

**A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER DYNAMICS
IN THE ALEVI BELIEF AND CEM RITUALS**

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ŞENGÜL ERUÇAR

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Meliha BENLİ ALTUNIŞIK
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Prof. Dr. Yıldız ECEVİT
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Canan ASLAN AKMAN
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Assist. Prof. Dr. Canan ASLAN AKMAN (METU, ADM) _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayşe GÜNDÜZ HOŞGÖR (METU, SOC) _____

Assist. Prof. Dr. Aykan ERDEMİR (METU, SOC) _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last name: Şengül ERUÇAR

Signature :

ABSTRACT

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Eruçar, Şengül

M.S., Department of Gender and Women's Studies

Supervisor : Assist. Prof. Dr. Canan Aslan Akman

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This thesis aims to analyze the gender dynamics in the Alevi belief and the 'Cem' rituals by focusing on the gap and tension between the discourse of equality and practices of the rituals. Within the framework of a theoretical approach which underlines the evolution of monotheistic religions along a patriarchal line of development and the resultant subordination of women particularly in the rituals, the approach and the discourse of the Alevi belief on women is overviewed. In this study, 'cem' ceremonies of the selected Alevi communities in Istanbul and Isparta are analyzed empirically. It is contended that while there are significant differences in terms of gender dynamics and women's position between the observed cems, in general the gender equality principle of the belief is not fully realized. It is contended that the gender issue and women's position *vis-a-vis* men constitute a major site of the constitution of the Alevi identity in the Turkish society. However, although patriarchal practices and premises have permeated the ritual dynamics of the Alevis, they are also subject to ongoing negotiations, legitimizations and interpretations by male and female actors of the community.

Keywords: Alevism, discourse, cem, gender equality, ritual

ÖZ

ALEVİ İNANCINDAKİ VE CEM RİTÜELLERİNDEKİ TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET DİNAMİKLERİNİN FEMİNİST BİR ANALİZİ

Eruçar, Şengül

Yüksek Lisans, Kadın Çalışmaları Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Canan Aslan Akman

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Bu tez, Alevi inancı ve ‘Cem’ ritüellerindeki toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerini, söylemdeki eşitlik ve ritüeldeki pratikler arasındaki farklılık ve gerilime odaklanarak, analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tek tanrılı dinlerin ataerkil bir gelişim çizgisi dahilinde gelişimini ve bunun sonucunda ritüellerde kadının geri plana atılmasının altını çizen bir kuramsal çerçeveyi takiben, Alevi inancında kadına ilişkin söylem ve yaklaşım gözden geçirilmiştir. Çalışmada İstanbul ve Isparta’da düzenlenen cem ibadetleri ampirik olarak incelenmiştir. Gözlemlenen cemlerde toplumsal cinsiyet dinamikleri ve kadın açısından çarpıcı farklılıklar bulunmakla birlikte, genel olarak öğreti ve inançtaki eşitlik ilkesinin tam olarak yaşama geçirilmediği belirtilmiştir. Erkek-egemen uygulamalar ve kanılar Alevi ritüellerindeki dinamiklere girmişse de, bunlar aynı zamanda topluluğun kadın ve erkek aktörleri tarafından süregelen bir uzlaşma, meşrulaştırma, ve anlamlandırma süreçlerine de tabi kılınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alevilik, söylem, cem, cinsiyet eşitliği, ritüel

To my love, Uğur

*And my beloved family,
my mother Emine,
my father Mükerrerem Ali,
my brother Süleyman and my sister İsmihan,*

And my dear friends

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1.The Objective and Significance of the Thesis

The Objectives and the Scope

The subject matter of the present thesis is the ‘cem’ rituals of the Alevi community, where both men and women have traditionally participated and acted together. The study specifically inquires into gender dynamics in the cem ceremonies in selected Cemevi’s in order to demonstrate whether and to what extent of the notion of equality between men and women enshrined and underlined in the Alevi belief and discourse is realized in the rituals. It also attempts to understand the underlying reason(s) of any observed tension between the discourse of gender equality and sexist practices which subordinate women *vis-a-vis* men in practice during the religious rituals where both genders interact in the Alevi community, in contrast to the Sunni practice of gender segregation in the mosques. Hence, the analysis sheds light on the following points: the existence of patriarchal relations in Alevi rituals contradicting the egalitarian discourses on women,

ways of its justification by men, implications of the gap between the religious teachings and the practice in the rituals for women's position in the Alevi community and the perceptions of both men and women regarding the prevailing gender dynamics in 'cem' ceremonies. On the basis of the data collected from the field research in the selected cem ceremonies carried out by the author, the thesis also aims at providing evidence regarding the myriad ways in which Alevi women participating in the cem ceremonies accommodate, interpret, negotiate or resist those patriarchal practices in the rituals which subordinate women *vis-a-vis* men, contradicting the essence of the belief on gender relations. To this end, it compares the gender dynamics in the rituals of two specific Cemevi's through observations of the spatial and interactional aspects of the cem rituals, underlines the significance of the ongoing and diversified forms of negotiations taking place both within the group and also between the Alevi community and the dominant –Sunni culture and majority on the basis of the gender dynamics and the control of women's bodies from a feminist perspective.

As a departure point for the analysis in this study, it can be contended that even though the Alevi discourse puts gender equality on its center and the members of the Alevi community define their identity as a belief system primarily over their difference from the dominant Sunni sect in terms of their egalitarian approach to the relations between the sexes, it could also adopt some of the dominant patriarchal assumptions and practices. As it is emphasized, socio-cultural structures religious teachings and practices have

interacted over centuries, ultimately resulting in the consolidation and the legitimization of sexist beliefs and practices. This could also be the case in Alevism, which has always been loosely defined by its adherents. With social change(s) accompanied by socio-economic modernization Alevism could also have come under the influence of egalitarian forces, or it could have succeeded to maintain its egalitarian ethos on gender dynamics. The lack of studies on contemporary Alevism in Turkey regarding its gender dynamics unfortunately has not provided with us any concrete data and conclusions so far on this specific issue, except for one or two studies which has underlined impressionistically and on the basis of general evaluations that patriarchal practices also permeated the Alevi belief and that women do not enjoy egalitarian status in the Alevi community as was the case in Sunnism. Therefore, by comparing the ritualistic practices and the philosophical premises of Alevism in terms of gender equality at the micro-level of the selected cem rituals, this study aims at contributing to the efforts toward filling the gap on this aspect of the Alevis in Turkey.

This is an exploratory and descriptive study aiming at demonstrating and describing the gendered practices in the Alevi rituals; it does not aim at explaining the reasons of discrepancies between equality discourses and the prevailing subordination of women. However, as it deals with the two specific cases of cem rituals in the two specific cemevis, it will indirectly highlight the underlying reasons of the differences in terms of gender dynamics on the basis of these specific cases taken up in the study. Above

all, it will be demonstrating whether and how patriarchy are reproduced in the Alevi communities and rituals despite social modernization, and the analysis will help us comprehend how this patriarchal practices could be situated as part of its encounter with the dominant (Sunni) culture which defines it as the “other” in the context of ongoing marginalization and oppression in the society at large.

Significance of the Study

Generally, in the monotheistic religions, the status of the women is defined as secondary to that of men. As a reflection of such situation, women have been made inferior to men in the religious practices, institutions and worshipping rituals. There are various dynamics which foster the conditions that renders the subordination of the women in those practices. Feminist scholarship has identified the subordinate position of women as problematic, and studied the social and cultural forces behind development of those practices which seemed to run contrary to the egalitarian spirit portrayed in religions. Research also compared the theoretical bases of inequality in the religions and the practical realities in social and religious life in society. The feminist literature on religion also revolves around a debate on the “essentially” patriarchal nature of religion. Regardless of whether we should be working with such essentialistic approaches, gender inequality can be found both in the written resources and the daily/ritual practices of religions. When it comes to Alevism, which is usually defined by its authorities as a philosophy rather than a religious creed, defined relative to

the Sunni Islam, it puts the gender equality occupies a central place in its teachings and discourses.

The literature on the identity, history and worshiping acts of the Alevi community in Turkey has expanded significantly, especially starting from early 1990s. Although some of this work on Alevism suffers from deficiencies in terms of theoretical basis and objectivity, and although some does not reflect well the actual life practices of the Alevis, there is a common understanding of the Alevi community regarding the equality of men and women in the Alevi belief and worships. This perception is evident especially in publications based on the discourses of the male Alevi authorities. However, specific publications which have separately analyzed the practices of Alevis on gender equality and which reflect the woman's views and voices remain scarce. It is this insufficiency in the literature on gender equality among the Alevi people which motivated this research on which this thesis is based. Thus, this thesis is expected to contribute to the existing literature by providing new data on the question of gender equality among the Alevis in Turkey, in particular by shedding light onto the problematique of the difference and tension between the equality rhetoric/discourse in the belief and the practice of gender relations and by accounting for –albeit partially– this problem and by underlining the significance of the strategies of survival in the Alevi community *vis-a-vis* the dominant sect.

The Alevi communities were treated as minority groups in most of the Muslim countries, including Turkey. Alevism is not recognized as one of the

official religions in those states. The Alevis needed to hide their own identities and worshipping practices until the early 1990s. The Alevi identity came under scrutiny and discussion by the 1990s and the question of a “real definition” of Alevism was also raised by the researchers. However, there still seems to be no consensus on what Alevism is, which accounts for the prevalence of various different definitions of Alevism. As a creed it has not also become institutionalized; nor has it produced a hierarchical structure regulating and homogenizing the relations between its believers. Historically in the Republican Turkey Alevi identity was introduced as a social and cultural phenomenon due to a concern with its legitimization in the state system, thus its structural peculiarities were made to be convenient with the principles of the Republic. There are some Alevi authorities who employ comparisons of Alevism with the Sunni belief in order to define the identity of Alevi community. As this thesis highlights identification of Alevism through comparing itself with Sunni belief is usually dealt with the comparison of women in the Alevi and the Sunni discourses.

One of the main deficiencies in the literature on Alevi doctrine relates to the issue of the religious rituals and practices. Although various sources on the discourse exist, observations of the practices of worship and the detailed analyzes of these ritual acts were not carried out by researchers. The reason behind the deficiency originates from the closed and conservative structure of the Alevi community, done for the sake of protection of their belief and believers in the predominantly Turkish Sunni

society. Because of the scarcity of the studies based on observations, the gender question in the religious rituals is also blurred in academic terms.

Scope of the Study

As mentioned above, the Alevi belief does not have a clear and sole definition. In general, the Alevis are described as the people who had great amity towards the people called 'ehl-i beyt' (the Prophet himself, his daughter Fatima, his son-in-law Ali, his grandchildren Hassan and Hussein) by the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad. Moreover, Alevi discourse is also depicted spiritual as the destination of the people who claimed Ali's caliphate after Mohammad's death in 632 A.D. Alevism constitutes the heterodox branch of Islam, opposite of the orthodox Sunnism. The central position in the Alevi discourse is reserved for the human being, and the love attached to human. In the doctrine, the person is evaluated according to, not his/her gender, but his/her contribution to 'the way'. The Alevi discourse suggests that the sex of the individuals does not bear any significance. Men and women can attend the 'cem', which is the essential worship ritual of the doctrine. There are certain examples to support this feature of Alevism: participation of both men and women to the 'cem' ceremony, ritual dancing of both sexes together, ad equal participation in the service for '*Twelve Services*' (*Oniki Hizmet*) by the men and women together.

In this study, gender relations in the 'cem' rituals of Alevi belief were evaluated from a feminist perspective in terms of its concerns, the focus,

and the research procedure. It is emphasized that, in the Alevi belief, which is the heterodox branch of Islam, there is unambiguous equality between the sexes. It was, however, observed in the field research that the local examples of the practice of the equality discourse had differences in Alevi discourse. It was uncovered that patriarchy had stronger impact on the rituals in the cems in specific regions/localities whereas gender segregation and women's subordination were less visible and less significant in others. Hence, a minor concern of this thesis is to identify and explore these differences and to account for this difference by comparing the cases of Cem Vakfı in Istanbul and that of Isparta Cemevi by taking into consideration of the range of differences in rituals in the other cems again observed by this author prior to the field research in the selected sites of rituals.¹

As explained in the research procedure section below the scope of study consists of observations and analysis of the cem rituals in both Istanbul and Isparta, by comparing and contrasting of cems in Cem Vakfı and in Isparta. These two cases display the two extreme examples of the rituals as far as the gender dynamics and the women's position are concerned. Hence, their comparisons would provide us insights regarding how and why patriarchy could permeate to a much greater extent a specific ritual setting than the other, and as to how these are justified and negotiated by the individuals.

¹ Please see the research procedure section. To collect the data on a background for my field research, to enrich my thesis, I attended four more cem rituals in addition to the cems in Cem Vakfı and in Isparta, but I did not include them into my analysis for comparison, the reasons of which were explained in Chapter 4.

I.2. The Use of Feminist Perspective and Methodology in Understanding Social Reality and the Research Procedure of the Thesis

Social sciences were enriched by the critical analyses and the insights gained from research done in the feminist methodology. This methodology attempts to fill in the gaps left by conventional methods in the social sciences. Before the arise of the feminist perspective, social science were characterized more explicitly by a gender lens in which women were assumed as a partial man and as negative images of men or convenient objects of man's needs.² Social scientific literature conventionally ignored the women and their social experiences, and researched women in relation to men. Domination of men and subordination of women to the men also displayed a large portion in that of literature. While social scientists took mostly men's world and experiences into account, and did not consider the women's world as important as that of men. However, feminist methodology is interested in, firstly, the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life. Then came the centrality of consciousness-raising as a specific methodological tool and as a general orientation or "way of seeing". Another important part is the need to challenge the norm of objectivity of the conventional methods that assumes that subject and object of research can be separated from one another. As for the identification and transformation of gender relations, feminist research has acted as a political

² Marcia Westcott, "Feminist Criticism of the Social Sciences", in Joyce McCarl Nielson (ed.), *Feminist Research Methods* (San Fransico and London: Westview Press, 1990), p.59

commitment. In refining and deepening feminist understanding of the criteria for judging the quality of social science and revealing how it operated in to practice of science, feminist methodology employs various methods to express feminist political commitments.³

Focusing on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research are also dominant concerns of the feminist perspective in the social sciences. The approach of feminist researchers concerns itself with answers to those questions which arise on the basis of premises and practices of the feminist methodology such as, “What is the source of gender asymmetry?, Why one gender is perceived dominant and the other subordinate? What is the historical background of that perception? How does the patriarchal system transform itself in different contexts? Why are women confined to secondary positions? Why women’s voices not heard and their experiments are not covered in scientific research?”. Feminist research thus provides us with opportunity of hearing the voices of women as objects of research. In that sense each article and thesis with feminist perspective are necessarily committed to transforming the male-dominated and gendered biases, parameters and assumptions of conventional methods. The thesis also reflects a similar concern by adopting such concerns and by following feminist research procedures with the intention to contribute to the existing body of the feminist literature.

³ Heather Brunskell, “Feminist Methodology”, in Clive Seale (ed.), *Researching Society And Culture* (Oxford: Sage Publications, 2004), p.38

This study is based on qualitative methodology involving interview surveys with men and women taking part in several selected cem rituals. Both interviews and observations were carried out by the researcher as a participant observer in the cems. A total of 47 interviews were carried out in the six cems attended, with the men and women attending the cems. One of the crucial points in this research relates to the comparisons between the 'cem's of Istanbul, the metropolitan city, and those of the Anatolia. The rationale behind this choice was to observe the impact of the life experiences of the Alevis in the cosmopolitan urban cities on the gender dynamics in the religious practices/rituals. Istanbul, the largest city of Turkey, includes a number of Alevi communities originating from almost every part of Turkey. The interaction between them and the insertion of new practices as a result of their integration in the metropolitan city seems to be significant in the observations for done this study. The other case, Isparta was selected because of the density of Alevi population in the region. The province is in the center of many Alevi communities, in surrounding towns and villages, with a more traditional life style. The Alevi Institute assisted the researcher with organizing the interviews with 'dede's of Cem Vakfı in Istanbul and the 'dede' in Isparta. With the assistance of the Alevi Institute in Ankara, the researcher identified specific sites to carry out the research. As mentioned, the Alevi community has a rather closed and protected structure, into which the outsiders and observers cannot get access, especially to observe the cems rituals. The Alevi Institute's contacts and relationships enabled the researcher to get access to the 'cem's organized in different

cities of Turkey. Contacts through the Alevi Institute, which enjoys influence over the cemevis, were thus highly beneficial prior to the research and during the field work. Upon their assistance, 5 'cem's in Istanbul and 1 in Isparta were observed. The reason behind the selection of these 'cem's is basically related with the dates and the organization of the cem ceremonies. During the period of the fieldwork, (17 December 2009 Hacı Bektaş Veli Vakfı, 19 December 2009 Karacaahmet, 10 January 2010 Şahkulu, 4 February 2010 Cem Vakfı, 7 February 2010 Cem in Kartal and 14 March 2010 Cem in Isparta) the Institute informed this researcher of the availability and of the timing of those 'cem' ceremonies, to attend as an observer/researcher. Because the ceremonies were generally organized between October and March, and because the number of the ceremonies in Istanbul was relatively high, it was agreed that the major site research would be Istanbul 'cem's. The next available ceremony was held in Isparta, a region where Alevi community had different religious practices than that of Istanbul. Then the researcher proceeded to locate and get access to the other 'cem' ceremonies in Istanbul by myself. Observations on Cems outside of Cem Vakfı in Istanbul are not, however, specifically analyzed the thesis, rather they are used to enrich the analysis and to highlight diversities in implementations.

One of the disadvantages regarding carrying out field research observations in the 'cem' ceremonies was the fact that 'cem's were organized in the time period between September and March. That's why,

even though I had the objective of observing more cem rituals this researcher could not enjoy wide opportunities to attend or participate in the 'cem's in different parts of Anatolia. In addition, the weather conditions resulted in cancellation of some 'cem's in Anatolia, to which I was planning to observe. So, there is only one 'cem' in Anatolia, to which I could attend. In total, I could observe six cem's in Istanbul, and one in Isparta. Therefore, the analysis is based on those six ceremonies only. The dedes of all the cems attended and observed were interviewed. However, because the scope of the analysis is limited to the two above-mentioned cem ceremonies specifically, only the data from the interviews with dedes of those two cems were covered in the thesis.

The research on which this thesis was based included face-to-face interviews with the male and female participants to collect data. Besides the limited information regarding the Alevi discourse on gender dynamics in the secondary sources, interviewing with dedes of cems and women participating in the cems were the major sources of information and data for this analysis. The interviews included structured and semi-structured questionnaires with twenty-four questions, presented to the 'dede's, who are the people that conduct and lead the ceremony, in each 'cem'. In addition to the standard questions, additional (contingency) questions were also asked in each interview, depending on the responses to the standard questions obtained from the 'dede's. The researcher also did probing to gather further information and to make the respondents to elaborate on their expressed

views. The range of the questions included the definition of Alevism, the perception of the human being in Alevism, the perspective on the gender issue in Alevism and the responsibilities of men and women in the 'cem' ceremonies.

The focus of the questions asked to Dedes before and occasionally after cems was on the positions of Dedes on gender issues in the discourse. Questions such as "is there any order coming from Vakıf authority or by dedes to women to veil or wearing skirt for participating cems?", "how both men and women sit in cems, together or separately?", "do women occupy any position of responsibility during cem rituals?" etc. were formulated women's position to ascertain in cems.

Similar questions were put to the women, who participated in the 'cem' ceremonies, before the 'cem' started. Nine people in the position of 'dede' were interviewed. In terms of the women participating in the 'cem' ceremonies, thirty-eight women in total were interviewed. These interviews were held before and after the ceremonies. Therefore, total number of interviewees reached up to forty-seven.

After interviewing with dedes, the researcher asked the same questions to women participants to cems. So I had the chance to compare the views of both dedes and women, in order to see whether there is a significant gap between their perceptions. On gender issues, I asked whether the participant women agree with what dedes said or whether and

how they challenge them as they are exposed to subordination. This was important to see whether or to what extent they internalized dede's views on gender relationship. The answers to those questions constitute the central points of feminist analysis.

Choosing open-ended questions has helped me as researcher to facilitate that women interviewee to represent their own ideas, experiences in their own words. That is accounted valuable to form a feminist literature composing by different women voices. Accepting interviewee as participant rather than as subject makes is a feature of feminist methodology throughout the thesis. As the participants of the cem was informed by the Institute that I could observe the rituals, participants behaved me as if I was one of the people among them. Even though I have not made any interpretation to any practices made during cem rituals, people in cem perceived me as a participant. That provided me with the opportunity to record any details during the cems easily. Hence, this study attempted to carry the Alevi women's voices to the daylight in the context of their rituals. The questions I asked to the women stimulated the discussion among the women about their status and rights.

I attended the 'cem's and recorded the processes there and carried out camera recordings of the cem rituals which observed all aspects of the ritual to gather data for the analysis to compare the discrepancy between the discourse and the rituals regarding gender equality. Camera recording enabled the researcher to capture all the relevant details as watched during

the cem from beginning to the end. Considering gender dynamics throughout cem rituals, understanding the women's positions, responsibilities, and visibilities in these observations constituted the major pillar of the feminist analysis on which study is based.

The 'cem' in Isparta was quite different than that in of Cem Vakfı in Istanbul. It was held in the evening and night, and the researcher interviewed with the women in the 'cem' before and after the ceremony. Because of the concrete differences in the 'cem' of Isparta than that of Istanbul, questions were also related to those differences and to the views of women on them. The main difference of Isparta's 'cem' was the existence of an 'Ana' along with the 'Dede' in the main position of the community. Interviewing her was therefore particularly important. Having woman as a ritual leader, which can be conceived and indeed in the Alevi rituals is observed, is rarely seen in monotheistic religions.⁴

In-depth interviewing with *Ana*'s who are assistants to the *dedes* in some cems in Istanbul was also crucial for the thesis to understand how female ritual leaders act, what they hold regarding the discourse and how they raise their voices among the participants during cems. In-depth interview technique is used for the following reasons. Firstly, talking with female ritual leader is so crucial for the feminist literature because, religion is so dogmatic topic that women can not break the chains easily to become

⁴ Because limited time was spent talking with Ana there, interview with dede was conducted later in Ankara.

religious leader. Secondly, for feminist analysis, the opinions of the religious leaders on women issues in Alevi discourse show how aware they are of women's dominated or subordinated position. Also in-depth interviews shed lights on whether and why they agree with patriarchal practices or not.

I.3. The Organization of the Thesis

In the following chapter, Chapter II, the approaches and the conclusions of existing feminist research on the gender dynamics and the status of women in the monotheistic religions and in Islamic societies in particular is reviewed. It is often argued that Islam received the cultural impacts of the patriarchal structure of pre-Islamic societies of the region. In addition to this heritage, the verses of Quran, Islam's holy book, on the gender issues were interpreted so as to subordinate the women in the society. Therefore, the visibility of the woman in the society descended as the time went by. On the other hand, some researchers hold a different viewpoint arguing that Islam radically transformed the women's status in the pre-Islamic Arab society. Hence, this chapter briefly looks at the arguments of feminist writers regarding the question of how to approach the woman question in Islam. This issue, however, is not the central question of the thesis; hence, this chapter also raises the problem of the discrepancy between the equality discourses on gender in religious doctrine and the practices of its rituals. It summarizes the major threads of the existing literature on this problem.

