mother is dumb.

The number of such types of verse texts is rather many. Today, most of such contests don't already exist, but if, we collect the texts spoken by elder narrators together, so, we can get information about their general topics. Though the contents of such verses are weak, they are closely connected with the people's lives. But we don't meet any contests and teases at today's wedding parties of mentioned regions. This fact proves that, the tradition of competing between the girl and boy's homes has been absolutely forgotten. The bride dispatches to the groom's home with the participation of close relatives. The bride's father or a respected elder man among the nearest relatives blesses the bride:

Be lucky, my daughter!
Be happy, get older together your husband!
Have cool water and baked bread!
Respect your mother-in-law!
Respect your father-in-law!

So, the elder man in the family tells such applauses and reprimands and exhorts the bride. Then the younger brother of the groom ties a red ribbon or red silk kerchief around the bride's waist. A red ribbon is a symbol of the virginity. Doing it, the groom's brother must say the following hemistiches:

Hey, virgin bride, you're my mother and sister,
Well-behaved and healthy bride.
I wish you've seven sons,
And only one daughter.

According to the tradition the bride-girl's face must be covered when she leaves her father's home. She wears a long white dress. She leaves the father's home to the accompaniment of the melody named "Vagzali" played by national instruments. The bride's mother splashes water after her daughter for her happiness in a new family.

For getting sweetness from the new father-in-law, the neighbors' children bar the car taken the bride and demand sweet, money, etc. from the groom's father. After coming to the groom's yard, the groom's father kills a ram as a sacrifice in front of the new couple. On the threshold

of the home, the mother-in-law puts a plate inside out under the feet of the bride. Breaking this plate, as if she turns out the bad ghosts around, and then she enters into her room. At this time, the bride's father-in-law and mother-in-law bless the bride, people from the village give presents among their cattle, or gold ring, bracelet and other things. After getting her presents, the bride sits down and she is given a little boy. This is a symbol of many kids and being the master of the household. This rite is called *duz ayagi vermek* in the region.

Then all guests eat, drink and gather to the *magar* for dancing. Until the middles of the last century, *ashuglar* (ashug is a folk poet and singer) used to invite to such type of boys' weddings. The weddings had lasted during three days, three nights and they were managed by *ashuglar*. They used to tell tales and all guests listen voiceless till the morning. Today, the tradition of telling tales by *ashuglar* has been totally forgotten in the region. The modern wedding parties are mostly conducted by toastmasters. Some of the guests congratulate the groom toasting. All guests can order the music they want and dance. In former times, young people used to give *shabash* (money) each-other while they were dancing. At the end of the wedding, collected *shabash* used to given to the musicians. But nowadays, this ritual has also been disappeared.

Weddings end by praising the groom. For this, the singer calls one-by-one the names of the nearest relatives and friends musically. In their turns, they come and give money or presents to the groom and his closest friends staying on his right and left sides. These men are called *sagdish* (a man staying on the right side) and *soldish* (another one staying on the left side).

In the region, one of the most important terms of the marriage is registering the marriage religiously. This process is made by the mullah according to Mussulman shariat and after it, the marriage is considered permitted. Besides the religious registration, the new couple must be registered in the state marriage organization, too.

In some of the devout families, the wedding ceremonies are held in a different form. Such weddings are conducted by mullahs and dervishes instead of musicians. These weddings are called *dervish toylari* (weddings conducted by dervishes). At such wedding ceremonies are recited elegies, told ayahs from the holy Koran book. Such type of *dervish toylari* ceremonies are met occasionally.

After three days of the wedding is organized a ceremony called *elgordu* for new married couple. In some regions this ceremony is called *uzechixdi*. The new bride's mother and other women relatives visit the groom's home. They bring presents, sweets putting them on several *khoncha*. The new bride comes to meet the relatives and then splash on them perfume.

Yashar Kalafat, the scientist writes that, today, among Kumyks we can meet the marriages in the way of named *beshikkertme* ritual. What does *beshikkertme* mean? When one of two friends or close relatives has got a son and other's daughter, in their childhood fathers agree to marry them in the future. Kalafat writes: "Today, among the Caucasian people we can meet some marriages with the *beshikkertme* ritual." He also notes that, Kumyks get married to their cousins, (3,114). At present time, the marriage among relatives exists in Azerbaijan, too. Parents betroth their children each-other at their early ages and promise to marry them off when they grow. In Salyan and Neftchala regions this ritual is called *gobekkesdi*.

In the mentioned regions, forty days after the wedding, the bride is considered *chilleli*. According to the tradition she shouldn't pass under the tree or over the water. If, she obliged to

do it, before passing, she must say "bismillah" (in the name of God) three times. In former times, the *chilleli* bride wasn't allowed to visit even her father's home.

Now, most of these rituals have been forgotten. We got information about them from the elder narrators. Today, the population of Salyan and Neftchala regions displays interest to innovations tries to organize more luxurious wedding ceremonies. But although, blessings of the parents, exhortations of the elder respected men take wide place for long-lived and happy marriages in these regions. As a result, the young people feel more responsibility for the marriage question.

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