In Chapter III, “The Alevi-Bektashi Belief System and Its Gender Discourse”, different definitions of Alevism and its historical content are provided. After describing the major tenets of the Alevi belief, based on humanism and the love of the human being, the Alevi perception of woman is highlighted and elaborated. Two dominant opinions on women in Alevism are identified: the woman is conceptualized as superior to man, and the woman is seen as equal to man.

Chapter IV, which is devoted to the analysis of the cem rituals, offers a detailed account of the observations of the researcher. The preparations, conduct and finalization of the ‘cem’ ceremonies will be recounted in details. The major focuses of the analysis relate to the status and position/status of the woman before, during and after the cem ceremonies. The main arguments of gender equality, highlighted in the discourses of Alevi community, will be evaluated in practical terms. The role of the women in preparations for ceremony, their position during the conduct and organization of it, and the role of gender in the whole process are dealt with extensively on the basis of the data from the interview surveys. Interviews done with leaders of the rituals and with women during the participation of the researcher in the cems, will be analyzed.

Chapter IV engages in a discussion of the findings of the qualitative analysis. Just like Alevi community preserves the strong equality argument in the discourse, the interviewees agreed with the notion of gender equality in the ‘cem’ rituals. The observations did not suggest totally contradictory

practices. For the Alevi women, in particular, the right of participation to the 'cem's along with men is understood as the most important indication of gender equality in Alevism. The interviews demonstrated, however, that the Alevi women were generally inclined to accept the excellence of the man over the woman. This position challenges the general belief in Alevism. Moreover, in 'cem' organized by Cem Vakfı in Istanbul, male and female participants demonstrated some kind of sexual division of labor and segregation between genders. The entrance to the 'cem' room was done through different entrances, and the women were expected to veil themselves before start of 'cem'. These were also observed as contradictory to the equality notion of Alevism. On the other side, both men and women participate to Semahs when cem is over. All participants regardless of their sex take 'lokma's shared equally. In the 'cem' of Isparta, the men and women stayed together during the ceremony. The *rehber* (men) played the instruments, while the women sang the 'nefes' songs (songs that are parts of worships). *The Twelve Services* were held together by both the men and women. The head cover during 'cem' was not an obligation. The survey in Isparta revealed interesting results. The women of Isparta had more equal status than those of Istanbul. However, they accepted the supremacy of man in Alevi belief, the results of which were perceived during interviews with women participants.

Finally, the Conclusion Chapter (Chapter V) will restate my findings and highlight my argument.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION IN RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE AND RITUALS

In general, religion can be defined as a system of faith and practice relating to a sacred world. In addition to describing the ultimate reality, religion also orders people how they have to act to reach that of reality. In that sense, it draws the lines of the lives of the believers. The co-relation between the religion and the society has long been studied and researched by different thinkers and disciplines. Emile Durkheim argued that religion is one of the 'social fact's, which was external to but coercive of the person. According to him, human being is a 'community-building animal' and religion has its source in man's perception of power outside himself, both constraining and providing him with support. "Power" is deemed to power of society. Society's consciousness connotes religion itself. Religious ideas are collective ideas representing collective realities, and are based on a division of the world into the sacred and the profane; hence, religious rites are manifestations of the integrated nature of the group. Durkheim thought that "religion provided an answer to the questions of what is right and wrong, and therefore helped each generation be socialized into the society, helping to

strengthen the group and ensuring its survival.”⁵ For Durkheim, religion is one of the factors that builds up the society and keeps the members of the society together. Similarly, Karl Marx argues that religion is essential in the formation of the society. The religion is, for Marx, the reflection of the self-consciousness and self-awareness of the members of the society. So, religion is the reflection of the humanity, instead of the god. Marx stated that religion is so essential for the society that, any critique against the religion will be the premise of all criticisms. In addition to the existentialist comments, Marx assessed that religion helped to maintain the status quo in the society. Depicting the exploitation of a class of the society by another class in the society through economic and political structures, Marx mentioned that “religion was one important way that this unfair situation was maintained.”⁶ In that sense, Marx and Durkheim agreed that religion is the social structure which is the way to prevent the social change.

Unlike Marx and Durkheim, Weber perceived the religion as the source of the change and reform in the society. He defined human being as “meaning-seeking animal”. The definition by Weber is related with function of religion. Weber maintained his idea about the people’s pursuit of interest and the assistance of religious structures in that pursuit. Based on this philosophy, he argued that the religion provides tools and opportunity for the beneficiaries of change, or stability. He followed the sample of the Calvinists who benefited from the change by religious structures in the industrial

⁵ Judy R. Aulette et. al., *Gendered Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.397

⁶ Ibid.

sectors. Ongoing that, he claimed, religion as a meaning system is an explanation of what the world is all about. Weber wrote that religious beliefs of Calvinists “caused the transition from an agriculturally based feudal society to an industrial capitalist one.”⁷

Religion creates the icons (or symbols) to define and explain the existentialist problems. Then, it makes its own interpretations about the icons. Those interpretations may vary in different societies; however, they essentially aim to introduce and sustain the order of the society. The power of the religion to iconize the world and to raise its impact over the individuals and society originates from its being divine and infinite. Depending on this kind of power, religion has the power for reification of the indefinable means. Thanks to the power of the religions to iconize and reify, the societies need the power of religions to explain and interpret the world. Religions and the social life always had an interactive relationship. On the one side, the rules and applications of the religious contents have the potential to change the lives of the members in the society. On the other side, traditions of societies contributed to the religious facts, especially to the religious rituals. Both the society and the religion had reciprocal influences. None of monotheistic religions could preserve the original version of itself. There always had been revisions and changes in the application of monotheistic religions.

All the religions draw the strict lines for the relations between the genders. When the gender relations defined by different religions are

⁷ Ibid., p.398

compared, the domination of one gender, the male, in the society seems to be the predominant element. The affinity to the male in the monotheistic religions is an outstanding topic, on which the feminist researchers paid attention. The main question to be answered in those researches is the reason behind such male-oriented approach of the religions to gender relations. The general content of the answers focus on the reality that religions and the societies, in which they act, have interaction in their relations. As a result of such interaction the religions, which had been introduced to the societies under patriarchal structure, were under the impact of the existing characteristic of societies. Therefore, the religions had been revised by the patriarchal societies in terms of gender roles. The same historical conditions were observed in the last monotheistic religion, Islam, too.

II.1. Patriarchal Domination and Religions

The concept of patriarchy refers to a system which oppresses women. As mentioned in the book “Gender, Race and Patriarchy” written by Kalwant Bhopal⁸, definitions of patriarchy and causes of it are problematic. The radical feminists, who have emphasized patriarchy firstly, define it as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.⁹

⁸ Kalwant Bhopal, *Gender, 'Race' and Patriarchy: A study of South Asian Women* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p.49

⁹ Quoted in Judith M. Bennet, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p.55

Origins and causes of patriarchy are assessed differently by different writers. For Firestone¹⁰, a radical feminist, it is a consequence of men's greater strength stemming from women's weakness during pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. When the role of men was acknowledged in reproduction, controlling of men over women started in history. (Rich, 1977)¹¹ Other perception regarding to that belongs to Collard (1988), patriarchy raised with hunting by men which is a new power relation between sexes based on violent conquest.

All monotheistic religions have been "the strongest carrier of the patriarchal societies."¹² Historically, the archeological researches demonstrated that the start point of patriarchy is the Old Mesopotamia. About 3000 B.C., the emergence of plow in agriculture, for some historians, is accepted as the beginning of patriarchal term. The plow required the domestication of large animals and fields more distant from the home, presenting difficulties for women. Tasks of women changed from culminating to storing foods, caring for children. The first urban communities emerged in Mesopotamia between B.C. 3500 and 3000. These communities became the city-states after a time period. To sustain these city-states, a kind of military service was established under certain discipline rules. Moreover, there was a necessity of registration of the documents for keeping the order. These duties were undertaken by the members of clergy in the temples. Because the

¹⁰ Kalwant Bhopal, *Gender, 'Race' and Patriarchy: A study of South Asian Women* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p.49

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Fatmagül Berktaş, *Tek Tanrılı Dinler Karşısında Kadın* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000), pp. 53-59

clergy class was composed of the men, the authority and power of the male in the society began to develop. In addition, to keep the 'inheritance' system active, it was very important to know the fathers of the sons. Therefore, the women were oppressed to have monogamy in their marriage options. This inheritance system, going from father to son, created the initial steps of the patriarchy in society. The sacred family institution was left to the control of the man.

Once the urban system created the division of labor, the other sectors of economy emerged. At the beginning, women were very active in agricultural society. Because of the specialization, the importance of agriculture went down eventually. As a result, woman was left to the secondary position in new urban society. Thanks to the transformation of society, the military class had great concessions in the new city states. This was the second strong coup against women's position in the society. Men were more active in the military profession. Lastly, the establishment of legal rules came against the status of woman in Mesopotamia. The legal rules, like those of Hammurabi, stipulated strict control over the family relations to keep the urban life alive. The rules left woman with thick control by her husband, which rendered the women dependant on their husbands. Thus, patriarchy and domination of men was established.

Before taking the Islam's perception of woman into consideration, it is necessary to see the common points of the three big monotheistic religions on the issue of woman. The results of the close relationship and interactive

affection of monotheistic religions and patriarchy are as follows: institutionalization of patriarchy, the devotion to excellence and supremacy of male, the impact of male's supremacy on the division of gender roles, the step-back of the woman in the hierarchical structure. In consecration of the family structure, patriarchy openly supports the side of men, and the management of the woman's body was assigned to the male of the family. Therefore, patriarchal structures were legitimized and were consolidated in the center of the religious doctrine. The Middle East was the cradle of the three monotheistic religions: historically Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Patriarchy came to the reality when the city-states were established in the old history.¹³ The rules of patriarchy, that is giving a secondary position to the women, was later on accepted and adopted by the monotheistic religions. This shows how strong the relation of religion and patriarchy is. Archeological studies prove that the status of the women before the reign of city-states was in a high position. Understanding of unchangeable status of woman, thanks to biological and natural reasons, can be refuted with the fact mentioned above. Two aspects of the history of religions strengthened the patriarchy in the society of three religions: the reality that all three monotheistic religions originated from the Middle East and the consolidation of the already established patriarchal principles by the newcomer religions as the 'orders of God' with a legal base. Through interaction of patriarchy of Middle East and the monotheistic religions, the patriarchal society was entrenched with its new legal and cultural structure.

¹³ Fatmagül Berktaş, *Tek Tanrılı Dinler Karşısında Kadın* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000), p.59

Regarding the oppression on woman, Nawal el Saadawi argues that it is not essentially due to the particular religious ideologies.¹⁴ It is true that the great religions have similar principles on the issue of submissions from women to men, and they agree on the fact that the God has masculine characteristics. However, the history of thoughts and thinkers puts the reality that those thinkers were blinded by their 'patriarchal cataract' and class optics.¹⁵

The institutionalization of patriarchy, which is known to be coming from the Old Mesopotamia, for taking the woman body under control, for defining the role and duties of woman in the society, for oppressing the woman to serve for the men, and for describing the gender roles in the society was achieved during the time of the monotheistic religions.¹⁶ Patriarchal system, in the monotheistic religions, has found the ways for legitimization of itself eventually. This legitimization includes the following: transferring from the private space to public, the control of woman's body by man, defining domestic roles.

II.2. The Islamic Approach to Women

Islam, as the last monotheistic religion, is distinct from other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity, by declaring that Quran is

¹⁴ Nawal El-Saadawi, "Woman And Islam", in Azizah Al-Hibri (ed.), *Women and Islam* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp.193-194

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From Middle Ages to Eighteen Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.3

the direct speech of God, communicated through the angel Gabriel to Mohammad, the Messenger of God to the Arabs and to the world for all eternity. The Quran mentions that, as the world keeps on turning around itself, the Quran verses will stay in their original forms without any changes. The Quran may be interpreted in different forms in various time and places; however, it is stated that the verses will be kept in original form. The Quran, which puts forward including warnings, commands, obedience and duties, serves as a guideline for Muslims.

In Islam, religion and state is stitched to each other strongly. It is not simply a system of belief. The God's words, in the Quran, order that it must be a method of management also. The God orders, which had been declared in Quran and the Sunna, do not only cover the human being, but also identifies the social relations between the people. Those relations are especially about the family, marriage, divorce and the inheritance issues.¹⁷ Thus, Islam is a total rule of life. The Muslim person should totally comply with Islam, not only in her/his actions regarding the religion, but also his/her non-religious activities, personal relations, social integration, private and public behaviours. The life style of the person is configured by the religion; thus, the global system in this concept is called as 'sharia'.¹⁸

The history of the conformity of social and individual activities with the religious orders goes back to the reign of Mohammad, who was both

¹⁷ Farooq Hassan, *The Concept of State and Law in Islam* (Ilanham: University Press of America, 1981), p.89

¹⁸ Ibid.

religious leader and highest authority of the state. Sencer argues that, for spread of and cohesion with the new religion, the Islam, the social and religious legal rules were unified. Doing so, the Islamic state, which was established as theoretically theocratic, became that of practically theocratic.¹⁹ In sheria, which was accepted as the system of state, all of the institutions have religious features.

In this theocratic state, disobedience against the legal laws, based on Islamic premises, is perceived as opposition against the religion. This is accepted as a betrayal against the religion. Islam concentrates all of the believers as single religious community, and does not consider its members individually. The sustainability of the community is vital, and has primacy over the welfare of the individual. In Islam, the sexuality of female is constructed more alluring than that of male, female sexuality provokes the male. That's why, the female sexuality is element of 'fitna' for man, and disrupts social order. One of the reasons, for which the woman is veiled, is the potential of woman to damage the social peace of society as an element of 'fitna'. Such demands of woman are opposite to the sheria, which means profane against the religion. At this point, the woman is forced to stay in already accepted patterns. Her demands are refused because of the idea that God's orders are certain and cannot be re-interpreted. Some male and female Muslims, especially those living in Europe, argue that Quran favors equality and it must be evaluated in equality forms. However, authorities of Islam reject such

¹⁹ Muzaffer Sencer, *Dinin Türk Toplumuna Etkileri* (İstanbul: Garanti Matbaası, 1968), pp.58-59

ideas with the reasoning that such opinions would westernize the society, which would result in transfer of bad sins of West to Islamic societies.

There are two major strands of argument opinions on the issue of Islam's perception of woman. First one states that Islam is essentially patriarchal, hence it aims at the subordination of the women to men. The second holds that Islam essentially foresees equality; but the interpreters of Quran have introduced male-dominated interpretations of the holy text.

As part of the first approach, Berktaý holds that religions conceive the characteristics of the societies, in which they take part. In the societies where patriarchal structures had already existed, the monotheistic religions consolidate and legitimize the patriarchy in society. Moreover, they assist the generational transfer of the patriarchal structure. The Quranic approach to women can be seen in two levels. First, Quran can directly address the women. In this level, the Quran establishes the direct connection with the women if it aims to give orders for worships and religious obligations. These obligations and worships are for both men and women. Both sexes have the same responsibilities and punishments. In the second level, the Quran has conversation with the women indirectly through the men. These orders include the imperatives regarding the organization and regulation of the society. In this second level, the women are socially subordinated to the men.

In Quran and Hadiths, there are explicit orders subordinating the women to the men and imposing them passivity in societal life, such as

specific verses and hadiths of prophet on various issues like inheritance, testimony, polygamy, labor division in family, leadership.

On the issue of witnessing, in Islamic discourse there should be two women corresponding to a man. Only in that case what witness says is accepted as valid. Due to being emotional and unable to decide rationally, women can be evaluated as not answering questions truly. Only a man correct what two witness women said, then the testimony of women can be accepted. This shows that how women are perceived as valueless, unreliable among Islamic society.

The verses which states that witnessing of two women can be equal to one man declares that woman can behave emotional and irrational during giving the information. So, the information taken from one woman can not be enough and reliable. But if a man endorses what the two women told about the case, then the witnessing of two women can be valid. The role devoted to the woman on witnessing issues makes the women invisible, and gives the role of irrational and emotional characteristics.

Concerning the inheritance, sharing the inheritance between sisters and brothers are differentiated according to Islamic teachings. Sister can only take half part of fortune comparing to brother. Quran says 'Man is entitled to the fortune of two women²⁰.' In some pre-Islamic societies, women herself constituted a part of the inheritance which men left behind after death, on the

²⁰ Sourat El-Nisa, Verse 7,11,12 and 176, in *Quran: The Final Testament* (Islamic Productions, 2003), pp.72-92

assumption that she is a part of his property bought for a dowry, and should therefore be handed down to his sons.

The matter of inheritance is closely linked to the matter of female witnesses. The Quran states that in cases of inheritance a daughter should get half the amount that a son gets. In most books and in the commentaries on the Quran there is unanimous agreement that the reason for this is that men are responsible for the financial maintenance of women – not only wives, but also mothers and sisters who are not provided for.

Regarding polygamy, there is disagreement among the thinkers of Islam. The basic verse on discussion is in ayeth: 'Marry as many women as you wish, two, three or four. If you fear no to treat them equally, marry only one. Indeed, you will not be able to be just between your wives, even if you try.'²¹ The first group of thinkers, like Mernissi and Saadawi argues that the polygamy was banned because the man is allowed only if he could treat his wives equally. There cannot be any slight difference between the women, for the husband. Following the possible permission to polygamy, the Quran has declared how impossible it is. As the equality is impossible in treating the women, then the men cannot get married with more than one woman. This group argues, the polygamy is strictly forbidden by the Quran. The second group, included Berkta, claimed that Quran allowed polygamy and Prophet Mohammad applied the right of polygamy on himself. Then, if the prophet did it, then it must be free to marry more than one woman.

²¹ Ibid.

The sphere of the Islamic societies is divided into two parts: the communal and the domestic. The first is the place where man is the sovereign. The second one is the place where sexual hierarchy is established. The public domain is examined above. The domestic sphere will be touched upon below.

The woman should be obedient against her husband. As mentioned in ayeth: "good woman are obedient. If you doubt about a woman's being rebel, give advices to her, leave her in the bed alone or beat her. But, if she obeys, do not look for the ways to make cruel to her." That is, the man has the right to react to the disobedience against his authority. And, this right was established through the divine rules of God.

What Mernissi points out between the sexual life and legal systems in different countries is that there is a certain contradiction.²² The act of defloration, as the case with pregnancy, is usually seen as a sole act and responsibility of the woman. However, in fact the sexual relation is an act of two people, the man and the woman. Patriarchal morality claims the one sided part of the discussion: defloration and pregnancy is the duty and responsibility of the woman. On the other side, the legal texts and rules order that the un-married sexual relations are crimes for the citizens of the same communities. Moreover, both partners are punished as guilty sides. That is,

²² Fatima Mernissi, "Virginity and Patriarchy", in Azizah Al-Hibri (ed.), *Women and Islam* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp:184-185

the legal system accepts the two-sided characteristics of sexual relationship, but patriarchy orders the one-sided of that.

The distinct nature of the woman emanating from her biological structure took great role during determining the gender roles in the society. With those differences, the necessary reasons for making the woman invisible were found. Also, the woman was commoditized through this process. Woman's menstrual periods, giving birth to children, being weaker than men physically had reflections to the status of woman in the society. Regarding the impact of the religion over the society, the woman's biological characteristics have been evaluated in the patriarchal structure, and it was located into the religious resources. Those resources impose that the orders of God are unchallengeable. Therefore, the religion imprisons the woman, thanks to her biological differences, into her own milieu, without any challenges or discussions criticizing the conditions.

The issue of veiling is also crucial in the Islamic culture. Since Islam is supposed to be experienced in all aspects of the life of human being, the exposal of the human body to the outside world is also explained in religious resources in details. This is also a way of declaring to be a Muslim. The clothing, which shows the dichotomy of sexual conditions, is also the meaning of overriding the theology by using the biology. "The clothing, a tool of probity in Islam, should cover the body and mention the dual conditions of sexes on the world. This duty is given to the scarf of the woman. The scarf not only covers the head, but also shows the purity and status of being a

Muslim woman.”²³ As seen, clothing should show both the sex and the religion.

Mernissi, who states that the word ‘*harim*’ means the border or the line to divide two spheres, argues that *harim* shows especially the border between man and the woman. According to Islam, woman belongs to the internal part. The word ‘*haram*’ means the woman which is prohibited for marriage because of the link from virginity. At this point, veiling provides the ways for woman to exit towards the outside world. Because, the veiled woman stays in the internal part although she gets out of the house, it recalls the ‘*mahrem*’ world.²⁴

The point to which most of researchers pay attention was taken into account by Berktaç: the visual function of veiling have a strong meaning about the relation between the looking and being looked sides. There is the relation of sovereignty or authority between the two. The reason behind the restrictions on woman, not the man, is a question to be answered by religion.

It is argued that, neither veiling nor imprisoning the women to home originates from the Islam or its culture. Conversely, the tradition of restricting the woman is common to the communities that lived in Eastern Mediterranean. The vital result of such an inheritance from those communities is that, the woman was sentenced to quietness and passive

²³ Sourat El-Nisa, Verse 7,11,12 and 176, in *Quran: The Final Testament* (Islamic Productions, 2003), pp.72-92

²⁴ Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınlar, 1991), p.138, quoted in Fatmagül Berktaç, *Tek Tanrılı Dinler Karşısında Kadın* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000), p.151

role, even though the centuries passed over. Mernissi, in her books *Beyond the Veil* and *Women in Islam*, mentions that Islam paid importance to the gender equality in its essence. However, the authorities who interpret the Quran and Hadiths are the people that were raised up in the patriarchal societies. That's why the interpretations of both sources favored the power of men over women. Similarly Bodman²⁵ argued that, after Mohammad died in 632 A.D., people who were close to him exercised what Prophet ordered. However, after they passed away, new religious guides introduced new customs (Sunna) of prophet, which encompassed new situations, presenting demands. Therefore, with origins, there were more Sunnas thought belongs to Mohammad. Other point which Bodman mention was the fact that Sunnas of Prophet were written down at least a century after Muhammad's death. Bodman, like Mernissi, claims that Mohammad was sensitive on the issue of gender equality. But, the Sunnas, which were interpreted according to the needs of society, may have been produced according to the requirements of patriarchy. That's why, there is the possibility of production of verses and sunnas, which sponsors the subordination of woman.

In The Quran and in the hadith literature, there are various statements concerning human beings in general, and statements concerning women in particular. In the Quran, of particular interest is the verse which says that men and women have been created out of one single soul. In Quran there is

²⁵ Herbert L. Bodman, "Introduction", in Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (eds.), *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity* (London and Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), pp:7-8

no clear indication as to how woman was created, but for some scholars some hadiths mentioned that Eve is created from “crooked” rib. People who believe gender equality in Islam doubt the truth of these hadiths. Mernissi, Bodman, Basharat Tayyab and Saadawi, gave clear example of how Islam transformed status of women in pre-Islamic term to prove their claims.

It is argued that before the advent of Islam, the status of woman in the region was very bad. The Arab men had right of unlimited marriages and divorces. Female babies were sentenced to death at the moment of their birth. It was claimed that Mohammad opposed these practices and to the status of woman before the advent of Islam. The period before Islam in the Arabic peninsula is called as the term of ‘Jahiliyah’ (the lack of education). Islam was welcomed by the society thanks to the fact that it promised better living conditions to the peninsula. There are the writers who state that Islam improved the status of woman in society.²⁶ On the contrary, some researchers argue that, in the pre-Islamic era, there were tribes who adopted the matriarchal life style.²⁷ In this type of life style, in the post-marriage period, the woman was living with her own tribe and children were under control of woman. The man was visiting the woman’s tribe to see his family. The fact that woman had more sexual rights in the Jahiliyah period demonstrates that, even though she did not have more freedom, she was in a better status in pre-Islamic era. Even, some writers think that there were

²⁶ Jane I. Smith, “Islam”, in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women in World Religions* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), p.236

²⁷ Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p.68

goddesses, priestesses that serve as representative of divine power, and female prophets.²⁸ Some of these priestesses were Sera binti, Nephan, Secah of Hadramut. The existence of woman clergy and the representation of divine power by the women before Islam provide information about how the status of woman in pre-Islamic society was respected and had its own good status.

Berkday, however, argued that, at that time, maternal regeneration (the woman can marry whoever she wants, and can divorce whenever she wants) was in practice in some regions, while paternal regeneration (man can marry without any limits, and can divorce whenever he wants) was in practice in others. Berkday quoted from Montgomery Watt that, at that time maternal regeneration was being applied and after Mohammad's birth, the convergence to paternal regeneration was witnessed. After the developing trade sector in Madina, the concerns of private property and inheritance resulted in the monogamy (having only one husband, not only one wife). The importance of the virginity, thanks to monogamy of the time, rose up. Therefore, the control over the body of woman became a serious concern for the men. This situation was institutionalized after a time. The responsibility to preserve the woman's body was left to her father until the marriage and to her husband after the marriage. The registration of woman's body was made to her husband.

²⁸ Nadia Abbott, "Women and the State on the Eve of Islam", *American Journal of Semitic Studies*, V.58 No.3, 1941, p.259

Another point on this issue was raised by Naawal al-Saadawi. She states that Mohammad's sensitivity towards women comes from the fact that women were more effective in the pre-Islamic society. The reason why Mohammad's first wife Hadija proposed to him, and he did not marry any other woman until she passed away. The vital point here is that, Mohammad, who lived in the period of the establishment of the patriarchy in the region, lived this period of transformation with his own life. Mohammad had monogamy until Hadija died, and married other women after her death. On this issue, Aisha's reaction against the verse that permits polygamy is very interesting. She thought that Allah (The God) responded the needs of the men, when Mohammad was permitted to marry as many women as he wants.²⁹

II.3. Ritual, Theory and Practice in Monotheistic Religions:

To approach the rituals of Alevi community from the gender issue, the theoretical and practical debates over the woman and religious practice should be overviewed. The ritual has its own history, which is as long as the history of the human being. Therefore, the literature over the ritual, its existence and the meaningful outcomes of it is quite wide. Since this thesis concentrates on the issue of gendered practices and the women's place in the Alevi rituals, I will touch upon the relevant parts of the theoretical analysis of the 'woman and religious practice' in literature.

²⁹ Ibid.

In general, the religions over the world, especially the monotheistic ones, have similar approaches to the issues of daily life. The sources of the religions, which were based on the written documents or discourses, mostly had inclusive, optimistic and egalitarian assessments on the status and position of the gender in the society and religious practices. However, it is generally argued that the interpretations of all those religious sources throughout the world resulted in differentiated practices of religious teachings in the daily life of the society. That is, in spite of the fact that “Jesus, Saint Paul and Muhammad had positive views of women, later theologians and scholars of sacred law imposed a patriarchal hegemony that at times degenerated into androcentrism and misogyny.”³⁰ The unavoidable outcome of such discriminative interpretations and implementations was the disputed existence of the woman social life. Therefore, significant share of the researches on the religious discourses and literature pays certain attention to the issue.

Before going through the details of the approaches of religions to the participation of the women in the religious practices, the perception of the gender issue in different religions should be overviewed. The leading idea on the issue of gender in religions is the fact that the three forerunning religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, are male-oriented and male-dominated religions. The prophets and the Gods in the resources of those religions are

³⁰ John L. Esposito, “Women, Religion and Empowerment”, in Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p.1

all men and the general contexts of the religions are built upon the masculine view of the world. Aulette et. al. argue that the gender in those religions are expressed in two ways. First, religions teach that the women and the men are two separate kinds of people. Second, religions mostly establish the opinion that women are lesser than the men.³¹

This prevailing gender-biased and discriminative treatment over women by religious teaching had significant consequences for the position of woman in society. To begin with, the inequality between the genders was originated from the very beginning of the religious establishments. The inequality begins from the creation, or emergence, of first humans, Adam and Eve. All three 'great' religions of the world basically accepted the unequal and discriminative positions of two genders, which would impose the same idea to the wide communities easily. Because, the total population who believe in those three religions constitute more than half of the world population.

Second, the religiously-inspired subordination of women against men has been endorsed and maintained by the power centers of the societies, like the religious groups, political authorities and even the state institutions. Religious texts and religious authorities have possessed almost unchallenged power over the believers of the religions. In some countries, like Islamic Middle Eastern states or Jewish Israel, religious texts have direct effects over the legal regulations. Thus, the subordination of the women in

³¹ Judy R. Aulette et. al., *Gendered Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.375

belief imposed the same level of the subordination to the political and social life through different ways, for instance legal and political ways.

Third, the inequality and subordination justified by religions resulted in the inequality of genders in the religious institutions as well. These institutions are in vital position for the religions, because they render the spread of the ideas, beliefs and opinions to the new communities and generations. However, women remain behind the curtains in those institutions in different religions. For instance, Catholicism claims that “men are superior to women because men are more like god and, therefore, do not allow women to become priests.”³² The obstacles in front of the women, as shown in this example, demonstrate itself in every higher rank in the career as priest.

Although there are certain common points on gender inequality where the three leading religions cooperate, the case should also be analyzed for each of the religion separately. To begin with, in the early periods, Judaism had the exercises of equality during holding the worship around religious practices. Berner argues that in the antique periods of the Jewish belief and tradition, the equality of men and women was preserved during the religious practices. “In the days of first and early second Temple in Jerusalem, men and women celebrated and worshipped together.”³³ What deteriorated such

³² Ibid., pp.375-376

³³ Leila G. Berner, “Hearing Hannah’s Voice”, in Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p.36

inclusive religious practices, according to Berner, is the advent of the Talmud.³⁴ According to the rules depicted in the Talmud, the segregation between the women and the men was explicit and applicable. One of the most outstanding indications of the segregation, Berner claims, could be seen in the 'personal prayer' of Hannah. She was warned by Eli, the priest, while she was praying to the Lord (God) for her own mood of motherhood.

She prays in an unstructured way, sharing her emotional state of mind with God. Eli reacts as a man who naturally gravitates toward structure, that is, toward the ritual "rules" with which he is familiar and comfortable. This moment of conflict between Eli, a representative of the cultic "tradition", and Hannah, with her own idiosyncratic spiritual style, reflects a centuries-old reality: men and women experience and communicate with the Divine in very different ways.³⁵

The Judaist belief implements a kind of equality between the genders which categorizes the expectations of the society and the religion from the different sexes. In that sense, there are certain duties of the women and men separately determined by the belief and society. The equality is defined as having the social roles for the society, even though the roles are separate and distinctive for both sexes. In the forefront, the men and the women are

³⁴ *Talmud* is the central text of mainstream Judaism, in the form of a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history. It is the second high-rank book, following Torah, in Judaist tradition. It is called *Gemara* as well.

³⁵ Leila G. Berner, "Hearing Hannah's Voice", in Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p.38

two separate identities, but they are equal before the God and holy faith. The obligations and responsibilities of the women are different from those of the men. Thus,

Traditional Judaism exempts women from many of the commandments incumbent upon men for historical and theological reasons, but they play pivotal roles in the life of Judaism: ushering in the Sabbath, fulfilling the role of first teachers of Jewish children, maintaining the everyday laws of kashrut (fitness) and perpetuating Judaism itself through childbirth.³⁶

The core point of the abovementioned notion is the fact that the women are sociologically located in their own realms. The spaces of the women are already determined. The positive light in which the woman was considered of such an understanding in the religion is that the responsibilities and duties of the women are not perceived as less important than those of the men. In this regard, the categories of each sex has been separated from each other, however the equality by the religion could be received among the categories, instead of the genders.

The main theme of the worship in Judaism is the recitation of the prayers. That is, a single or the group of prayers recites the holy texts while the rest of the group participates by listening or reciting together with the

³⁶ The Dunedin Jewish Christian and Muslim Community Liaison Group, *Understanding the Three Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, available at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/chaplain/resour/DJCMCLG.pdf> (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

prayers to the recital. To be ten or more people (minyan) for the ritual is thought to be ideal. There is certain segregation against women in this. First, the participation of the women in the prayer is not counted as the participation of one more person. For instance, if the woman is the tenth person in worshipping group, it is not counted as a completion of the minyan. Still one more man is needed for the group. Similarly, the woman's participation in the act of worship does not mean that she fulfils the group's obligation to perform the worship. Openly, the women are ignored as a 'member' of the religious community in Judaist worships.

Second, the Judaism and the Jewish Law states that men and women should certainly be spatially separated from each other during the worship. This separation can be done via a wall or curtain, but both sexes should not be able to see each other. The reason is the potential ideas related to sexuality that can be aroused in the minds of the 'men', not the women.

Third, men pray by thanking to the God for "not making me (themselves) a woman". Judaism argues that man should thank, because God gives more responsibilities to the men, and this would render them to work more for God. The inequality and segregation in the Judaist belief are evident in these features of the Judaism.

Berner suggests that there emerged significant ideological and academic challenges, regarding the status of the woman in religion and worships, against the already established power structures in the Jewish

community. The leading one was during the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly, where women demanded to take a part in the speeches and meetings in the convention held in 1972. They raised the question of woman's ignorance in the political and religious practices, which were announced in "equal access agenda". In addition, the academic challenges followed this. Rachel Adler argued that Jewish women's problem stemmed from that they were viewed in Jewish law and practice as peripheral Jews.³⁷ The access of the woman and children to the rituals of the Jewish belief was constrained and limited, while the Jewish law paid limited credibility to the same group, rather than holy 'men'. On the issue of gender inequality, reaction from within the Jewish community itself provides strong opposition to already established authority.

As far as Christianity is concerned, the issue of the women and its status vis-à-vis men in terms of religious interpretations has been also complex. The traditional Christianity belief provides the men with a leading role in the society and other aspects of the life, including religious practices. The authoritative power in the society was devoted to the men, rather than to the women, considered on the weak gender. The implication of such role differentiation is that man is the leader of the family, which would deteriorate without his presence. The role of the women and the rationale for her existence were explained in the Biblical texts in the following way:

³⁷ Quoted in Leila G. Berner, "Hearing Hannah's Voice", in Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p.40

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...³⁸

For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.³⁹

Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.⁴⁰

Obviously, the Christian religious texts order that women have to be subordinate to men, because men represent the Christ, and even the God, in his own body. Having those structural sources of inequality on the ground, the scholarly focus on the debates on gender discrepancies mainly revolve around two issues: the gendered nature of the God (as a man) and the ordination of the women, on the way to the leadership in Church. Regarding the 'God' as a 'man', the religious texts, as mentioned above, and the discourse benefits from a male-oriented image of the God from the early years of Christianity. The creator was envisaged as embodied in Christ's

³⁸ Ephesians 5:22-23, available at <http://www.biblegateway.com/> (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

³⁹ Corinthians 11:8-9, available at <http://www.biblegateway.com/> (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

⁴⁰ Genesis 5:2, available at <http://www.biblegateway.com/> (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

body, and the sex of the God was naturally male. Moreover, as the Christ was the 'Son' of the creator, the God was unavoidably the 'Father' of the humanity. Ruether argued that such usage of terminology was a depiction of the power relationships among sexes. Since "God is not only imaged almost exclusively in male terms, but also in terms of patriarchal power roles, such as patriarchal father, king, warrior and lord."⁴¹

Britto claims that the masculine image of the God in Christianity is used so widely that there is a cross-cultural consensus on the sexist language of the religion:

The male metaphors are so pervasive that they can be found even among the Christians of diverse languages and cultures. For example, even in a language like Japanese, in which pronouns are rarely used, God is most often referred to as a male.⁴²

The ordination of the women is the second significant issue in the discussion of the gender status in Christian societies. Christianity traditionally was against the ordination of the women, which would result in the leadership of the women in the churches. However, the first women ordained was Antoinette Brown, ordained in Congregational Church in 1853, and Louisa Woosley, ordained in Presbyterian Church in 1889. The ordination of the

⁴¹ Rosemary R. Ruether, "Christian Feminist Theology", in Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p.67

⁴² Francis Britto, "The Gender of God: Judeo-Christian Feminist Debates" in Allyson Jule (ed.), *Gender and the Language of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.28

woman to the full ministry was agreed in 1955 in the northern Presbyterian Church. Following those years, some reformist churches voted in favor of the ordination of the woman and their accession to full membership in the church. There are still significant differences among Christian churches over the issue of woman ordination. With the result, there are a few Christian denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, various Eastern Orthodox Churches, and some conservative Protestant denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention, have been officially opposed the ordination of women to date. Even though many Catholic nuns could take leadership roles in the order, the Pope did not allow them to preach as an official clergy.⁴³ The debate over the women's ordination would go on until all of the churches concede to the right of accession of the woman to the clergy.

The women's struggle for taking part in the religious practices occasionally resulted in challenges by women against men's domination in rituals. The ordination of some women by the clergy of the churches was mentioned above. As for Islam, the traditional belief rejects women's being the imam in the mosques. In some sects, the women are only allowed to take part behind the men's group during the worships. For instance, the Hanbali sect lets women to have worship behind the men in 'tarawih' practice. However, recent reformist thought in Islam argues that the imamate of the women in the religious rituals of Islam should be allowed. In one of the assertive actions by the women Muslim leaders, Amina Wadud in the U.S.

⁴³ Toru Takahashi, "Changing Female Religious Leadership in Christianity: A Case Study of American Methodism", *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions (JISMOR)* 1, 2005, p.117

attempted to be the imam of a congregation in New York. She was opposed by large Muslim communities.⁴⁴

In the Jewish tradition, the 'mitzvah' ceremony was in the center of the debates in the Jewish community. The puberty of the boys and girls are considered to be significant in the Jewish tradition and belief. For long centuries, the puberty of the boys were celebrated as 'Bar Mitzvah' in the Jewish communities. However, the similar celebrations are organized for the puberty of the girls as the Bat Mitzvah (daughter of the commandment). Though the girls are accepted as adult at the age of 12, while the boys are believed to be at the age of 13, the equality in organizing the celebration for puberty was achieved. The mitzvah for the boys had been one of the long lasting traditions in the Jewish community. It was observed as a step towards the adultery, which brought the individual capability of the 'will'. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some Jewish clergy began to organize similar ceremonies for the girls as well.⁴⁵ The reformist/liberal wing of the Jewish groups implement the ceremony for the girls almost as same as those for the boys. However, for the orthodox wing, even the mitzvah for girls is still a rare operation. The right of the women to take part in religious rituals is under discussion in the orthodox part of Jewish believers. However, although the orthodox Jewish are critical, the Bat Mitzvah ceremony is perceived as "an important means of stressing the membership of the younger generation in

⁴⁴ The case is available at http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2005/03/19/2005-03-19_woman_leads_muslims_in_pray.html (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

⁴⁵ Ariela Pelaia, *What is a Bat Mitzvah?*, available on www.about.com (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

the Jewish people, rather than as ceremonies that signify the traditional meaning of taking upon oneself the obligation of observing the commandments of the Torah.”⁴⁶

The Islam’s test with the gender equality wrote its peculiar history. In general, the idea that Islam brought much better conditions for the women than they had been before is strongly defended by the Islamic authorities. However, both the traditional resources of Islamic religion and the social practices in different contexts demonstrate that the case is not as the authorities claim.

⁴⁶ Brenda Sochacevsky Bacon, “Reading Three Israeli Bat/Bar Mitzvah Curricula as Gender, Theological, and Autobiographical Texts”, *Journal of Jewish Education*, 74, 2008, p.146

CHAPTER III

THE ALEVI - BEKTASHI BELIEF AND ITS GENDER DISCOURSE

Alevis, one of the culturally and politically marginalized groups in Turkey, are geographically spread throughout the country. In fact, the precise of the Alevi communities is not known, but estimated as 5 million to 25 million. Alevis have possessed their own cultural features, moral values, rituals and shared collective memories over the centuries. "The Alevi issue" is complex, and it has been misrepresented and even distorted in the official discourse, due to the absence of recognition of its minority status, religion, life style or belief. Resentments, grievances and aspersions on Alevis are voiced through different mechanisms rather than directly through their own words. In that sense, today recognition of their identities in the predominant Sunni population in Turkey, remains major demand of all Alevis, even each Alevi define his/her own identity differently.

Sunni Islam is orthodox part of Islam, and Alevi is heterodox that of it.⁴⁷ After Prophet Mohammad died, the occupation of the caliphate was not clear. For Sunnis, Ebu Bekir was selected by people because he was the first

⁴⁷ 'Sunna' means what Prophet Mohammad did in his time, people who follow his way named as 'Sunni'.

Muslim person who believed what Mohammad said and his features were suitable to become leader of Muslims. On the other hand, other group wanted to see Ali, son-in-law of Mohammad, as Caliph.⁴⁸ The First split among the Muslims arose on the basis of this conflict. Thereafter, those people, who followed Mohammad and his orthodox teachings, were called as Sunnis, and people who supported Ali were named as Alevis. The Sunni group of Islam followed the suggestions of Mohammad, performed by him during his life time. However, Alevis followed both Mohammad and his family called as “Ehl-i Beyt” (compound by Mohammad, his daughter, Fatima, his son in law Ali, his grandsons Hassan and Hussein) as the order of Mohammad which he said before he died. From that time on, Alevis have been known as opponents against Sunnis. Because Sunnis had official power, they formed the orthodox structure of Islam. Alevis could not transfer their rituals to codification for the future generations.

The ‘Cem’ ritual has central position in the Alevi belief, and all of the discourses are related to the “first cem worship”.⁴⁹ Alevis could not perform their cems publicly; both women and men could attend together without considering their sexes. This hidden form of worships resulted in aspersions about Alevi belief spread throughout the Sunnis.⁵⁰ Alevis were seen as potential rebel group against the state in the Ottoman Empire for centuries,

⁴⁸ For Alevis, the first Muslim person was Ali, because he was younger than Ebu Bekir. And also, Mohammad ordered that Ali would become Caliphate when he died, so, for them he should be caliph. For details please see *Tam Hüsnîye* (Ayyıldız Kitabevi Yayınları, 1958), p.13

⁴⁹ More information about the first cem and other cem rituals is explained next chapter.

⁵⁰ Aspersions on Alevis, such as “ana bacı bilmezler”, “mum söndü” means incest between Alevis during cem rituals.

especially during the last four centuries of Ottoman era. Thus, they were marginalized, discriminated and persecuted by the state. Aspersions about Alevis were the most useful tools to provoke Sunnis against Alevis. After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, new government embraced Alevis in the context of consolidating a secular state. It is thought that this minority group had early Turkish cultural features and a secular basis. In that sense, Alevis were considered as loyal citizens in Republican of Turkey as they supported state secularism. Discourse of “loyalty” was based on an embracement of secular values among Alevis. In the early 1960s, urban-rural migration by Alevi citizens rapidly urbanized Alevi cities. Modernization process also transformed the Alevi identity and its social order. Parallel to Kurdish and Islamist movements in Turkey, Alevi voices were weakly raised to assert Alevi identity. Politicized Alevis took place along the side of left wing activists. In name of ensuring stabilization throughout the country, the 1980 military coup oppressed all social and political movements, which paradoxically provided opportunities to the Alevis for acting independently. Starting from the late 1980s, Alevi identity was formulated in the political platform with certain demands. Academic and popular literature helped their identity, and voiced Alevi demands. Manifestation of the identity awakened group consciousness. However, Alevis still seek to create conditions to maintenance of Alevi identity in modern urban cities and need recognition like the Sunni belief and identity in Republic realm.

Even though Alevis has sought official recognition by state, what defines their identity is still problematic. Etymologically Alevi means, in Arabic, those who are 'members of Ali', 'belongs to Ali', 'supporter of Ali' or 'loves, respects and tied to Ali'.⁵¹ Historically, Alevi refers to those who come from Ali's family.⁵² Depending on these definitions, Alevi word has been used, in the history of religious sects, to refer to the people who accept that caliphate should be assigned by Mohammad's authority.⁵³ In cultural terms, Alevism has built up its own social institutions out of the area of religion. According to Cengiz, who explains these institutions as the products of the 'closed community' times for functioning the social life, Alevism constituted peculiar institutions like morality, family, law, politics, economy, education etc.⁵⁴

Obviously, there are certain differences between the rituals of different Alevi communities which were isolated from each other in the past. The reason behind the distinctive rituals and different life styles is the fact that Alevis largely have advanced oral traditions. There was a great deal of effort for interpretations, because of the necessity to attribute appropriate meanings to the rituals, which had already lost its impact on society. The same rituals were applied differently even they live together in the same conditions. The different approaches to define Alevism through the oral

⁵¹ Yahya Mustafa Keskin, *Kırsal Kesim Aleviliği* (Ankara: İlahiyat Yayınları, 2004), p.38

⁵² Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş: Efsaneden Gerçeğe* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1998), p.21

⁵³ Ethem Ruhi Fırlı, *Türkiye'de Alevi Bektaşilik* (İstanbul: Selçuk Yayınları, 1994), p.7

⁵⁴ Quoted in Ayhan Yalçınkaya, *Alevilikte Toplumsal Kurumlar ve Öznenin Siyasal Belirşi* (Master Thesis) (Ankara Üniversitesi, 1994), p.33

traditions resulted in various interpretations on definition of the Alevism. The explanation about Alevism in different regions and communities has reflections on the rituals of Alevi belief. Naturally, it has also significant impact on the comprehension of woman in those societies and the status of woman in the Alevi rituals, which is the main theme of my thesis.

III. 1. Different Approaches to Alevism:

As previously mentioned, defining Alevism is a contested concept. The main difficulty behind it is that Alevism is open to interpretations and it is questionable. This demonstrates that Alevism is open to reinterpretation. The challenging and criticizing are reflections of change, transformation and reproduction. Alevism is not static; neither is closed to the dogmatic style of thinking.

Bedri Noyan, known as Dedebaba⁵⁵, defines Alevism as the real Islam, which was manifested by Mohammad and implemented by Ali. This type of Islam is perceived as the one which was debugged from the Arabic effects.⁵⁶ Noyan emphasizes that after Turks accepts Islam as their own religion, the Alevi belief was shaped according to Turkish cultures within Islamic sense.

There are many researchers who describe Alevism as a belief system that is peculiar to the Turkish people. It is held that, it has emerged from the

⁵⁵ *Dedebaba*, person who guides people in Bektashi belief, is a concept used in Bektashi culture.

⁵⁶ Bedri Noyan, *Bektaşilik Alevilik Nedir?* (İstanbul: Can ve Ant Yayınları, 1995), p.93

distinctive blend of Islam with the historical Turkish beliefs and their rituals. While some argue that Alevism is specific to Turks, others claim that it is a part of the Kurdish culture. Because Kurds had also accepted the way of Ali, who was the symbol of justice in Islam.⁵⁷

Some thinkers have elaborated Alevism inside the nationalist discourse starting from 1990s, while they uploaded universal values to it on the other side. They point out that the Alevi values, which are tolerance, equality, justice take place inside the universal value system. However, they claim that these values reflect those of Turkish culture. The Pir Sultan Abdal Association states that Alevism has a meaning beyond being a religion. According to the Association, Alevism should be perceived as a philosophical tradition. Because Alevism puts the 'human' to its centre, it should be handled as a philosophical approach. Some leftist writers think that Alevism is a position which identify with the oppressed people. This view, Alevism becomes a revolutionary ideology held by the people oppressed under the religious pressure.⁵⁸

Yalçinkaya emphasizes the sectarian structure of Alevism.⁵⁹ He argues that, although Alevism looks like a political subject, it can transform itself clearly. This rendered the inclusion of non-traditional and heterodox

⁵⁷ Cemşit Bender, *Kürt Uygarlığında Alevilik* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1993), p.41

⁵⁸ Reha Çamuroğlu, *Günümüz Aleviliğinin Sorunları* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992), p.65. Because Sunni belief is in power, Alevis could not mention on their identities; thus, lots of them behave as they were Sunni, in order to avoid being marginalized by society.

⁵⁹ Ayhan Yalçinkaya, *Alevilikte Toplumsal Kurumlar ve Öznenin Siyasal Belirşi* (Master Thesis) (Ankara Üniversitesi, 1994), p.30

features into Alevism. He contends that, although there are a number of tendencies to define and entrench Alevism in the society, the dominant perspective on Alevism regard it as a belief system, and at the same time a method of culture and life style. Yalçınkaya claimed that, while Islam is one of the main resources that feed the Ali-centered iconized universe of Alevism, the other resource is the non-religious beliefs and cultures. The nomadic Turkish culture had merged with Shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Mani religion and partially Christianity-Nestorianism before Islam. Therefore, the Turks had melted the symbols of pre-Islamic period and religious features within those of Islam.

Massicard holds that “Alevism –belief, religion, culture, social and moral life style- is a serious challenge against the efforts of classification.”⁶⁰ She stresses that, while defining Alevism, the real source of problem is the necessity to grant permission for inserting the demands of Alevis into the definition of the society. The positioning of Alevism into one of the categories determines the criteria through which Alevism will take its place inside the society. While defining the reality, the Alevis shape the definition initially according to their worldly interests. The political discourse is declared via this method. Because, the definitions are vital to provoke and trigger the Alevi community for political activism. The simple details of definitions can stimulate the masses of Alevis. Massicard emphasized her doubts regarding the scientific bases of the definitions on Alevism. The reason behind it is the

⁶⁰ Elice Massicard, *Türkiye’den Avrupa’ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), pp:109-110

fact that the history of Alevism has not been written up to present. This causes the breaches in the Alevi history, which would have impact on the definition of the Alevism. She also stresses the discourse on identity in the definitions of Alevism. She points out that Alevis define their positions in relation to the others, the Sunnis, and this reality shows its effects in the definitions.

Although it is usually defined in religious terms, Alevism does not have religious sanctions, and does not impose certain lines about the Islamic restrictions. The reason behind the openness of Alevism's to novel definitions and interpretations originate from the fact of fuzziness of its identity.

III. 2. The Unity of Alevism and Bektashism:

Alevism and Bektashism are often dealt with together, and they are even used interchangeably. According to Melikoff,⁶¹ considering Alevism and Bektashism separately is impossible. Hunkar Hacı Bektash-i Veli was one of the caliphs of Baba İlyas. He was one of the heterodox Turkmen fathers, who were political and religious leaders of the Turkmen tribes that migrated to Anatolia. He was leading Islamist propaganda around Sulucakarahöyük. According to Vilayetname, Hacı Bektash-i Veli was carrying on the Islamist propaganda against the Shamanist Mongols and Christian people. He was sending his caliph followers to various parts of Anatolia. Hacı Bektash-i Veli did not establish his own religious sect during his life time. After his death,

⁶¹ Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş: Efsaneden Gerçeğe* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1998), p.147

thanks to the efforts of his followers, Abdal Musa and Kaygusuz Abdal, he became one of the leading holy figures of heterodox Turkmen nomadic (Abdal) in whole Anatolia and Balkans.

In the early periods of Ottoman state, those dervishes who had cognomens like 'Abdal', 'baba', 'dede' and 'ahi', were in the forefront and conquered different regions in Byzantium Empire and Balkan Peninsula. They were highly respected by the first Ottoman sultans. Not only they contributed to the conquests, but also they settled in the new villages and regions where they dealt with agriculture and livestock production. They contributed to the socio-economical development to the newly conquered regions. As a signal of the dervishes, who lived in 14th and 15th centuries, the graves and dervish lodges of those dervishes can be found in Balkans and Anatolia.

The Safevi state declared Shiism as the official religion of the state. This resulted in the decline of tolerance to and the rise of oppression over the heterodox groups in Anatolia in the period of Yavuz Sultan Selim. The term 'kızılbaş' was used to define the Safevian people in Ottoman state. However, by the rise of anti-Safevi movement in Ottomans, the term was started to be used to refer to the religious heterodox population. They were isolated from the system, and this isolation was achieved through slaughters and massacres. The Kızılbaşes were oppressed and enforced to migrate to other regions. At this point, the Alevi community, which was labeled as Kızılbaş, entrenched its power in the Ottoman Empire. The Hacı Bektash

dervish lodge undertook the mandate of the janissary military class. The loyalty of heterodox people to the dervish lodge of Bektashism increased day-by-day. The Alevism and Bektashism, which had similarities in basic terms, synchronized to each other in this period. The synchronization was so strong that the concepts of each party became the parts of the big cooperation.

Essentially, both Bektashism and Alevism put the human being to centre of focus. The way of belief is over every other thing. ‘Four doors and Forty places’ has its own place in both of the parties. The principle of ‘keeping the hand, tongue and semens’ of Bektashism had been adopted also by the Alevis; and it was internalized. Regarding the differences between two movements, the continuity of Alevism goes on through blood (descent); while continuity goes on via suffice (giving the hand) in Bektashism. It is thought that Hacı Bektash-i Veli did not have any children and the people to whom he gave hands were accepted as the members of the same way. On the other side, the Kadıncık Ana⁶² drank the water of Hacı Bektash’s ablution water. It is believed that she got pregnant after drinking that water. Those who came from this offspring were believed to be ‘dedebaba’ and rendered the spread of the Bektashism. The Alevis argue that the birth of their generation goes back up to Ali and the ‘Twelve imams’ that came after him. In Bektashism, those who devote themselves to the way of Bektash can be Bektashis. In Alevism, it is necessary to be a member of

⁶² ‘Kadıncık Ana’ is a dervish who welcomed Hacı Bektashi Veli, when he first came to Anatolia.

family of 'dede'⁶³ to be a 'dede', while in Bektashism, to take hand from one of leaders of Bektashism is adequate for being a 'dedebaba'.

Melikoff, in her book called *Hacı Bektaş Efsaneden Gerçeğe* (Hacı Bektaş: From Legend to Reality) explains Bektashism as follows: Bektashism-Alevism is not a religion; but it is a social phenomenon, the roots of which goes back to the tribes with its ties to beliefs and very old traditions. Analyzing the Bektashi belief is not a problem of 'believing'; instead it is a problem of learning, analyzing and trying to understand.⁶⁴

To call Alevism as 'the Alevi-Bektashi Belief' is also possible. The central position of human being in the Alevi-Bektashi belief demonstrates the love of the human being. This common feature of both beliefs can be one of the reasons for their better cooperation and collaboration. Both beliefs merged easily thanks to this love on human being. Thereafter, the approach of Alevism to human being and the perception of woman in same belief will be elaborated.

III. 2. i. The "Human Being" in the Alevi Bektashi Belief:

The human being is the symbol of God's (Allah) the excellent, magnificent and perfect power of creation. The human, honored by the God

⁶³ 'Dede' is the guide of Alevis. It is believed that origins of dedes roots to Ali. As a leader, responsibilities of dedes among Alevis are so crucial. They are responsible to preserve the belief for generations.

⁶⁴ Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş: Efsaneden Gerçeğe* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1998), p.200

as being his representative, is “the highest and greatest Holy Book to be read” according to Alevi philosophy.⁶⁵

In the Alevi sect, the people that are members of the community are described as “can”s (can: the life). In this concept, there is not a reference to the sex of the person. The ‘Can’ refers to the spirit in the body. After the spirit leaves the body, then the life of the body comes to an end. “Death is that of body, not the life” is the motto of this understanding. That is, the body is a part of the earth, and after the death it will be left on the earth. However, the spirit, referred as ‘Can’ will go on living after the death. “At this point, it is impossible that the spirit has a sex in the stage of the God. In Alevi belief, before being sent into the bodies, the spirits are sole spirits and they are sexless. That’s why, in the God’s level, all spirits are ‘can’s. The perception of the view is two sided in Alevism: the apparent one and the internal one. Because the life is more important, then the internal perception is more important than the other. The sexual view is inside the apparent one, and represents the outside view only. According to the belief, the real base is the identity inside, instead of the outside. The clothes are explanation of how the spirit gets the shape of the body.⁶⁶ The life wanders around in different clothes. The sex is one of those. In essence, all of them are spirits. Because the sex is one of the clothes, it is not so important.

⁶⁵ Hüseyin Özcan, “Asya Toplamlarını Etkileyen Alevi Bektasi Kültüründe İnsanın Değeri”, *1.Uluslararası Asya Felsefe Derneği Sempozyumu*, p.16, available at http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/HALKBILIM/huseyin_ozcan_alevi_bektasi_kulturu_asya_toplamlari.pdf (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

⁶⁶ Irene Melikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar* (İstanbul: Demos Yayınları, 2006), p.62

The discourse of Alevism argues that in the eyes of the God, all human beings are equal. That's why everyone is supposed to do the same act of worship. During the worship, the Alevis enter into the place through leaving out the sex factor, as a human being in a higher context. While entering into place, where Bektashis have worships, they emphasize that the personality of woman and man do not enter into the place.⁶⁷ In the act of worship, the person is with the God by his/her own personality and life, not his/her own sex. The person is isolated from his/her sexual identity. The following verses by Hacı Bektash reflect the idea of equality between man and woman:

Erkek dişi sorulmaz muhabbetin dilinde
Hakkın yarattığı her şey yerli yerinde
Bizim nazarıımızda kadın-erkek farkı yok
Noksanlık, eksiklik senin görüşlerinde⁶⁸.

The other one is "a female lion is also a lion."

The information, by Ibrahim Bahadır in his book "Alevi ve Sünni Tekkelerinde Kadın Dervişler (Woman Dervishes in Alevi and Sunni Dervish

⁶⁷ Belkıs Temren, "Bektaşî Alevî Kültüründe Kadın", in *I. Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Sempozyum Bildirileri* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Araştırma Merkezi, 1998), p.317

⁶⁸ "Male and female is not questioned in language of love

All God's creatures are in their valid places

In our perception, no difference between male and female

Ideas of deficiencies are in your views"

Lodges)”⁶⁹, is interesting: he gives descriptions in which the Alevi “eren”s do not have a certain sex. One of them points out that there were white and red roses in the place of Hacı Bektash’s testicles.⁷⁰ A similar story is told about Otman Baba with slight differences. There are two roses, a white and a red one, between the legs of Otman Baba.⁷¹ What those two cases mention is that, Hacı Bektash Veli, who is thought to be a part of the world, has been isolated from the sex devotions.

In the Alevi belief, the human being is assessed according to the contribution to the belief, instead of the sex he/she is. If the person has promoted in the sufistic essence thanks to his/her adulthood and behaviors, no matter it is a woman or man, he/she is in a higher rank than ordinary people, and is called as ‘er’. Although the Alevi community uses the word “Er” for an unisex structure, “Er” is also used for the meanings of mature, sophisticated, brave, just and hero. However, these words are the adjectives for the men, and the desire to define the model of woman by the men’s literature is obvious. This demonstrates how strong the patriarchal authority over the language is. Moreover, even the unisex character of the words and social realities are told through the patriarchal style of narrating. The point, that is the target to be achieved, is shown via the “er”, and this reality demonstrates the strong will to be a man. Even in the Alevi-Bektashi tenets,

⁶⁹ İbrahim Bahadır, *Alevi Bektaşî Kadın Dervişler* (Köln: Alevi Bektaşî Kültür Enstitüsü Yayınları, 2004), p.82

⁷⁰ Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Vilayetname* (İstanbul: İnkılap Yayınları, 1990), p.32

⁷¹ Yunus Koçak, *Hasan Dede: Hayatı ve Öğretisi* (Ankara: Hasan Dede Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları No:3), p.198

which stress the equality between woman and man, the ideal model has been defined as “er”, the man. It orientates the people to the demand to be born as a man. It results in the fact that the people want to behave like a man, to have the male characteristics to reach the goals of their lives, to spend efforts to have the same features with the men, and to achieve the level of ideal life. This can be seen in the lines of a woman dervish, Münire Baci:

“Erkan ile yürürüm

Yol ehlinin kuluyum

Ben bir erin oğluyum

Haydariyem Haydari”

Munire Baci defines herself as the son of an “er”, even though she is a woman. This definition does not carry any sexual implications. It naturally derives from the concept in the Sufism. It is a level, to which only the promotion people in the community can reach. She declares her level of promotion in the community, by using the motto ‘I am a son of an er.’⁷² Melikoff conceived Munire Baci as a woman which aims to reach the widely accepted values of the world.

Throughout the history of the mankind, patriarchy accomplished to push the woman behind the scenes. Then, woman was associated with “nature”, she was left to reproduce the children. That’s why women were not

⁷² Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş: Efsaneden Gerçeğe* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1998), p.200

able to create the symbols of the world history. In this ignorance, the Alevi woman had its own share. Munire Baci, who took the symbol produced by the men's hegemony as an example for herself, accepted the idea that being an "er" is the status to be achieved.

III. 2. ii. Women in Alevi- Bektashi Belief and Gender Dynamics:

When the status of women in Alevi Bektashi belief is analyzed from feminist approach, one should consider the perceptions on the relationship between the discourse and the reality. To begin with, the Alevis that transfer the discourse part of Alevism to us demonstrate the sociological reality of Alevism. The accrual differentiation between the discourse and reality may deplete the opinions about the woman in Alevi doctrine. The important points are those where the distinction of discourse and reality comes to an end. Uyanık has highlighted this point by claiming that "while Alevism is the name of a belief system, a globe of values that is a total of parts coherent with each other, the Alevis are social realities that constitute the correspondent of that system of belief and values."⁷³ According to Uyanık, the belief and the supporters of the belief who want to apply that belief into their lives may not totally overlap. The distance between belief and life may change according to the time and space. "The place of woman in Alevi-Bektashi doctrine and system of values and the place of woman among the Alevis at present will not lead to the same problem, but to different reflections of the same problem

⁷³ Zeki Uyanık, "Alevilik, Alevilerde Kadın", available at http://www.hbektasveli.gazi.edu.tr/dergi_dosyalar/32-29-35.pdf (last accessed on 11/09/2010)

in different platforms.”⁷⁴ Regarding how Alevi belief perceives gender dynamics, there are two main promises: the supremacy of women over men and equality between women and men. Now these two dimensions are evaluated.

III. 2. ii. a) The Supremacy of the Woman:

The main argument of Alevi belief for women’s status is the equality with men. Moreover, there are some views which accept the supremacy of woman on man. Temren has explained this fact in a symposium held in Ankara in 1998 as follows: “Quran defines the couple as Adam and his wife. In the interpretation made by the authorities of Bektashism, it is argued that, Adam should not be interpreted as a male, thanks to the definition in Quran. The explanation should be as ‘human and spouse’. However, if defining Adam as a male is necessary, then Bektashism describes the notion of Eve’s being created from Adam’s left rib bone as follows: ‘For emergence of holy development, the promotion of the man was necessity. The first wanted one was the last created. Then the first wanted and last created is Eve. Therefore, Eve is the holy development, and Adam is the promotion of man. The youngest is the greatest. The last comer is the most magnificent one.”⁷⁵

In the Sunni belief of Islam, due to the dogmas of belief, the man is believed to be the creator of woman. Therefore, the man has certain

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Belkis Temren, *Bektaşiliğin Eğitsel ve Kültürel Boyutu* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1998), p.171

supremacy over the woman. In the Alevi belief, because the woman was created later than man, the woman is thought as the supreme sex.

Ozcan claims that Alevis perceive the female as the light of the God.⁷⁶

As one of the folk tales of Alevis explains:

When the God created the universe, when there were no lands, when the ground and sky was water, a light came up in the candle. In that light, a woman was seen. She had a crown on her head, two rings in her two ears and a belt on her waist. The Angel Gabriel was shocked when he saw the woman. He asked the God that who she was. The God replied and said: Hey Gabriel, she is Fatima Zehra, who is the best of women in Heaven. Gabriel asked: Hey God, she is so beautiful. God replied: we created her from the light. Gabriel asked: what does she have on her head? The God replied: the crown on her head is the crown of the state. This is the prophet Mohammad Moustapha. The Gabriel wondered the belt on her waist. The God replied that it is Ali, the husband of Fatima. The Gabriel asked: What does she have on her ears? The God replied: They are Hassan and Hussein, the masters of heaven.

⁷⁶ Hüseyin Özcan, "Asya Toplamlarını Etkileyen Alevi Bektasi Kültüründe İnsanın Değeri", *I.Uluslararası Asya Felsefe Derneği Sempozyumu*, p.16, available at http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/HALKBILIM/huseyin_ozcan_alevi_bektasi_kulturu_asya_toplamlari.pdf (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

This case demonstrates that the existence of Mohammad, Ali, Hassan and Hussein have been integrated into the existence of Fatima. As the woman, she collected all of them in her body. She herself is the light.⁷⁷

III. 2. ii. b) The Equality of Genders:

➤ Equality

In addition to the view of supremacy of woman, the sources of the thoughts which perceive the man and woman together are the historical background of the 'cem' rituals. In the Alevi belief system, to see the woman equal with man and to bless the woman not less than man originates from the "Kırklar Cemi (Forties' Assemble)". This assemble is known as the convention of the highest rank authorities of Alevi belief. It is composed of 40 people, 17 of which are women. One of the women is believed to be Fatima Ana.⁷⁸ The number of the sexes in this assemble proves that there is almost equality between women and men. These reflections of this equality principle can be seen in the daily life style of the Alevi community. The rights of the women were respected, and the status of the women has never been in a subordination position in discourse. It is told that there are *twelve services* assistants in the Forties' Assemble, which were composed of men and women. It is mentioned that one of the sexes does not have hegemony over the other.

⁷⁷ Muharrem Naci Orhan, "Alevilikte Kadının Yeri", *Gerçek İlim* (Alevi Birlikleri Yayın Organı), available at www.gercekilim.com (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

⁷⁸ Irene Melikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar* (İstanbul: Demos Yayınları, 2006), p.65

In the Alevi-Bektashi belief, it is believed that the body of human being is the manifestation of the God. God reveals itself in the human body. Temren touched upon the two names of God, 'Cemal' and 'Celal'. The right side symbolizes Cemal, which is Mohammad; while the left side symbolizes Celal, which is Ali. In the doctrine, symbolization has a strong place. For the names of God, 'cemal' mentions the woman and 'celal' describes the man. In this symbolization, the symbols have been chosen according to the perception by the community. The woman is 'cemal', because she is fragile, delicate, should be approached with courtesy. Because of her weakness, she had to be protected. 'Celal' is a male, because he is hard, protective and potentially angry. The symbols of patriarchy have been used by the Alevis for symbolizing the Alevi facts.

Some argue that the free conditions for the woman in Alevi society originates from the early Turk beliefs. "In the early Turks, there was a family system which depends on the equality of man and woman. The sky was the King's (Hakan), while the earth was the Queen's (Hatun). In addition to 'Hatun' (Queen) and 'Han' (King), there was Begüm in Turkish tribes in the past. This notion and understanding is active in Alevi community, which are thought to be coming from Oğuz tribes in history."⁷⁹

The woman had a respected position and status in the past Turkish societies. The real owner of the land was the woman. The lady had precedence in the way to go. The same precedence was in the meal times.

⁷⁹ Yahya Benekay, *Yaşayan Alevilik* (İstanbul: Varlık Yayınları 1967), p.113

The family was a holy community and it was believed that there was a celestial power which preserves the family. Every family was a house for this power. The women were granted the authority to manage the house.⁸⁰ Because of these reasons, the Turkish tradition has identified the woman with the house and getting married is defined as getting a lady.⁸¹

Alevis demonstrate the importance of the gender equality for them by comparing the Alevi and Sunni women in terms of the 'value' of woman. In this concern, they point out how they define the identity of Alevi woman, in order to get official recognition by the state. Because, for Alevis, the Alevi woman is secular, free and equal with the man. These are the features of the woman, which the secular state supports as the female identity.

III.3 Comparison Between Status of Woman in Alevi and Sunni Beliefs

The literature on Alevi contains ample references to equality between men and women, asserting that women are more valuable than men, by differentiating certain characteristics of woman from the man. One of the important points in this context is the fact that the perception of woman in Alevi belief is explained by comparing the Sunni practices over women and equality with men.

⁸⁰ Cemal Bardakçı, *Milli, Tarihi, Dini, İctimai, Siyasi, İktisadi ve İdari Bakımlardan Alevilik Ahilik Bektaşilik* (Ankara: Türkiye Matbaacılık ve Gazetecilik, 1950), p.42

⁸¹ Belkıs Temren, "Bektaşî Alevî Kültüründe Kadın", in *I. Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Sempozyum Bildirileri* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Araştırma Merkezi, 1998), p.319

The Sunni section of Islam can be described as the Orthodox branch of Islam religion, while Alevi part is more heterodox in terms of social relations. In the Sunni tradition, the communication between woman and man, their social interactions and close contacts in the same conditions are restricted under certain and harsh rules. In the Alevi-Bektashi belief, the case is completely opposite. The religious rituals where both sexes attended were held before the Islamic era of Turkish history. These were carried on among Turks after the introduction of Islam.⁸² However, although Alevi interpretations for woman's status are much more liberal than Sunni belief, this does not mean that there are no problems in this issue. In the evaluation of the woman's status in the Alevi belief, the first and foremost feature to consider is woman and man's sharing the same places and social conditions without any problems. There are no great differences between the life styles of man and woman. This description of Alevi woman is for the objective of demonstrating the freedom conditions of Alevi society while compared to that of the Sunni branch of Islam.

For Alevi belief, women and men are always hand in hand in both rituals and daily lives. She should not run away or get out of the place. The man should be observed as a guest and should be treated in this way. In order not to be rude, the Alevi woman interested with the guest men as much as possible.

⁸² In 750, there was a war called as Talas, between Chinese people and Arabs. Turks took place on Arab's side. It was the first introduction of Turks with Islam.

Unlike Sunni, in Alevi belief women are not seen as the source of “fitna”. In the previous chapter, the use of woman as a tool of fitna was mentioned by Mernissi. Being a tool of fitna is the reason for keeping the woman of the men in orthodox Islam. Not to provoke men in sexually, the women are oppressed to cover themselves. On the same issue, Alevism puts forward explanations.

III.3.a) The Interpretations on Quran Verses by Alevism:

There is a strong belief in the discourse of Alevism that the Quran had been changed, especially in Omayyad and Abbasid reigns. In other words, Alevis think that some ayeds were changed intentionally. Alevi Dede, Orhon⁸³, claimed that Alevis do not believe some parts of Quran, which they argue, was Sunnified throughout the history. Especially those sourats and ayeths, in which the treatment against women, like violence, polygamy etc. were justified, are rejected by the Alevi belief. The main reason is that the equality of women and men withers away in those Quranic rules.⁸⁴

Contrary to the Sunni belief; Monogamy established a condition in Alevi belief. The monogamy of Ali is demonstrated as a good example and Mohammad’s first marriage is perceived as the only valid one. This recognition of Hz. Hatice as only wife of Mohammad was repeated in the

⁸³ Hüseyin Orhon, *Alevi İbadeti* (İstanbul: Ufuk Matbaacılık, 2010), pp.163-165

⁸⁴ For him, in Abbasid term, ayeths (verses) and hadiths were reinterpreted by Sunnis according to their thoughts. Even ayeths were the same, because interpretation changed, then meanings of ayeths were announced as they wish.

interviews with 'Dede's I had.⁸⁵ 'Dede's also held that the monogamy is the sole form of marriage in Alevism. About the issue of divorce, the person who wants to divorce is perceived as 'düşkün' (indigent). The indigent person is isolated from the community and the way of the society. The only reason for divorce is sexual relationship out of marriage. Man or woman, who commits the crime of out of marriage sexual relationship, she/he is isolated from the social life. Men are not allowed to divorce with arbitrary decisions. This is a rule for protecting the woman in the society. If the man gets divorce with invalid arbitrary reasons, then he is declared as indigent and cannot use social rights for a while. He cannot do his worships, and cannot enter into social rituals of worships. This prevents women from being a tool which can be ignored or used whenever the men want. This application for the sake of woman is vital for the periods of time when there was no social security of economic freedoms. However, after urbanization of the Alevi community, although there are still similar implementations of social rules, the indigency and declaring a person as indigent is more difficult than the past. To apply all of the traditions in city life is totally impossible.

In the Alevi doctrine, in addition to monogamy, the rules of equality are also explicit. The inheritance is shared between man and woman equally. The witnessing of both man and woman has the same importance in cases. The worship of Alevism is done by men and women together. There are no

⁸⁵ Veli Akkul is dede of Şahkulu Vakfı. He said: "In Alevi belief, divorce is out of topic. With marriage, woman and man complete each other. As Hz. Muhammed said: "Ali, you should be slave of Fatma as she is slave of you." Celal Çelik, dede of Karacaahmet said: "Hz. Muhammed got married only to Hz. Hatice. Ayşe is known as also wife of Muhammed but he did not touch even his hand to her. He just took care of her."

texts which declare that woman should be isolated from public life. In the 'Buyruk', almost holy book of Alevi, there are no texts which mention that women should be in the subordinate position and behind the scenes.⁸⁶ As mentioned in the chapter II, the subordinate position of the woman has been concreted in the verses of Quran, the order of God, through the institutions of inheritance, witnessing, and polygamy. In Alevism, in contrast to the Sunni discourse, the verses which support those ideas are refused. The Alevi portrait, which is secular, democratic and respectful to human rights are underlined. The significant point here is that, Alevism defines itself through the other side. However, it attempts to define itself by using the problematique of woman. Hence, objectification of the women for drawing the framework of Alevi's social characteristics is prevalent among Alevi.

In the Alevi life style, it is emphasized that the daughters of a family are as valuable as the sons of that. It is believed that Havi Bektashi Veli, to whom most of Alevi are tied with great respect, said "educate your women". This recommendation by him is respected and applied. Because they support the equality, Alevi do not say 'I have two children and three daughters' while talking about their children.⁸⁷

The Alevi woman is portrayed as the idealized woman who is in much better conditions than the Sunni woman. This conception is manipulated by

⁸⁶ Sefer Aytakin, *Buyruk* (İstanbul: Maarif Kitaphanesi, 1958), p.46

⁸⁷ Yaşar Seyman, *Alevi Öğretisinde ve Toplumsal Yaşamda Kadın*, available at http://www.psakd.org/makaleler/alevi_bektasi_geleneginde_kadinin_yeri.html (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

the Alevi community. The Alevi woman is holified through the motto that Sunni women are worse than Alevi, and the Sunni belief insults the woman. Then, she is supposed to thank God for these good conditions, when compared to Sunni women. However, this prevents the right of Alevi woman to write their own history. This belief prevents this. The subordination of Alevi woman is hidden by these arguments, which claim that Alevi woman is much better than Sunni counterparts.

The freedom at this point is described via comparing the situation in Sunni women. As Vorhoff contented that using the woman figure to attack to other side and to glorify his/her own society has been a vital weapon in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies.⁸⁸ The fact that there is not an individualistic understanding of probity, but a tied-to-man view prevented the women from a number of rights and freedoms.⁸⁹ This applies to most of communities in Turkey, including Alevis.

III.3.b) Alevi Perspective on Marriage With Sunni Man:

Another point is the marriages between Alevis and Sunnis. There are no restrictions when the Alevi girl marries to the Sunni boy. With the urbanization and life in cities, keeping the Alevi traditions has been more difficult than in the past. The cities have more cosmopolitan structure and the core traditions of Alevi community began to dissolve in urban life. However,

⁸⁸ Karin Vorhoff, "Türkiye'de Alevi Kadını: İddialar ve Gerçekler", *Tarihsel ve Aktüel Boyutlarıyla Türkiye'de Aleviler, Bektaşiler, Nusayriler* (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 1997), p.253

⁸⁹ Ibid.

the interesting point is about the marriages. The traditional rules mentioned above are still valid and applied by Alevi community. The reason for refraining from Alevi woman-Sunni man marriage is as follows: there is the common idea that the Alevi woman will lost her freedom and rights when she marries to a Sunni man. The Alevis believe that Sunni families are restrictive on women. So, they are not favorable with this kind of a marriage. However, the Alevi authorities and authors, who support universalism and love to human being as the essence of belief, are in difficult with this issue. Vorhoff offers an explanation by stating that: "Still there is a way to tie these attitudes with the traditional Alevism. Alevism may be declared as a kind of Medieval modernism, and the concepts that rise in 19th and 20th centuries can be declared as the core features of old Alevism. Thus, when rejecting the inter-belief marriages, the Alevi writers had to declare that this rejection originates from the attitude of the 'other'. It is told that a Sunni bride will not have any problems in Alevi family, because the Alevi family will allow her freedom. However, it is emphasized that Alevi bride in Sunni family will face oppression and will lose her equal rights. It is told that the woman is subject to man in Sunni family, and man can marry with other woman as second or third wives."

III.3.c) Alevi Approach on Veiling:

In the chapter of Woman and Islam, the perception of woman in Islam religion was evaluated through the Sunni sect, which is the Orthodox group of Islam. Leaving Alevi belief out of the whole picture causes imperfect

analysis of Islam on women's issues. The notion that the woman is a center of temptation of men was analyzed in the book of Rıza Algül.⁹⁰ In Alevism, there is not a specific rule, which prohibits social relations between the sexes, for keeping the woman off the men in order to prevent temptation of men. In addition, there are no rules for covering the woman's body to "protect her". Moreover, it is claimed that if sexual arousal occurs, then the responsibility belongs to men. If men are easily affected by the temptation of woman's body, this demonstrates a characteristic problem of men. Regarding the veiling of woman's body, it is claimed that the rules to veil women does not result in a solution; instead it creates new restrictions for the women. In those conditions, even the women's need for protection was obvious; the mistake of taking precautions against the aggressive men has functioned against the rights of women. The guilt in this circle is not individual. Conversely, the guilty is the system itself and the dominants of it.

The Sunni belief claims that the woman should stay behind the scene, and this is perceived as an order of the God. In Alevism, on the contrary, it is thought that those who impose the hegemony of men as the order of the God in the historical perspective, and those who idealize this fact are the hegemonic classes which benefit from the economical exploitation of the women.

⁹⁰ Rıza Algül, *Geçmiş ve Gelecek Gözüyle Alevilik: İnsandan Başka İnsandır* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1999), p.231

III. 4. Important Woman Figures in Alevism:

In the early Alevi doctrine, the value devoted to the woman in society, the perception of the women themselves as the individuals of the society are vital points. The examples for the vitality of woman's contributions to doctrine are the sacred status of Fatima, the life style of Hacı Bektashi Veli which was indoctrinated by Kadincik Ana, the function of Atasagun sisters and Bacıyan-l Rumi their being dervish in dervish lodges, and Husniye, who was known for her cleverness. These examples will be examined below.

The Status of Fatima:

Fatima has a special place in the Alevi doctrine. The loyalty to Fatima is almost similar to the loyalty to Ali. Fatima is called as Fatima Ana (Mother Fatima) among the Alevis. She is the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad, and wife of Ali. She is the only body who combines the prophecy power of Mohammad and imamate power of Ali. She is a member of the prophecy family. She is in the group which was labeled by Prophet as his surroundings. Fatima is accepted as the first moral leader of Sufi "Kutbun" group. That's why she has a special place for Alevis.⁹¹ The spiritual beauty of Fatima was endorsed by the Prophet Mohammad. Moreover, she is the mother of two grandsons of Mohammad, Hassan and Hussein, who were killed in a tragic way.⁹² Another distinguishing feature of Fatima is the fact that only

⁹¹ Margaret Smith, *Bir Kadın Sufi: Rabia* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1991), p.38

⁹² Aliyah Schleifer, *İslamın Kutsal Meryem'i: Peygamber mi Evliya mı?* (İstanbul: Gelenek Yayınları, 2003), p.17

descendants of Fatima are accepted as 'seyyid', that means the descendants of the Prophet. Hayrunisa, the greatest of the woman, is the adjective devoted to Fatima, with his mother Hadija. In the Shi'a tradition, Fatima is the example of good Muslim mother.

As seen, Fatima Ana was on the forefront with his features on belief. Moreover, because she was daughter of Prophet and wife of Ali, she had a special place in Alevi communities' ideas. She gained sacred position through her father and husband. Fatima had three children: Hassan, Hussein and Zeynep. Hassan and Hussein (the sons) were seen as the part of Ehl-i Beyt, the people of Prophet. However, Zeynep was not interpreted as one of those people. During my interviews, I asked the 'Dede's the reason of hers being exclusion from Ehl-i Beyt. They replied that up to that moment, they had not paid attention to this issue. Instead of criticizing the issue, they had accepted as it is. This shows that the descendance of the family and even the belief is carried on by the son, instead of the daughters. Even in the Alevi doctrine, which supports the equality of the sexes, did not change this patriarchal system of society. One indication is that while there is a lot of information about Hassan and Hussein, there is only a little about Zeynep.

Fatima gained her position in Alevi community through her father, husband and children. Interesting point is that, in the resources regarding Alevism, there are not any mottos or sayings of Fatima Ana. Although there are a lot of compliments for Fatima in discourse, the lack of information about her is striking.

Atasagun Sisters:

In Bektashism, one person can get the adjective of 'perfect' after a long time of experience in the community. This can only be achieved after a long time of service for community. One of the services to be held is the institution of nursery. In the voluntary institution called 'Atasagun Hemşireleri', the woman who take part in services are those who had totally devoted themselves to the way of Bektash. Those who started to go on the way without any discrimination between the sexes constitute the group of sisters who care after the ill people.⁹³

Bacıyan-ı Rum and Kadıncık Ana:

The other group of woman dervishes is the 'Bacıyan-ı Rumlar', which means the sisters of Anatolia. The first information about this group comes from Aşıkpaşazade. According to his study of history, there are 4 groups of people that came to Anatolia in 1481:⁹⁴

Gaziyanı rum (Anadolu Gazileri)

Ahiyanı Rum (Anadolu Ahileri)

Abdalan-ı Rum (Anadolu Abdalları)

Bacıyan-ı Rum (Anadolu Bacıları)

⁹³ Belkıs Temren, "Bektaşî Alevî Kültüründe Kadın", in *I. Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Sempozyum Bildirileri* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Araştırma Merkezi, 1998), p.320

⁹⁴ Necati Gültepe, *Türk Kadın Tarihine Giriş: Amazonlardan Bacıyan-ı Ruma* (İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 2008), p.76

The first leader of Bacıyan-ı Rum, as far as known, is Fatma Baci, who is Kadincik Ana. There is no certain information regarding the origins of this organization. The historians claim that Bacıyan-ı Rum is also a branch of the 'Ahi' organization. Moreover, the Assyrian historian Ebu'l-Ferec Gregory has mentioned the women's organization in his writings.⁹⁵ According to historian Mikail Bayram, the first writer to mention the woman warriors is the Mohammad, the son of Şeyh Şemsü'd –din Ömer et-Tiflis, who is the caliph of the father, Şeyh Evhadu'd –Din Hamid el Kirmani, of Fatma Baci. Kadincik Ana, on the other hand, is one of the first people among 'eren's, who felt the incoming of Hacı Bektashi Veli, when he stepped in Anatolia.⁹⁶ Fatma Ana was grown up by Hacı Bektashi Veli, and his all information was transferred to her. After death of Hacı Bektashi Veli, Kadincik Ana undertook the duty of continuing the road, and raised the women and men together. She is known to be the person who grew up Abdal Musa.

Of the functions of Bacıyan-ı Rum organization is to guide the families who had been migrated from Transoxiana, especially the Turanian part. Moreover, they were active to render those families adapt themselves to the new geography and conditions. Hacı Bektash, in his writings (*Velayetname*), informs that Fatma Hatun is a great guide for people and she educates not only the women but also the men.

⁹⁵ *Ebu'l Ferec Tarihi, II*, p.5429 quoted in Necati Gültepe, *Türk Kadın Tarihine Giriş: Amazonlardan Bacıyan-ı Ruma* (İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 2008), p.77

⁹⁶ Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, *Velayetname* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2007), p.18

Hüsniye:

Husniye is the profile of pre-12th century woman dervish, whose identities were found out. In fact, she was a slave; but her relation with her master was rather a relation of guide and follower. She got lectures from Imam Cafer for a long time, and became one of the leading wise people of her time. She has shown up against the Abbasid Caliph Haroun Reshid, and demonstrated how wise and smart she is. The leading subjects of her discussions were religious acts, destiny, the Prophet and Imams, the debates over Ebu Bekir. It is obvious that, although the women are sacred through their father, husband or children, there are some women who have been in the forefront of Alevism thanks to their own features, like knowledge and abilities. At this point, it is clear that the discourse and practical experiences coincided with each other at that time.⁹⁷

Woman Dervishes:

It is known that, as can be seen in the examples below, in the Alevi belief the women has managed the dervish lodges as caliphs and they had a number of followers in the dervish lodges. The best example of this is Kadincik Ana, who undertook the post after death of Hacı Bektashi Veli. She raised Abdul Musa, who is known as the thinker who conceptualized Bektashism.⁹⁸ In fact, in this dervish lodge, it is argued that there were a

⁹⁷ For more information, please look at Sefer Aytekin (Hazırlayan), *Hüsniye* (Ankara: Emek Basım Yayınevi, 1957)

⁹⁸ Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş: Efsaneden Gerçeğe* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1998), p.200

number of Alevis who grew up. One of them is Seyit Ali Sultan, known as Kızıldeli, who is known as a guest of Hacı Bektash Tekke, as written in his own publication.⁹⁹ It is thought that a lot of Alevi dervishes grew up in this dervish lodge.

Once the number of women dervishes in the history is checked, it is obvious that the number of them is not less. This has been elaborated by Ibrahim Bahadır, in his book 'Alevi ve Sünni Tekkelerinde Kadın Dervişler'. I will only repeat their names and the origins. Kız Ana, as mentioned in Demir Baba Vilayetnamesi, managed the Tekke from her post¹⁰⁰; Anşa Baci, who lived in Tokat¹⁰¹; Zöhre Bacı in Afyon region.¹⁰²

In the past, the number of the women who rose up to the positions of leadership on Alevi belief was quite high; but as time passes, the leadership of the woman is challenged. The woman examples provide good sampling for the women, although the literature is written by the men. The woman figures that take part in Alevism is significant, even though the leadership position of the woman is remained ambiguous.

As mentioned in this chapter, Alevism emerged as one of the opposition movements after the death of Islam's prophet. The power

⁹⁹ For the details of bibliography of Seyit Ali Sultan, please see Bedri Noyan, *Seyyit Ali Sultan Vilayetnamesi* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Yayınları, 1999)

¹⁰⁰ Bedri Noyan, *Demir Baba Vilayetnamesi* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1976), p.67

¹⁰¹ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "İstila Devirlerinin Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri ve Zaviyeler", *Vakıflar Dergisi*, No.2, 1942, p.283

¹⁰² Necat Birdoğan, *Anadolu ve Balkanlarda Alevi Yerleşmesi: Ocaklar, Dedeler, Soy Ağaçları* (İstanbul: Mozaik Yayınları, 1995), p.178

struggles of that time brought about sectarian division of Islam society. The identity of Alevi community got its roots from the way on which Ali's discourse was pursued. However, the Alevi community had to build up its own life style to preserve the belief system. One of the leading parts of the identity formation was the status of woman in the society. Alevis allowed the woman to acquire high ranks and authoritative positions in the community. Therefore, woman's status strengthened itself as the outstanding element of Alevi identity.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S POSITION IN CEM RITUALS:

THE CASE OF ISPARTA AND CEM VAKFI

As emphasized in the previous chapter, according to the Alevi’s point of view the source of love towards human beings lies in the perception of the humans as the manifestation of God. Human beings are called as “Can” (beloved) and this term does not state any gender. Can is not a woman or a man. Can is a human being and people following this way are all “Can” not considering their being woman or man, young or old, poor or rich. Due to this point of view, woman is not assessed in a secondary position. Women are as valuable as men and men are as valuable as women. Women are even believed to be more valuable than men according to some writers. In the Alevi’s belief where everyone is considered to be equal, gender is a cloth only put on the “can”. The concept of death is considered as a kind of “immigration” in Alevi discourse. In this immigration, one may be born again in another soul. For this reason, a person being a woman today may be another person after a migration. According to this understanding, gender is a cloth worn by the souls in this world. Being equal as “Can” prevents the understanding of superiority or inferiority of genders which are just clothes.

As Alevi rituals Cems are in the center of Alevi belief. It is possible to see in cem rituals whatever the belief orders. Cem rituals form the practices of Alevi belief with all the preparations before the rituals, practices during the cem and lokma (yeast fritters in eaten syrup) eaten after the ritual. Cem rituals embody the practical application the Alevi belief and show the perception of woman to what extent this perception realized in the rituals. The following account explains the historical roots of Cem rituals, the meanings of symbols in Cem and elaborates specifically on the approach of woman issue in Cem rituals.

As mentioned in the introduction, I attended six cem rituals five being in Istanbul and one in Isparta from the beginning to the end. The Alevi Institute assisted me about the venue and time of rituals I was going to attend. The Alevi Institute called Cem foundations to help me for my recording the rituals and informed them about my attendance. The cem rituals I attended in Istanbul was planned to be held on different days of January 2010. And I attended the Cem in Isparta on 6 March 2010 later with the assistance of the Institute. The Alevi Institute had informed the “dede” of the Cem about my thesis. Traditionally, the Cems are mainly carried out between September - March. However, Cems may be put off due to air conditions or different reasons. They are generally arranged in Thursday evenings. Cems can be arranged on Saturdays or Sundays for the attendance of those people who work during week.

In Istanbul, the four Cem rituals I attended were organized by the foundations while one was organized at house in Kartal to which I could attend with my own efforts. The cem rituals organized by the foundations were similar to each other. The rituals are conducted by one or more dede working for the foundation. The Cem houses where the rituals are organized are cleaned by the employees of the foundation. Those performing the *Twelve Services* during the cem rituals are the people trained at the courses taught voluntarily by the foundation. Dividing the lokma, to be eaten after the ritual, into equal shares is also done voluntarily by the employees of the foundation. The cem rituals organized by foundations generally display similar dynamics. The cem in Isparta presented no difference from the others in terms of being organized at cem house, under the leadership of a dede, performing the *Twelve Services*, distribution of lokma after the ritual. However it was also different in some aspects from the cem ritual of foundations; men and women working for preparation of the cem house for the ritual had dined together, there was a figure of Ana (Mother) apart from dede in the ritual, and this woman made her presence felt during the whole ritual, sitting positions of the attendees, presence of different parts of cem, questioning the people who wanted the ritual to be performed, performing of “nefes” (religious songs in Alevi belief) by women. Since there are more concrete examples in terms of gender dynamics at rituals organized by foundations, a detailed feminist assessment of the woman positions at cems performed at Cem foundations and in Isparta will be followed in this chapter. By comparing the two cems at different points, it will be possible to discern

differences between the discourse and ritual and account for the observed gaps between the discourse and the ritual. The analysis in this chapter which includes the comparison and contrast of the cem in Isparta (considered having the most egalitarian structure) and most strictly organized cem at the Cem Foundation in Istanbul demonstrates the problematic dimensions of practical applicability of gender equality principle in Alevi discourse.

It is important to mention the other cem rituals I attended in Istanbul, apart from the ones organized at the Cem Foundation, in order to better understand the range of variations and the differences among the cem rituals. Other cems I attended were organized by the following foundations: Hacı Bektaşî Veli Vakfı, Karacaahmet Vakfı, Şahkulu Cem vakfı. At these three foundations, the cem rituals are carried out under the leadership of a dede as it was at the Cem Foundation. Unlike the Cem Foundation, however, the attendees of the ritual, men and women, entered through the same door. As observed at all of the foundations, women sat at one side and men at the other side. It was observed that the number of women attending to the cem rituals was always more than the number of men. The room where the cem is performed was quite wide and dede, rehber (the guide) and zakir sat on a high platform to be seen by everybody. Women sat at one side of this platform and men sat at the other side. In the middle, people trained at the foundation to perform the *Twelve Services* were situated so as to form a ring. In Istanbul, the dede, rehber and zakir were men at all the cem rituals. The *Twelve service* people were mainly men, but there were women as well.

Towards the end of cem ritual, the first semah (whirling) was performed by men and women together. The latter semah performances were women only, men only or together again. After the cem ritual, the lokma brought by the attendees were divided into equal shares by the employees of the foundation and presented to the attendees. In sum, egalitarian aspects of the ceremony come into being.

IV.I. The Cem Rituals

Cem is the name of the holly ritual of worshipping performed by the Alevi - Bektaşî people together with the community. The cem rituals have different names such as Ayin-i Cem, mehman, erkan, Ali Cemi, Görgü Cemi, İçeri Kurbanı¹⁰³ and means “collecting, gathering, community, crowd” in Arabic language. However, according to Korkmaz the root of Cem term is rather complex. According to Iran statements the word is coming from the sultan named Cem who discover wine.¹⁰⁴

There are two important claims about the historical roots and emergence of cem ritual. The first one is that it resembles to the shamanist rituals. After the Turks accepted Islam, they wished to continue their old traditions, and as they were more integrated to Alevi communion than Sunni, they found the opportunity to continue their old religious rituals in this way. When we consider the ritual characteristics of Shamanism, Zoroastrianism,

¹⁰³ Mehmet Yaman, *Alevilik, İnanç, Edeb, Erkan* (İstanbul: Ufuk matbaacılık, 2004), p.186

¹⁰⁴ Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnanç, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000), pp:205-206

and Mani religion, we see that the Shamans gather at the house of the leader at certain days of the week, they dance accompanied by lute (a musical instrument) and drink kumis (fermented mare's milk). The cem rituals are like the continuation of the rituals in Shamanism.¹⁰⁵ As in Shamanism, the cem ritual is present in Zoroastrianism and Buddhism as well.¹⁰⁶

Another dominant view about the historical root of Cem rituals was stated in *Buyruk*.¹⁰⁷ As the story goes, Mohammed and Cebrail encounter a lion on the way to Mirac¹⁰⁸. The lion does not permit Mohammed to pass to the other side. Cebrail says Mohammed to give the lion a token to let them pass. The Prophet gets off his ring and leaves it to the mouth of the lion. On the way back from Mirac, the Prophet sees a dome in Mina. When he knocks the door, a voice is heard from inside saying "Who is that?" when the Prophet says "Mohammed Prophet has come", the people inside replies "be the prophet of your communion, we have no prophet". After this, the prophet says that "I am from your community, I am a human and want to see you" and the people inside let him in. The prophet sees that there are 17 women and 22 men inside and asks "who are you?", and they answer "we are called the forties, one of us is forty, forty of us is one". After this the Prophet states that they are 39, they say that "Selmanı Pak is out". The prophet wants them to show a sign for forty of them being one and when Ali wounds his arm, the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Sefer Aytekin, *Buyruk* (İstanbul: Maarif Kitaphanesi, 1958), p.9

¹⁰⁸ From the interview with Hacı Baktaşlı Veli Vakfı, Cemal Aslan Dede in 17 December 2009.

arms of all of the 39 people bleed and one drop of blood comes from the top. They say that the drop belongs to Selmanı Pak. The prophet believes them. Selmanı Pak enters inside with a grape, gives it to the prophet and wants him divide it for everybody. The prophet grinds it and everyone has a sip, the one getting carried away stand up to whirl. Mohammad also attends them and his turban falls off and break into forty pieces. Everyone from the community takes one piece and fastens around their waist. In this way they become “kemberbest”. Mohammad sees the ring he gave to the lion on the way to Mirac on the finger of Ali. He hugs him.¹⁰⁹ Despite being mythologically expressed, this situation shows that cem rituals are traced back to ancient times.

As at the “cem of forties” men and women were together, they saw the Prophet as one of them, they whirled together, women and men attend to cem ritual together. It is preliminary condition that every one leaves his / her title and gender outside. Everyone is equal there; no one has a superior feature.

During the winter, cem rituals are generally held at night from Thursday to Friday. However in Istanbul, cem rituals are performed on Saturdays, even sometimes on Sundays for people working during week days. Every Alevi performs Cem ritual once a year, in this way, he / she is voluntarily questioned once a year. Although everyone has the right to attend to Cem rituals regardless of their sex, whether they are poor or rich, young or

¹⁰⁹ Sefer Aytekin, *Buyruk* (Istanbul: Maarif Kitaphanesi, 1958), p.10

old, some people are not permitted to attend to cem. These are the ones divorced from their spouses without a reasonable ground, ones having unlawful income, committing false witnesses, thieves, killers, people disrespecting their parents, people disturbing their neighbors, people misusing the rights of employees and orphans. In this way cem rituals are purified from people with bad intentions.¹¹⁰ However, the cem rituals in Istanbul performed by foundations are open for everybody. All people, whether they are Alevi or not, believer or atheist, young or children can attend to the rituals.

Among the important characteristics of cem rituals are leadership of dedes, mixed men and women to the rituals, whirling together, questioning the attendees, eating for the sake of their belief, and presence of a drink. Apart from being a way of worshipping, cem rituals have another feature. There is an obligatory duty of cem rituals. Reconciling of the sulky people, punishing the ones smearing, helping the ones getting smeared are done under the leadership of dede during “questioning”. The punishments given to the guilty people change according to the crimes they commit. For instance, the punishment for seizure, smearing against one’s honour is making the guilty stand on a hot iron sheet, while the punishment for people ravishing one’s chastity, honour are not allowed in the cem houses, no one speaks to that person in his hometown, he is subjected to social isolation,

¹¹⁰ Mehmet Yaman, *Alevilik, İnanç, Edeb, Erkan* (İstanbul: Ufuk matbaacılık, 2004), p.186

neighborhood relations are cut off.¹¹¹ As the cem rituals also known to be public courts, the strictest punishment is one's perversion, leaving to poverty.

According to the belief, The God is a manifested in humans. Hence, every person is a part of God. For this reason, a person who adopts the trinity of God, Mohammed, and Ali finds himself / herself at cem houses which are a place of music, dance, drinking together, talking, realizing individual and social duties and being a good human being in this way¹¹². For this reason, cem rituals are a kind of journey inside one's own self, a way of getting rid of one's shortcomings rather than simply a collective worship.¹¹³

In the Alevi belief, Cem is an authority where Alevi belief is lived, the source of this belief comes into being. Cem rituals are important for research about the Alevis as it provides ideas about the evolution of the belief, what additions and extractions are made, historical continuation of the belief and which assets have lost their value. The cem rituals also draw attention to the continuation, application, forming the center of the belief. The cem rituals are the sites where all the discourses of the Alevi belief come into existence. In order to see the practice of every kind of discourse on belief, these discourses have been symbolized in Cem rituals. All of the practices performed during cem have symbolic meanings. Not only the applications but also the place, door, area, the animal to be sacrificed have symbolic

¹¹¹ Mehmet Kızılgöz, *Anadolu Aleviliğinde Yargı ve Sorgu Cemi* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Yayınları, 1997), p.59

¹¹² Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000), p.215

¹¹³ Quoted in interview with Mehmet Turan dede in Ankara in 25 March 2010.

meanings. These symbols of Cem rituals needed to be touched upon in order to better express the practices in cems and in the Alevi belief, and to shed light to the relation between men and women in cems.¹¹⁴

- Area: it is the place of worshipping for the attendees of cem. The fact of Cem is formed and applied there. According to the belief, humans are coming from the sand, the sand is holly, and therefore they entreat for the area.

- The house or cem house where the cem is performed is a proof of the seen or unseen universe. The attendees of cem in fact set off a journey in themselves. The area is believed to unify the inner and outer worlds of the attendees.

- Middle of the area, “Dar” or “Darı Mansur”: When Hallacı Mansur said “enel Hak” (I am God) according to his belief, he was executed. Being hanged for one’s belief created a tremendous impression among Alevi people and they began to call the middle of the area Darı Mansur.¹¹⁵ The middle of the area where the worship is performed, attendees are questioned, people whirl, is holly according to their belief. It is the symbol of saying that they can give their lives for the sake of their belief like Hallacı Mansur. If the person in the middle is guilty, he cannot leave the area (dar)

¹¹⁴ For more information on that topic please look at the book Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000)

¹¹⁵ Ali Duran Gülçiçek, *Alevilik, Bektaşilik, Kızılbaşlık ve Onlara Yakın İnançlar*, Vol. 2 (Köln: Ethnographia Anatolica Verlag, 2004), p.639

until he is purified. The person not reaching to the spiritual cleanliness does not have a place in the cem. His name is cleared off.

The Dar has different names apart from Mansur darı, such as Dar-ı Fatma or Dar-ı Hüseyin, Dar-ı Fazlı and Dar-ı Nesimi. Each dar has its own standing position. But I want to emphasize Dar-ı Fatma here.

Fatma has a holly place in the Alevi belief, she is not only mentioned as the daughter of the prophet, wife of Ali or mother of Hasan and Huseyin, she is the person having unified the divine light of prophecy and imamet light, her light is even believed to be present in the world before everybody.¹¹⁶ Fatma and Hüseyin symbolize to be ready to sacrifice one's life for his / her belief. In this dar position, (also known to be Hüseyin Darı) the thumb of the right foot is put on the thumb of the left foot, hands are on the knees or the right hand is on the heart, the head is slightly dropped.¹¹⁷ Putting the thumb of the right foot on the thumb of the left foot is called sealing. The ones standing, service owners sit in this dar position.

Giving the name of Fatma to the area shows the value given to her in the belief. Alevis whirl for Fatma, known to be the leader of women, in some regions.¹¹⁸ The value given to the women in Alevi belief is evident in the

¹¹⁶ Mentioned in the previous chapter.

¹¹⁷ Ali Duran Gülçiçek, *Alevilik, Bektaşılık, Kızılbaşlık ve Onlara Yakın İnançlar*, Vol. 2 (Köln: Ethnographia Anatolica Verlag, 2004), p.639

¹¹⁸ According to Mehmet Turan Dede, it is the kind of semah which is performed in Afyon. In Addition, it is known as "Semah of Fatma Ana or Semah of Ali Nur". İlhan Cem Erseven, *Aleviler'de Semah* (İstanbul: Ürün Yayınları, 1996), p.123

cases of citing women among the leaders, and mentioning their names at the important points of the belief.

Pir: The person who is accepted as holy due to upgrade his statues with following “four doors, forty ranks” (dört kapı, kırk makam). Like Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Mürşit (Mentor): He is the one directing the cem ritual. He is an experienced person, guiding people, showing the right way. The person directing the ritual is called dede, Seyid, Sercem or Baba (Father).¹¹⁹

Talip (Candidate): The person having promised for following the Alevi way, and being loyal to the dede of the house he belongs.

Post: The place accounted as holy is named with “post” which is used for any implementation in ritual. Such as, *twelve services* post, dede postu.

Gülbenk, Gülbang: It is the name of pray in Alevi belief. Gülbenk or Gülbang is the invitation for the rose, love, peace and inviting it to the community, Cem. It is begging, wishing to be forgiven, seeking refuge.¹²⁰ It includes prays read by the dede and mentor during the cem.

- **Making a promise (İkrar):** the married people make a promise in front of dede to show their faith in this belief. The married couple informs the

¹¹⁹ Ali Duran Gülçiçek, *Alevilik, Bektaşilik, Kızılbaşlık ve Onlara Yakın İnançlar*, Vol. 2 (Köln: Ethnographia Anatolica Verlag, 2004), p. 641

¹²⁰ Ömer Uluçay, *Alevilikte Dua: Gülbank* (Adana: Ajans 1 Yayıncılık, 1992), p.11

dede about their wish for promising. At the cem organized for promising, the couples make their promise in front of dede. The couples promise to attend to cem rituals once a year, not to go into illegal ways, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to smear. Making a promise at the same time means that they accept to be questioned when one complains about them and when they apply to dede to solve the complaint.

- **Ring salaat:** according to Korkmaz, the name of ring salaat comes from the sitting position of the attendees in a ritual where they see the face of each other and pray together.¹²¹ In fact the ring salaat is the name of cem as a whole. Because during the cem rituals people sit in ring position and pray. According to Alev belief loving humans loves the God as God is manifested in humans. They reflect the value they give to humans in their prayers and want to see each others' faces during the rituals. In other words, as everyone is a manifestation of God, in Alevi belief, human is in God, God is in human, therefore they sit in this position.¹²²

- **Obtaining one's consent, giving consent:** If a person hurts someone, he shall take his consent to be forgiven, cheer the person up if he makes someone cry, compensate the losses of someone if he causes.¹²³ In the same way, everyone taking responsibility during the cem ritual including

¹²¹ Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000), p.212

¹²² Ali Duran Gülçiçek, *Alevilik, Bektaşilik, Kızılbaşlık ve Onlara Yakın İnançlar, Vol. 2* (Köln: Ethnoaphia Anatolica Verlag, 2004); Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000); Sefer Aytekin, *Buyruk* (İstanbul: Maarif Kitaphanesi, 1958)

¹²³ *Cem* (İstanbul: Cem Vakfı Cem Kitaplığı Dizisi-1, 2006), p.10

dede, have to take the consent of the community for their work, namely, they ask the people whether they are satisfied with their work or not. If the people are not satisfied, the duty is given to another one.

Cerag and proof: There are 3 candles at cerag, in the names of God, Mohammed and Ali. These three candles are lit at the beginning of the cem ritual and stay lit until the end. Cerag symbolizes the enlightenment of people with the light of God, Mohammed and Ali, and praying for them.

Passing from the rod: As a tool to purify from the badness, ugliness, rod (known to be community stick) is used. The dede uses this rod for the persons being questioned and touches on their backs with it to show their purification. In some regions rod is still being used while in some regions the dede uses his hand (pawns)¹²⁴.

Saka water: It symbolizes to be purified with knowledge. With the water distributed at cem ritual, attendees are purified with knowledge¹²⁵. Another meaning is to memorialize Hz Huseyin who was left to die from thrust. Besides, at the first forties cem, Mohammed squeezes the grape and shares the water of it among 40 people. By distributing water, this ritual is realized.

¹²⁴ Ayhan Aydın, *Alevilik Bektaşilik Söyleşileri* (İstanbul: Pencere Yayınları, 1997), p.117

¹²⁵ Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000), p.217

Dying before death: attendees of cem ritual with the discourse “we have come to die before death” state that they are ready to be questioned. As they believe that after the death, they will be questioned in the after-life for their actions in the world and they think that this shall be done before death. According to the belief, “one’s right is paid to its owner”.¹²⁶ The person having attended the cem ritual accepts to listen and solve the complaint about him. By dying before death, he is questioned for at the cem ritual before everybody.

-The *Twelve Services* and their meanings:

Symbolization is present in the *twelve services* which are the most important elements of cem ritual. *Twelve services* are coming from the first forties cem ritual till today and compulsory to be performed at every cem ritual. Although there are regional differences in their performance, their aim is the same. Each service is realized by one or more people. Dede decides which person is going to realize the duty. It is generally known that the fathers of people continue those duties.¹²⁷ For *twelve services*, the people shall have made their promise previously. They shall continuously attend to the cem rituals and complete their duties without any deficiency. As the *twelve services* are traced back to the first forties cem ritual, each person performing a service is considered to be the father of the others to perform that duty later. On the other hand, when the ones performing the duties are

¹²⁶ *Cem* (İstanbul: Cem Vakfı Cem Kitaplığı Dizisi-1, 2006), p.13

¹²⁷ These are quoted in interviews with Dursun Zebil in Cem Vakfı in 10 January 2010, Sinan Boztepe in Kartal in 7 February 2010.

important people, the duties can be undertaken in their names during the following cem rituals. For instance, the first father was Hz Ali and later Hz. Hüseyin Hacı Bektası Veli performed that duty and therefore the duties are called with names of those people. Now I can mention about the duties one by one:

Dede: He is the director of Cem ritual; he is the judge of cem. As Korkmaz states, dede is the existence of mind, belief. He is the center of spiritual focus of God¹²⁸. Dedes are bound to foundations and they visit the candidates bound to them every year. In this way, the continuity of the belief is ensured. While loyalty to the belief is increased, solidarity among people is ensured, conflicts are solved.¹²⁹ The dedes need to perform their duties as the inheritors of the way established by Muhammedin and Ali¹³⁰, otherwise they are considered to be needy.

Şah İsmail gave Sayyid title to Alevi dedes (indicating they are the children of Ali) and this makes the Alevi dedes holly.¹³¹ In the Anatolia, being dede is known to pass from father to children but Birdoğan states that this is a characteristic of Mani religion. According to him, there is not such an understanding passing from father to the son in Islam.¹³² And Yaman states

¹²⁸ Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000), p.217

¹²⁹ Mehmet Eröz, *Türkiyede Alevilik Bektaşılık* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), p.106

¹³⁰ Mehmet Yaman, *Alevilik, İnanç, Edeb, Erkan* (İstanbul: Ufuk matbaacılık, 2004), p.183.

¹³¹ Ayhan Aydın, *Alevilik Bektaşılık Söyleşileri* (İstanbul: Pencere Yayınları, 1997), p.51

¹³² Ibid., pp.97-98.

that being a dede is coming from Muhammet-Ali. The ones not being Sayyid cannot be dede.¹³³

Dede is the leader of belief and main element of Alevi belief as he is the one continuing the belief. The features of dede are mentioned in the book *Buyruk* written by İmam Caferi Sadık who is an important person for the Alevi. *Buyruk* gives general and special information about the belief. Main foundations of Alevi belief, conditions to be realized and not to be realized by the Alevi and general information about Alevi people are given in this book. In *Buyruk*¹³⁴, it is written that there are details about being a dede. In short, the father, mentor, dede shall know all the requirements of the belief and perform them. He shall be educated, have knowledge and correctly transfer this knowledge to the candidates. He should not have committed any crime against the rightful share of people. He should not have hurt people, and shall keep his promises. Otherwise, when the candidates are being questioned, the dede asks the others “do you have any problems with this “can” and for this; he shall be clean from the heart.

Dede is responsible both for himself and his candidates. According to the belief, dedes know the problems of the candidates and if they cannot solve the problem, they are also considered to be responsible for the problem. For this reason, the principle of “fill if you spill, cheer up if you make cry, give if you take” is valid for both dede and the candidate. The crime of

¹³³ Mehmet Yaman, *Alevilik, İnanç, Edeb, Erkan* (İstanbul: Ufuk matbaacılık, 2004), p.180

¹³⁴ Sefer Aytekin, *Buyruk* (İstanbul: Maarif Kitaphanesi, 1958), p.50

the candidate is also put on dede. As the questioner of the candidates, first of all he is expected to be clean.

Mentor (Rehber): He is the authority after Dede. His duties are helping people attending to the cem ritual, training the people on this way. He is guiding the people who have promised. According to Kızılgöz; father, mentor and guide shall be from ehli beyt family.¹³⁵ If he has insufficient information, he cannot be a mentor even if being coming from Ehli beyt family. Mentor helps the preparation of the ones to make promise.

Observer (Gözcü): He is responsible for ensuring peace and silence at cem. According to the belief, he prevents the pray to be learnt or disturbed by the people not wanted. He warns the ones who do not obey the rules of cem ritual and if needed he wants from dede to take that person to the dar. The observer does not interfere in the outer side. He arranges the sitting order.

Ceragci: He is responsible for lighting the cerag symbolizing the God, Mohammed and Ali and lighting the 3 candles. After the cem is finished, he blows out the candles. Lighting cerag is in fact known to be lightening the area is at the same time interpreted as the externalization of the holly light in humans who are the manifestation of the God.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Mehmet Kızılgöz, *Anadolu Aleviliğinde Yargı ve Sorgu Cemi* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Yayınları, 1997), p.52

¹³⁶ Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği (Felsefesi, İnancı, Öğretisi, Erkanı)* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000), p.219

Doorman (Kapıcı): He is on duty at the outer door. He sorts the shoes of the people. He is the one who warns the people inside against any dangers outside.

Zakir: He is the one undertaking the service of reading of deyiş, düvaz, mersiye, taçlama, nefes. These discourses include the requirements of the Bektaşî belief, its aim, historical discourse of events important for the belief, love for humans, love for Ali, Kerbela event etc and read by zakir at cem rituals. Korkmaz considers the duty of zakirs as externalization of the mind of human in special and mind of community in general¹³⁷. According to him, zakir has undertaken the duty of Cebrail. Cebrail is the angel transferring the information taken from the God to Mohammad, and zakir is the one conveying the information to the community at cem rituals.

Dust collector, Farras (Süpürgeci): He has to duty of sweeping the area symbolically. Sweeper symbolizes the cleanliness of the internal world. It is the sign of getting rid of jealousy, gossip, malice, sinfulness from the hearts and bringing clean feelings instead of them. Korkmaz focuses on the superficial meaning of the dust collector and emphasizes the value of the dust collector at the ritual. In the analysis of Korkmaz,¹³⁸ dust collector is the one externalizing the Nature God and Human God features. In Nature God, there is a conflict between the universal mind and universal soul. A whole mind symbolizes having no additions while soul deficiency is the symbol of

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.221

deficiency. Nature is born from the movement of deficiency towards being whole. The human is over everything as a small proof of the nature. The human is now Nature God.

In Human God, there is the contract between love and personality. Love symbolizes being whole while personality symbolizes being deficient. Batini, the internal, wants to overcome the deficiency struggles for it. The presence of mind of God comes into existence in humans. And now humans are Human God.¹³⁹ The sweeper in the area is from the deficient to the whole. It is the sign of going from personality to love, from soul to mind. In this way, the deficiency is swept away and the clean place symbolizes being a hole.

Sofracı or Lokmacı: The service of dealing with animal sacrifice or lokma. The animal is cooked and presented to people. Cooking the lokma and serving them at cem houses symbolizes dying before death according to esoteric belief.

Pervaneci: This is the service of whirling. These are the people performing the forties semah symbolizing the whirling at the first forties cem ritual. Hz Fatma is said to be among the first forties semah. According to Korkmaz, semah is the state where people washed with social intelligence during the cem ritual transform the social intelligenec to individual intelligence and activities, actions they perform. Semah is the externalization of the

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.220

happiness while going from the deficient to the whole.¹⁴⁰ The characteristic of semah is that it is performed by men and women together as in the world of being whole; there are no mortal definitions such as self, personality, and gender.

Reporter (Peyikçi): He is the one informing the people about the place and time of cem ritual.

İznikçi: He is responsible for the cleanliness of the place where the cem ritual is to be performed.

Sakacı or Tezekar: He is responsible for bringing the saka water and distribution of the water at the cem ritual.

The Cem ritual is performed under the leadership of dede and performing the *Twelve Services* in order. With the performance of these services, other results of the cem ritual (apart from being a pray) emerge. Cem ritual is a worshipping ritual performed together where all people are considered equal. By undertaking different duties, solidarity emerges. Through active participation the act of praying is performed. People at the cem rituals are questioned and therefore these rituals are self-criticizing to some extent.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 221

IV.2. Cem Rituals as a Discipline

There are various cem rituals, but I will mention about the general features of cem rituals performed as a discipline as I attended them in Istanbul and had the chance to compare them. First of all, cem rituals as a discipline mean the ones performed by foundations to which everyone can attend and whose aim is to ensure the continuation of Alevi belief, to meet the prayer needs of Alevi people wishing to attend to cem rituals, to prevent the prayer from being forgotten and where general characteristics of a cem ritual are performed. These cem rituals are performed symbolically¹⁴¹ and they educating people with the aim of the teaching the cem ritual to the next generations.

The main aim in performing a cem ritual is to take consent from the attendees of the cem, being questioned before dying, and solving the problems if a person has some in this world. However, people attending to the cem rituals in Istanbul do not know each other, and this causes some problems in taking the consent of the community, when a person wants to get consent, the others to give consent do not know him. More importantly, in Anatolia the people attending to the cem rituals need to make a promise. However, in Istanbul, making a promise, being bound to a dede as a candidate is not applied. The Alevi people having migrated to Istanbul who had to keep their identity secret before the 1980s and had the opportunity

¹⁴¹ Cemal Aslan (dede in Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Vakfı), Celal Çelik (in Karacaahmet), Veli Akkul (in Şahkulu), Dursun Zebil (in Cem Vakfı) and Mehmet Turan mentioned that cems performed in Istanbul are symbolically performed.

thanks to the foundations after 80s consider these rituals as an important start. However, this situation is far away from the main aim of cem rituals but meets the need of Alevi people to perform these rituals.

In Istanbul metropolitan where dede -candidate relations are about to be forgotten, the foundations organize cem rituals not only to ensure the continuation of the main prayer of Alevi people. They also organize these rituals in order to clear the misrepresentations and smears about Alevi people during cem rituals open to public. It is wanted to prove that the smears about Alevi people caused by their worshipping together are wrong and therefore the cem rituals are open to everyone. The main condition for attending to a cem ritual is having promised and being an Alevi have been invalid. The dede directing the cem has lost his leadership position as the questioner but become the one being responsible for carrying out the ritual in an appropriate way. Dede is selected on consent and *twelve services* to be performed at the rituals are performed by the people having been trained at the foundations, especially young people and even children. For these reasons, the cem rituals organized by the foundations in Istanbul are called “cem as a discipline”.

By the 1960s, Alevi people having migrated to Istanbul could find the chance to perform their cem rituals after 80s; however the dynamics of the cem rituals have changed as the rituals were performed by leaving /abandoning their original aims. Women who attend to the cem rituals in their village did not hesitate to have dinner at the same table with men and they

could perform the duties given by dede, could share her problems about her husband or family with dede, in Istanbul they began to attend the cem rituals only as audience and lost their confidence in performing the *Twelve Services* unless being trained at the foundation. They hesitate to share their problems with dede whom they see once a week. They find it difficult to be in front of the public as they were in their village.¹⁴² I asked the women I saw in one of the cem rituals organized by the foundations that “Do you want to perform one of the *twelve services*?” They replied as “no, no, this is not my duty”¹⁴³ or “I am sending my children to the foundation. I cannot do it but my son does, he is trained”¹⁴⁴ or “I do not know, it may not be true, I cannot do it correctly”¹⁴⁵, which reflects the sociological developments in the country which have changed the dynamics of cem rituals to a great extent.

IV.3. The Research Procedure:

For my thesis subject including the gender dynamics in cem rituals in Alevi belief, Alevi Institute helped me in the selection of the cem ritual I was going to attend. We talked about my thesis at the Alevi Institute, and we agreed about the cem rituals where I was going to get more clear information about gender dynamics. As comparing and contrasting the cem rituals

¹⁴² These are the opinions of Sinan Boztepe.

¹⁴³ In cem in Cem Vakfi in 10 January 2010, these are the answers of the three women. One is a 40 years old, migrated from Malatya, graduate of elementary school. Another is 63 years old, graduate of elementary school, migrated from Giresun. The last one is 43 years old, graduate of elementary school and has children.

¹⁴⁴ In Cem in HBV in 17 December 2010, these are the answers of two women: a 31 year-old, high school graduate, with one child; and a 37 year-old graduate of elementary school and has 3 children.

¹⁴⁵ In Cem in Karacaahmet in 19 Aralık 2009, this is the answer of a 53-year-old woman with elementary school education, who had migrated from Sivas.

performed by foundations in Istanbul and cem rituals in Anatolia will enrich my thesis, I planned to attend them. Alevi Institute organized the place and time of the cem rituals I was going to attend. Before I went there, they called the foundations and gave information about my thesis, and required the people to help me when I reached there. As I went there with the reference of Alevi Institute, I could make interviews with the Alevi dedes, ask questions to the women there and take the record of the ritual.

I firstly attended to the cem ritual organized by Hacı Bektaşî Veli Vakfı on 17 December 2009, Thursday evening, later on 19 December 2009 Saturday evening at the Karacaahmet Cem vakfı, on 13 January 2010 Sunday to the cem ritual at Şahkulu and lastly on 2 February 2010 Thursday to the cem ritual at Cem Foundation. I could attend to a cem ritual on 5 February Sunday afternoon organized at home with my own efforts. An Alevi friend of mine told me that a cem ritual was going to be performed at a home in Kartal, and I went there with my friend. My friend requested from dede to allow me and watch the cem ritual mentioning about my thesis. And on 14 March Saturday evening, I attended a cem ritual in Baladız village of Isparta. Again I attended the ritual there with the help of Alevi institute and recorded the ritual.

Before the cems started, I asked 25 questions I prepared earlier to the dedes. In the interviews with semi-structured questionnaires I generally asked about the meaning of being an Alevi for them, how the woman is considered in Alevi belief, the position of a woman, the depth love of Fatma,

Hatice and Zeynep in Alevi belief, the responsibilities undertaken by women before, during and after the cem rituals, whether a woman can have the duty of a dede or not, which services are more frequently done by women among the 12 services, sitting positions of men and women in rituals, whether there are issues about clothing". According to the answers of the dedes, further questions were asked and the subject was elaborated.

After the interviews I made with the dedes, who are seated at the center of the belief, I could learn their views about the issue of women. As the dedes are not only in the position of a religious leader, having to role to arrange the social relations, being the ones directing people, and as alevi people respect dedes and their comments it was necessary to know their views about the subject of my thesis, and therefore I proceeded to conduct interviews with them.

After the interviews with the dedes, I made face to face interviews with selected women in the cems before the ritual started. I did not take the names of the women to ensure that they felt comfortable. I asked them personal questions at first, such as their age, marital status, profession, being parents or not, their hometown etc, followed by questions related to my thesis topic. Due to time limitations, my questions related to whether they believed in the equality of men and women in Alevi belief, the frequency of their attendance to cem ritual, whether they took certain duties at cem rituals or not, whether they brought their children or not, what they thought about undertaking the dede role by a woman. I asked the main questions about the

thesis subject because women came to the rituals just before the start and went home as soon as the ritual finished. I tried to get a more comprehensive study trying to interview the women from different age groups, different educational levels, and migrated from different places. I could ask questions about seven to fifteen women at each cem ritual. The time pressure shaped the number of women being interviewed. At some foundation rituals (such as Hacı Bektaş Veli Vakıf and Şahkulu Vakfı) women were more comfortable about the interview while at some (such as Cem vakfı) even though we had enough time and I promised not to disclose their identities, they did not want to be interviewed.

As a result of the interviews I made with the women, I could learn the perceptions of women in Alevi belief about the equality between men and women. Another expectation of mine from the interviews made with women was making them hear their voices and make others listen to it. The interviews helped me understand whether they accepted the discourse without questioning whatever it was, whether they were aware or not about the practice of gender equality at cem houses. My interviews with dedes first and then with women, followed by observations at cem rituals were important as I could see how similar they were in terms of the practices.

After the interviews, I attended to the cem rituals to see whether the gender equality principle in the Alevi discourse was materialized at the rituals and recorded them with my camera. During the cem, I stood at a corner in order not to disturb the ritual and the attendees. As the dedes knew my

thesis subject, they explained some of the practices from time to time as they went with their work. I especially tried to record women having attended to the cem rituals.

In the first place I made the interviews with dedes and then women and could learn their views about the position of women in the belief, and later I could observe the cem rituals and saw whether gender equality principle was applied at the rituals or not, whether there are discrepancies between the words of dedes and women and my observations. It was also important for me to see how women adapted the patriarchal relation and its results despite believing in the gender equality principle.

IV.4. Comparative Analysis of the Rituals: Isparta and Cem Vakfi

BALADIZ VILLAGE

The Village of Isparta (official name is Gümüşgün) is settled on North West in Isparta. Villagers prefer previous name of it than the official one. The village has moderate climate with high concerned plants. In statistics consists of 1990 datas, population is 731 with 389 women and 342 men. Although there are ignorant old people; villagers are concentrated on education of their children. Till recent times, the village was in a position of supplying migrants to out of the village. Thanks to establishment of firms near to village, people start to migrate there. The basic means of subsistence of it is agriculture and cattle-dealing. There are two major of ethnic and religious

group; Turkish Alevis and migrated people so called Abdal by villagers. The latter one has low population. Due to existence of Alevi dedes, there is no crucial judicial manners are accounted in village. Because dedes are responsible for preserving the social life in a desired way, there is one mosque and one cemevi in Baladız.¹⁴⁶

CEM VAKFI:

Cem Vakfi was established in Istanbul on March, 27th 1995 to address the problems of Alevi community to the political leaders, universities and civil society organizations, and to find solutions to their problems. Founder of the institution is Prof. Dr. İzzettin Doğan. The foundation performs organizations with its fifty branches both in different regions of Turkey and also in Bulgaria, Germany, Austria and Sweden. The foundation with its main center and branches concentrates on conferences, panels, educational activities.¹⁴⁷

The Structure of Cem Houses (Cemevis):

In Baladız Village, Alevi population is high and they construct the cemevis by themselves. The historical back ground of cem evi is like that, after 1980 coup, the commandant order to construct of mosque in the village. With sponsorship of the government, establishment of mosque started. Before, it completed, because the coup term finished, the villagers turns this

¹⁴⁶ Hüseyin Bal, *Alevi Bektaşî Köylerinde Toplumsal Kurumlar: Burdur ve Isparta'nın İki Köyünde Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1997), p.130

¹⁴⁷ Available at http://www.cemvakfi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=474&Itemid=136 (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

unfinished construction to construction of cemevi.¹⁴⁸ Before the construction of the cem house, the rituals were being performed at houses but as the village got crowded, and a separate cem house was needed. On the first floor of the Cem house, there is a wide room where the ritual is performed, a kitchen with two divisions to cook the meals and a guest room for people coming from outside.

At the second floor there is a small room for the young people who have not made their promise yet. From the window at the second floor, the people can watch the cem ritual. In this way they watch cem rituals and prepare themselves accordingly, by adapting the cem culture and having the intention to make promise after getting married. In this way, Alevi belief is tried to be transferred to the next generations. Young girls and boys come here. I observed that they were watching the ritual side by side from the same window. Presence of girls and boys in the same atmosphere at earlier ages together, providing those with such an opportunity to see the requirements of their belief indicate that the village people adapt the gender equality principle. At the interviews I made with the women from the village after the cem ritual, they generally answered as “we do not know man and woman, there is no discrimination between them.” They all shared the same view as if they had agreed earlier. And gathering the children and young of the village in a room to teach them the requirements of the beliefs and not to

¹⁴⁸ Hüseyin Bal, *Alevi Bektaşî Köylerinde Toplumsal Kurumlar: Burdur ve Isparta'nın İki Köyünde Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1997), p.131

“make them forget the traditions”¹⁴⁹ indicate that they also apply the gender equality discourses and they already adapt and apply this principle.

The opportunity of attending the cem rituals after making a promise helps to take women from the private to the public. As it is necessary to get married before making a promise, the woman has the right to show herself in the public after getting married. In this way, the woman coming from the father's house to the husband's house not only changes her marital status but gets new rights. The condition of making a promise for attending to the cem is through marriage and this brings women to the public and the chance for serving before the public. The belief carries women from private area to the public area and even compels men to get married and attend to the cem rituals. In this way, when cem rituals are considered, it is not a public area formed for men; women are also needed in this area.

There is a volunteer man working in the kitchen from the village public. He cooks the meals. Although he is working there voluntarily, the village people pay him for the service. As known, kitchen is the domain of the housewife. In fact, in cems, cooking and presenting dinner performed by men and women which shows cooking as a domestic responsibility only performed by women transferred from “inside world of sex” to “outside world of sex”. Having responsibility in kitchen” demonstrated flue barrier of public and private domains in cems.

¹⁴⁹ In Baladiz in 14 March 2010, a 72 year-old woman gave this answer and also similar answers were given by women who are 65 years old, elementary school graduate and 63 years old, illiterate.

Cleaning of the cem house, before and after the ritual, is performed by the village people wishing the performance of the ritual. At the cem ritual I attended, 3 families wanted the performance of the cem ritual. According to the belief, the ones that promised previously need to be questioned once a year. Due to the financial situations, some may wish to be questioned with his wife; some come together as families and is questioned. Before the cem ritual, work of cleaning the room was performed by the women, daughters and sons of these families and again after the ritual these families were responsible for the cleaning. When I asked who performed the cleaning, they answered that generally women and girls did it¹⁵⁰ men also helped them when needed. The central role of women in the domestic area, doing the housework indicates that the woman cannot be freed from the image of making house works, even though she enters to the public area. This situation is adapted by them in their answers to my question: "we already do the cleaning work at home, men cannot do it." Doing house works is like a cloth that cannot be got off by women. It is a part of the identity.

The room for performing the ritual is wide; it has one door making it possible that everyone enters through the same door. The room is covered with carpets and there are seats along the wall for the old and patients. The seats of the father, mentor and zakir are not elevated. No one sits at a higher place than another. Everyone sits at the same level. When I asked why there

¹⁵⁰ In the cem mentioned above, answer of the question, "who makes the clear of cemevi?" is: "We make this at home also, men can not succed" given by women with 33 year old, elementary school graduate with 2 chidren and other answer is "Of course us, who makes else!" given by a woman who was 41 years old, graduate of elementary school and had 3 children.

was not elevated seats for dede, mentor and zakir as in Istanbul rituals, dede answered as follows “why shall we sit at higher seats, we are no different from the attendees”. Even if the dede has more responsibilities for his duty and considered to be ancestor as the guide of his candidates, he sits at the same level with the attendees and approves this with his words, which is a proof for the discourse “in Alevi belief, there is not man, woman, old, young, poor, rich, there is “can””. The dede has no idea of sitting at higher as to indicate the hierarchical order. He considers himself equal to everyone. Being a dede does not give him a power but confers on him a responsibility.

There are chairs in the room. There are for people who cannot sit on the floor. The people sat on those chairs during the ritual. One of the men among the village people said to a woman “sit on the chair, you have had an operation, do not sit on the floor” indicates that patients are given priority in sitting as well as the old.

Before the start of the cem ritual, for the people working in the cleaning and carriage of the materials, meals are prepared. Women help to prepare these tables. Sometimes young men also help them. Even though men and women are separately seated at the tables there are mixed tables as well. While eating their meals they also talk to each other, dialogues are sometimes coming from one table to another, women are making jokes to men, they laugh all together, the women there were in the public area and comfortable and they were quite visible in the public area by opening the

dialogues themselves rather than trying to be invisible. The woman exits in the public as an individual.

There are pictures of the Alevi belief ancestors on the walls and writings about the *twelve services*. Besides there are information about the village, history of the village and at the same some didactic writings on the doors such as “buraya boş gelip, dolu gidilsin, vay boş gelip boş gidene (come empty here but go with a full mind, what a pity for the ones coming empty and going empty). There is a quartet belonging to Hacı Bektaşî Veli on the wall:

Erkek dışı sorulmaz muhabbetin dilinde

Hakk'ın yarattığı her şey yerli yerinde

Bizim nazarımızda kadın erkek farkı yok

Noksanlık, eksiklik senin görüşlerinde

There is a cemevi in Cem Vakfı established in Yeni Bosna/ İstanbul. Before establishing it, authority of Vakıf has planned a project competition to choose the best and modern cemevi construction. This cemevi should be consisting of library, conference lodge, and room for guests. Then the cemevi founded in accordance with the project win the competition. In this Cem Vakfı there are cemevi with 1000 people can attend, dining room with 200 people, conference saloon with 200 people, library, morgue and Director of Alevi –

Islam Religious Services.¹⁵¹ The cem rituals are planned for every Thursday. Everyone can attend to the cem rituals. It was observed that the people attending to the cem rituals bring the fruits of that season together. The fruits brought are collected equally in bags by the lokmaci (even though these people are voluntary, they are being paid by the foundation against their services). The cleaning of the Cem Vakfi is got made by the foundation.

There are two doors of the cem house for men and women. There are doorman at both of the doors. Men and women go up in the same elevator or climb the same ladder and they enter the cem house from different doors in different directions. The people coming before the ritual are gathering at different corners and talk to each other. Women and men groups are not mixed. They wait for the doors of the cem house to be opened. Even though they wait at different places, no observation was made about the hesitation of the two groups from each other. It was observed that the two groups spoke in high volumes and laughed time to time in their own groups. This situation showed that the view in orthodox Islam considering the women as an object of lust due to being woman and they needed to care for their clothing and actions¹⁵² was not taken into consideration by the attendees of cem rituals. Such an idea is shown to have no place at the cem rituals. However the same situation was different during the cem ritual.

¹⁵¹ Available at http://www.cemvakfi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=474&Itemid=136 (last accessed on 10 December 2010)

¹⁵² Mentioned in Chapter II.

As Erdemir reminds us, Cem Vakfi is among the main Alevi organizations all over the world. “The administrative headquarters in YeniBosna, İstanbul, is a five-storey building housing the Cem Radio Station, Cem journal as well as a big cemevi. This cemevi has not only been a Project of architecture and civil engineering but also a project of social engineering.”¹⁵³ As a social engineering project, there is a central floor to make people sit as a ring in the middle and steps towards the edges. The seats of dede, mentor and zakir are elevated. The elevated area as the protocol area makes everyone see the dede, mentor and zakir¹⁵⁴ while indicating the importance of these three in the cem rituals, and make the hierarchical structure felt (dede being at the top, higher than the candidate). Due to this protocol, gender segregation continues which was started at the doors. Men and women can sit at separate places.

There are the pictures of Ali, twelve imams, Hacı Bektaşî Veli, Karacaahmet, Ahmet Yesevi at the walls of the cem house. Besides, there are the words of these ancestors. The pictures, expressions and instruments hanged on the wall (sedge, sweeper etc) show the value given to the elements in the Alevi belief being exhibited via people, ritual and objects. While the pictures of the ancestors show the respect to them, the sedge is the tool for transferring the traditions to the next generations and therefore considered to be holy. Again the sweeper, post examples and other objects

¹⁵³ Aykan Erdemir, *Incorporating Alevis: The Transformation of Governance and Faith-Based Collective Action in Turkey* (Master Thesis) (Harvard University, 2004), p.138

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in interview with Dursun Zebil in 10 Ocak 2010.

are exhibited on the wall and show the respect given to them. The sayings of the Alevi ancestors are on the walls for the same reason. Presence of discourses on the walls emphasizes the requirements of the Alevi belief and needed behaviors and also the recommendations to be applied by the Alevi people. There is also a picture of Atatürk¹⁵⁵ and sentence from him, “kadın sefil olursa insanlık çöker (if the woman goes shabby, humanity fails)”. Besides the sayings of Hacı Bektaşî Veli “Educate women” is on the wall. As seen in other foundations, there are their comments and sayings on women. When the requirements of the Alevi belief are considered to be emphasized on the wall, the belief of “everyone is “can”, no difference among the souls, gender is a cloth worn by the soul” are parallel with the discourses of Atatürk about women. The presence of such sayings about women is attracting attention about the gender equality principle. The sayings on the walls at the same time show the main principles of Alevi belief wanted to be focused on. For this reason, presence of expressions about women is a necessary issue for Alevi people who always emphasize that “there is no discrimination between men and women”. On the other hand, it is interesting that the pictures of Fatma, Zeynep, Kadıncık Ana are not present. All the pictures on the walls portray males.

¹⁵⁵ Even though he was not Alevi, Atatürk was held in high esteem by the Alevis. For them, Atatürk transformed a theocratic empire into a Republican secularist nation-state. Even Some Alevis recognize him as the last Imam. Adil Ali Atalay mentioned Atatürk as Mehdi in his poetry written in 1981. Please see Markus Dressler, “Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century: The Fusion of Political and Religious Identities”, *ALIF: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 23, 2003.

Prior to the cem ritual:

----**Positioning:** In Baladız village everyone sat to form a ring to see each other. On one side there were men and on the other there were women. Sometimes men and women were together. Everyone entering into the cem room says “saluting for all of you (cümnenize niyazım var)”. Besides, they salute the ones close to oneself (two people hug each other 3 times, later handle their palms, and take the palms to their face). The women are also seen to entreat each other. Girls and little boys sit with their mothers. Elder boys sit with their fathers. The boys feeling to have grown and wishing to disclose themselves as “man” sit with their fathers. Little boys are still children and cared by their mothers.

While coming to cem rituals, the village people wear their everyday clothes. The women wear their baggy trousers required by the village life and put their scarves on tying the ends crossly at the back of the neck, leaving the neck open. Their scarves are in the same position when they enter the cem house. The young girls do not use scarves and wear jeans. Their necks are generally open.

Before the cem ritual starts it is normal that dede talks to those who are present to attend the cem. Dede talks to warn the people about specific issue or inform them or talk about any issue. The subject of the talk at the cem ritual was perspective of the Alevism about women and gender relations due to presence there to conduct the research of my thesis. Before the cem

started, he introduced me to the attendees of the cem ritual and explained the reason for my presence there.

Dede especially wanted to clarify me the issue of clothing for women during the cem ritual. He explained that it was not necessary to cover one's head to come to the cem. For the women who normally wear the head scarf, covering is accepted, but normally, women do not wear the head scarf attending the cem. Dede said, "Whether a woman is veiling or not is her problem, our people are open, open for the can, canan. There are not men and women here, there is can. There are no poor, rich, small, and big but community. The age is measured with their promises, not with their life. Here we are forty for one and one for forty. We wear the same shirt and pray in the same area." When dede speaks, the people around not their head approving the remarks of dede and emphasis that "yes, yes, that's true" which seems more important than the remarks of dede. Thus, the people approve the ritual as they believed in on this issue. Both men and women approved these by bowing their heads, which shows that there was not any conflict between the ritual and the belief. The village people do not know that the issue is was "gender equality", but they also said that they do not differentiate between men and women and they endorse equality principle in their ritual practice.

Before the cem ritual started, I also interviewed with Havvali Ana¹⁵⁶ and asked her "whether woman had to cover their head before the ritual" and

¹⁵⁶ Havvali Ana is 80 years old and mother of Mehmet Turan Dede. She is so-called Ana because firstly she is the mother of Dede and also she spends her life for the sake of the Belief. Answer is derived from interview with her before cem ritual started.

she answered that there was not such an obligation, people came here as they were, the ones who wear turbans was related to political issues.

During the interview, there were other men and women standing close to us. After the answer by Havvali Ana to my question, one of the village women mentioned the broadcasts of Cem TV¹⁵⁷ on Thursdays and said that “we need to wear turbans; we see on TV they all wear it”. In exchange, Havvali Ana remarked that “in fact there is not such a thing to cover one’s head. The ones you see have other intentions, they are not real intentions”. It is not surprising that the woman makes herself believe that the TV program shows what is correct for women. As Anatolian people often watch the TV they often believe that what we see on TV reflect the reality. When the woman sees a difference between the practices and the broadcasts, she has difficulty in understanding the truth.

In the Baladız village I spent another day after the cem ritual and I asked the same question again to other women and received answers such as “we are not familiar with covering our heads, we are like this, we go to the cem like this, we do not wear head scarf”. Women in the village wear baggy trousers and they do not wear skirt for the Cem ritual as well.

Dede saluted women first as there were women at the places close to the door, women kissed the hand of dede and later dede saluted the area and sat at his seat. Dede did not behave differently towards women as he is

¹⁵⁷ Cem TV belongs to Cem Vakfı.

a “man” but saluted them and asked their problems and talked to them entering into close contact. Dede talked to the men as much as he talked to women. For dede, the genders of the attendees are not important. They are all there for praying and as “cans”. As dede says, “after entering through the cemevi door, the genders are left outside” entreating the women equal. Dede is the leader and male identity of dede is different from his identity as a road leader.

The mentor is seated near dede. Near the mentor, there is the mother of the mentor. On the other side of the dede, there are candidates of dede and guests from outside. The ones entering after dede entreats the area, later dede and mentor and say “Entreating everyone” and sit. Havvali Ana was seated at a high place at the side of the women due to her pain in the knee. Havvali Ana informed that she was actually sitting beside dede but due to her pain she could not sit on the floor, and attending to the cem from a comfortable place. Unlike the cem rituals in Anatolia and Istanbul, Ana sits near dede at the rituals. Dede emphasizes that there are two Ana, his wife is also called Ana and in the community she sits near dede. *“In fact she sits side by side with dede but the wife of dede is ana. If she is the mother of dede, her place is higher. In the Alevi belief one side of dede is cerag place and the other is ana place. Ana sits there and observes the ritual, when there is a problem she is consulted, dede is the one serving in the area but the actual one is Ana. Dede and his wife sit side by side.”*

There are men entreating Havvali Ana. Havvali Ana is also respected for her services in the Alevi way like dede and she is entreated. Havvali Ana respects the ones entreating knowing that they entreat for the way and accept them. Havvali Ana is not respected due to dede. She served for many years and respected for this. In fact Havvali Ana serves in this way since the death of her husband who was a dede. She did not lose the responsibility of “ana” title after her husband died, and continued to serve. The role of being the ana of the way was not lost after the death of her husband being the ana of the way starts with one’s husband becoming a dede and continues until the death during the service process.

Havvali Ana not only retained the title of Ana after losing her husband but she was also considered for a higher authority after the new dede is selected. During her services in the way, she is at one step higher than dede. Havvali Ana is a person who can interfere in the event consulted to her related to the cem ritual, whose sayings are still applied. The authority of ana did not end after the death of her husband and on the contrary, with her services in the way her title got higher. As also stated by dede during the cem ritual, the people are qualified according to their services in the way during the cem ritual, not their age, gender, identity. The title of Havali Ana was increased as a result of her services in the way.

The seat of the dede and mentor were not elevated. Everyone was at the same level. Everyone could see each other. Dede and mentor were also zakir. They sit crossly fastening their legs in the front and everyone is given a

towel. When I asked the reason for the towels, dede answered, “they are laid on the promised (ikrarlı) cans. *Without considering their genders, it is their sign. Promise. It is needed to cover the private areas and there is a sofra during the pray. According to sofra traditions, cloth is used, it is used while taking the lokma.*” Dede said that the towel was not only for covering the private areas but also it was used while taking the lokma according to sofra traditions, not only men but also women are given towels. As dede said, both men and women took towel.

When I asked the same question to women in the interview after the cem ritual, the women did not want to answer this question. Haydar bey, being the mentor and helping me in the interview with women, he said “*you should interpret why we use towel*” by stressing that “*they are closed for men, to cover their private places*” and people there smiled bowing their heads. As the males get erected, the towel is given to them in order to cover themselves not to disturb the others and here men are perceived as an object of lust, not women, and there is the view that others may be disturbed if notices the erection of a man in which way the pray will be distorted from its aim.

At the cem rituals organized by some of the foundations in Istanbul, women are wanted to cover their heads while in Baladız village towel practice put on the area between the waist and leg of men serve for the same aim. The aim is not to be an object of lust for the other gender and not to disturb others during the pray. The village people say the there is not a compulsory

thing to cover one's head while coming to the cem ritual while they continue their tradition of covering the sex organ of men. The necessity of women to cover their heads is like imprisoning the women for the village people but they are not disturbed while applying the same for the men. The situation of putting on towels for men frequently encountered in Anatolia cem rituals¹⁵⁸ served for the same objective as women's covering their head in Istanbul. Not disturbing the opposite gender is assessed from the male's part here.

At the Cem Vakfi, it is not compulsory to cover the heads for women before cem rituals. However, it was observed that uncovered women in everyday life came to the cem rituals wearing the headscarf. When I asked them whether they were warned them by someone to close their heads they said that there was no such warning. Among the Cem Vakfi dedes, Dursun Zebil dede said that "wearing skirt or covering the head are not compulsory for women, but unfortunately in the provinces these are felt or perceived to be necessary. You care for your clothing, and in the cem houses there is a father, area, being the right. People wish to care for their clothing while going to there. If she wants she can wear turban. But there is not such a rule ordering that. But one shall wear clean clothes, not disturb others". However the girls wearing black skirts and scarves who perform the *Twelve Services* are a way of expressing how one shall come to the cem ritual

¹⁵⁸ In cem performed in Kartal on 7 February 2010, towels were given to dede, rehber and zakir. Sinan Bozetepe, the dede of cem, said that giving towel to dede is common in Anadolu.

When I asked women who wore headscarves for the cem ritual the reasons of covering their head, they answered that “it was a prayer and Quran was read there”. Another woman told that normally she wore jeans and she was open headed but while coming to the cem ritual, she wore skirt and scarf as this is a prayer place, there are men in the cem house, one shall not be exhibitory and shall not disturb others.

Some of the women emphasized the need to cover the head while Quran is read as in Sunni Islamic belief, while some stated that they needed to cover their body for the reasons mentioned earlier. Obeying the orders in the Sunni Islam shows that Alevi belief is heterodox, open to the public, for this reason adopts some practices in time. The practice of covering the head is identified with the Alevi belief and, as emphasized it is a necessity of the Sunni belief, it is obvious that it is not related to the Alevi belief. The thought that body of women seduces men was accepted by some of the women attending to the cem rituals. According to them, a woman coming for prayer shall cover her body, women shall not attract the attention of men participating in the prayer and cover her body to hide the lines. If she wears in a way to exhibit the body contour she could seduce a man and she was the source of this situation herself. And the perception of “being the seducer of men” in the basis of the monotheistic religions is just the same for ages. For these reason women, covering their heads and attending to cem rituals generally think that they shall take their measures as they are the seducing objects because of their “gender”. Woman is a part of the patriarchal system

and is thought to defend it. Women in cem rituals did not seem to be paying attention to how this assumption limits their freedom.

As all the protocol in the Cem Vakfi was men makes this area “a place for culture”. The presence of two doors at the Cem Vakfi indicates the discrimination on the basis genders. This can be encoded as the message that men and women are separated in terms of their sexes.

Women enter into the cem houses through the door made specifically for them and sit at another corner, while man come via another door and sit at a separate place. As the number increases, the men and women have to come closer. When I asked why men and women were sitting separately in the same place, dede answered the question that there were bad rumors about the Alevi people from the past and that since regarding sexual intimacy between man and woman, everyone participates in the cem rituals, they do not know which people attend for which aim, hence in order to prevent misunderstandings they make everyone sit together. *“In ancient times, women and men were sitting together in the villages. Everyone knew each other, here it is Istanbul, and there are people of every kind. Now you cannot know the intention of people, one may come with a camera and disturb a person, then he will say that the rumors are correct, not smear, we cannot know this earlier”*. In order to prevent the rumors and overcome the disturbing situations, this prevention has been taken while it brings the thought of gender segregation in a more strict way. It is implicated that people continuously seeing the separate sitting of men and women will not consider

it as a temporary prevention but a way of practices. In the future, this practice will cause the discourse of gender equality of the Alevi belief to be meaningless. The future generations would have their practices in gender discrimination forms.

On the other hand, the rumors against Alevi people are related to the honour of women.¹⁵⁹ In order to refute these rumors made about women, cem rituals were started to be performed in public and open to everybody. Men and women were seated separately to prove that these rumors are not true. This situation was taken one step ahead at the Cem Vakfi and two doors were separately constructed for men and women. Alevi world is trying to overcome these stereotypes about women while weakening the image of “there is not such a thing as man or woman for us” by making them sit at different places. Due to these old age rumors, and biased representations of the Alevi gender relations Alevi people were also forced to keep their identity in secret. Therefore, the Alevi women seem vulnerable to give up their right to be side by side with men to maintain an “Alevi women” identity in order to refute the rumors.

The high number of women presenting in the cems is striking. In Baladız village, women outnumbered men as in the other cem rituals I attended. This shows that cem rituals are not only organized for men, collective worshipping is not only for men as in other monotheistic religions.

¹⁵⁹ There are some slanders against Alevi people like “candle went out” implicates that in cem ritual when men and women come together, then they start orgies. “They do not recognize mother or sister” means that in rituals there are also sexual relationship, in which incest is tolerated.

In Alevi belief, people attend to the cem houses as individuals not according to their genders. The majority of women are an indication of the realization gender equality in the belief.

Girls and boys are seated with their mothers. The mother role of women is thus continues to be central wherever she is, as long as she is with her child. The presence of mothers listening to the dede while trying to put their children to sleep is considered to be normal by others. A woman is a mother in the first place. Because there is no person at home to take care of the children, these women have to bring them with themselves to cems which in the view of these women is also a chance for children to see their own religious rituals from childhood.¹⁶⁰

The seats of dede, mentor and zakir function like a protocol and remain elevated than the floor. The elevations attract attention. The value given to the dede, zakir and mentor is indicated by this elevation for their seat compared to the area. At the Cem Vakfi, there are two dedes, two zakirs and two mentors and all are men. The majority of men at the place elevated for them indicate that these people are not only respected as they are authorities in the way but also they are respected as they are men.

¹⁶⁰ The answer which is given by 36 year old woman, secondary school graduate, migrated from Ordu is "what can I do, to whom do I leave my child, and there are no people at home. It is beneficial for my son also; he learns religious rituals from his childhood." Other answer given by 32 year old, high school graduate woman is "my child is so young, she goes with me, and come with, she does not disturb any one."

The wife of one of the dedes was at the cem ritual and sat at the side of women. However, she was passive. Dede's wife, Ana emerges at the forties semah when she stands for whirling after dede. She has no position felt like Havvali Ana. Ana title is coming from his husband "dede". She has that title through marriage from a man but this does not give her any responsibility for the cem rituals. Here, we see that emphasized by Delphy, occupational status of an individual determining his/her place in the social ladder is in the case of women replaced by the criterion of marriage.¹⁶¹

Dynamics of the Rituals:

Once dede told the first gulbang, the cem started. In the gulbangs, women are held in high esteem in Alevi doctrine, such as Muhammed, Ali, Hatice- wife of Muhammed-, Fatma -daughters of Muhammed and both wife of Ali, Zeynep- daughter of Fatma are mentioned in a respectful way.¹⁶² For example:

"...Muhammed ve Ali vel Fatma vel Hatice ve alihim acmeni.." or

"...ve seyide-i ma'sümel ulya hazret-i Fatımat'uz Zehra ve Haticet'ul Kübra..." or

¹⁶¹ Christine Delphy, "Women in Stratification Studies", in Helen Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.116, quoted in Helen Roberts, "The Social Classification of Women: A Life Cycle Approach", in Patricia Allat et.al. (eds.), *Women and the Life Cycle: Transition and Turning Points* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p.34

¹⁶² Ömer Uluçay, *Alevilikte Dua: Gülbank* (Adana: Ajans 1 Yayıncılık, 1992), p.19

“...Bismi Şah. Allah Allah.... Hem Hadice, Fatıma hayrûnisanın aşkına..” or

“Bu yola yarardır halis bir bacı,
Fatma’dan urunmuş takınmış tacı
Şefaatçi ola Güruh-ı Naci
Rukiye, Gülsüm ve Şehriban gerek”

The names of women who spent all times for the sake of Alevi belief are displayed in gûlbangs, which shows that in Alevi discourse, prayers are not only attributed to men. They are attributed to the women, as well, in a way. Remembering women’s names and especially praying for them to show Alevi people’s respects to these women is going parallel with what the discourse says on “being a “can”, neither men nor women.

After gulbang, the time comes for exposing criticism by other people. Dede asks all people three times: “among us, if there is a person who dissatisfy from anything or from anyone, please tell now. If all of us satisfy with standing here together, tell it, either.” If people are happy to be there, then they three times say “Allah eyvallah”. Also to show their satisfaction, they show a ritual sign. There are differences between cems- of cem Vakfı and in Isparta in showing the sign. At the beginning, people are touching with fingers to knee of next person. But in cems in Isparta, people embrace with people sitting both in west and east of them. In place where women and men sitting together, they also embrace each other. In the Ritual in Baladız, being

interactive, which brings being closer with people sitting near themselves, is necessity.

*** *The Twelve Services:***

In both cems, zakir sings nefes (religious song, hymn) to call people responsible from *twelve services* to the center of cemevi. In Baladız, dede also takes the responsibility of zakir, and then he calls people as zakir. Dede in Baladız is also zakir. First service is occupied by dede. In both cems, dedes are men as observed in the other cems.

Dede is the pillar of the cem ritual; in fact, without dede, no cem can be performed. For being a dede, being a son of dede is necessary, so it is an inherited position. People whose families are the members of Ocakzadeler can only take responsibilities of dede. Ocakzadeler are people whose bloods rooted to Ali and Fatma's family. Children whose father is Ali but whose mother is not Fatma are called Evladı Ali.¹⁶³ As accepted in Alevi belief, Fatma is the person who integrates the divine light of prophet arose from Muhammed with that of imamate arose from Ali. For that reason, Fatma has a divine place in hearts of Alevis. In that sense only children of Fatma can be called as "seyit" people only a member of seyyit family can be chosen as dede. This brings position of dede to be transferred from father to son. Only with one condition other people can become dede: If there is no person

¹⁶³ M.Naci Orhan, "Dedeler ve Dedelik", *Cem*, Yıl 3, No 32,1994, p.16 quoted in Ayhan Yalçınkaya, *Alevilikte Toplumsal Kurumlar ve Özenin Siyasal Belirlişi* (Master Thesis) (Ankara Üniversitesi, 1994), p.92

coming from Seyyit generation, then alevi authorities in village coming together, choosing a well-informed person as a dede for the sake of the Alevi belief.

On the other hand, in Babagans displayed in Bektashi belief, for being dedebaba there is no strict rule as being a member of a specific generation. In Bektashi discourse, people who well-performed for the position of dede is chosen. People who spent their lives for the sake of the discourse are chosen people as dede.¹⁶⁴

Dede is not only the person who performs cems; he is also a person who guides people, has well-ordered behaviours to be ample for other believers. His behaviours are imitated by followers in that sense, with his behaviours, ideas, life-styles as a whole, dede should be guide of others. Each talip (person who belongs to dede) is in a religious relationship with dede. Not only in that region, but also in other regions, dede has lots of talips.

In a specific time periods, dede visits all talips to find out whether any of them has any problem, any matter to be solved with her assistance. Dedes are not only in a connection with their own ocak, they also connect with others. Those kinds of connection are seen throughout the Anatolia. In that sense, to survive permanence of the belief, dedes has a crucial role. In Alevi belief, "It is believed that dedes are the inheritance of Muhammed and Ali, therefore, to keep purity of the family lineage, as known Seyit, only daughters

¹⁶⁴ It is quoted in interview held in 25 March 2010 with Mehmet Turan.

of dedes are married with sons of other dedes. Keeping the purity of the lineage is thus essential.¹⁶⁵

In this research, the question whether a woman could present as dede which is the most sacred position in Alevi belief was crucial. According to the part of Ocakzade, in which the position of dede followed descent, women cannot reach the position of dedes. But, throughout history, there are exceptions of this. From Selçuklu period to date, attacks on Alevi people, especially to Alevi dedes forced them to leave their Alevi life style, continued. Dedes who struggle for their own sovereignty, have been killed. In these hard conditions, wives of dedes had to be replaced with dedes and has visited talips of husbands and performed the cems.¹⁶⁶ On the other side, in Babagan part, Kadıncık Ana is well –known ample for people that Alevi women could present in role of dede. Kadıncık Ana, after Hacı Bektaşî Veli died, was a substitute in the name of Hacı Bektaşî Veli.¹⁶⁷

When I asked to interviewees whether women can take the position of dedes it became clear that dedes separate the roles of dedes and anas. Some emerge the supporters of the view that men are the only people who can be called as dede, and other dedes claim that women can also be presented as dede.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Fuat Bozkurt, *Aleviliğin Toplumsal Boyutları* (İstanbul: Yön Yayınları, 1990), p.89

¹⁶⁶ Similar answers are given by all Dedes, such as, Sinan Boztepe, Hacı Bektaşî Veli, Cemal Aslan, Celal Çelik during interviews done with them.

¹⁶⁷ İbrahim Bahadır, *Alevi Bektaşî Kadın Dervişler* (Köln: Alevi Bektaşî Kültür Enstitüsü Yayınları, 2004), p.146

¹⁶⁸ Such as Mehmet Turan and Celal Çelik.

According to Dursun Zebil, dede of Cem Vakfı, regarding to become dede, women cannot be replaced with men. The only condition for women to be called as dede would be in hard conditions in which they can be assistants of dedes temporarily. He went on to say that women and men have different responsibilities. For him, women not can be dede, but be Ana only. However, the position of Ana for women and position of dede for men are two different subjects, which could not be thought in the same way Dede can talk with all people; on the other hand Ana can only talk with women. Ana is listening to the private matters of women and giving advice to them. “Ana says that, my girl, my daughter, keep your honour. If there is some problem with your husbands, you should perform more loyalty to the extent that your husband presents. You should preserve the sake of your family. Men are generally are outside. They work long hours, they work in hard conditions, as housewives, our lives are easier. We just only spend our times with the household chores. Therefore we should respect our husbands. Please keep our children in well conditions.”

In his speech, he made it clear that women cannot be thought as dede. It was obvious that, he had not thought on that issue, women being dede, before. The implications can be derived from his speech that he explains how patriarchal system reproduces itself. There is thus a tension between the Alevi Discourse claiming that “there is no gender segregation, no women, no men just only human” and gendered division of responsibilities. The latter totally reflects patriarchal understanding. Even

Dursun dede mentions gender equality in Alevi belief, he is not aware of the fact that he advocates what patriarchy manifests. When he supports equality between genders, on the other side, he shows how he embraces patriarchal lifestyle. As he put it, keeping honour is the responsibility of women. Any disorder caused by the husband can be accepted normal or women have to pretend not to see it. Due to her physical nature, she is occupied with housework. But men, when comparing with women, are more powerful, he is busy with hard work conditions, and he also has a right to make a fuss when he comes to home. In that condition, woman cannot oppose him, even when she tries to keep him in calm. Even when both genders contribute to the production of needed and desired commodities, there are typically inequities in what men and women receive in exchange for their labor. The work that women do is viewed as less important than what men do. Where tasks are sharply distinguished by gender, those performed by men tend to be more highly valued.

As Zebil speaking with patriarchal sub-consciousness, his opinions on the women's being dede in the rituals are limited to the framework of patriarchal system wants. Women can only speak with people having the same gender, and only to them, women can give advices which supports patriarchy. Dede, as being male, he can speak both men and women. He is proud with being dede. As for Ana, she cannot have any natural faculty as men have to connect with all human beings.

Regarding becoming a dede, there is a clear sexual asymmetry in his view. Although dede claims that Alevi doctrine was based on gender equality, his views on being dede reflected the patriarchal mentality. The speech of Zebil is socially constructed. While the biological facts of reproduction and lactation “leave their mark on women’s lives”, biological facts do not by themselves explain sexual hierarchies and inequality. Hence, as in all patriarchal cultures, the limitations and constraints placed on women’s access to ‘prestigious male pursuits’ are the consequences of women’s position in their patriarchal society.¹⁶⁹

Dede is not only a religious guide; he has also power to lead people. For Zebil, dede as a man, he has necessary features to be called as dede: Ample opportunities for public influence and prestige, the ability to forge relationships, determine enmities, speak up in public.¹⁷⁰ Only males can have these kinds of features given by God. The existence of gender differences is accounted by natural features given by God; however, these are socially constructed.

In the cem performed in Cem Vakfı, wife of dede, so called Ana, sits near to women. Her existence is not noticed by participants until playing semahs together, only. As Dursun Dede mentioned, Ana has no responsibility during the cem rituals, she only turning in semahs like other women do. In the words of Zebil, “First of all, in creation, women are called

¹⁶⁹ Bernice Lott, *Women’s Lives, Themes and Variations in Gender Learning* (California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1994), pp.13-14

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.14

as Ana, men are called as Dede, and each of them has different responsibilities. Can we call Dede as Ana? No! The responsibility of dede cannot be displayed by Ana, and vice versa. But, the point is important. Holiness of Ana is out of discussion, for Alevis, women are also sacred. The woman is mother, woman is wife, and woman is sister. For us, there are no differences between genders. Neither in war, nor in peace, there is sexual asymmetry on genders. Women and men are shoulder to shoulder in anywhere. The implication is derived from that speech is, for Zebil, gender equality principle in Alevi discourse should not be evaluated with the manner of women's being dede. According to him, these two topics are held in differently.

Because women are confined to domestic arena, women cannot take responsibilities of being dede. This could be assigned with duality concept according to which women are situated closer to the nature.¹⁷¹ In fact, reproductive capacities that many societies place women nearer to nature, while productive activities of men afford them a place nearer to culture. This issue is valid also for child-bearing. This is women at the epitome not only of her femininity, but of her "natural" creativity. It is also same for being pregnancy. Being dede can be symbolized as religious guide, also as social leader, as social lawyer, as a moderator regarding to problems among

¹⁷¹ Silvia Rodgers, "Women's space in a Men's House: The British House of Commons", in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Woman and Space-Ground Rules and Social Maps (Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women)* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), p.55

individuals, as ombudsman. These symbols are obviously parallel with “the cultural features” attributed to men.

Another point which takes attention in Dursun Dede’s speech is that women have to protect their own honours. This implies that the sexuality of women can be perceived as “sleeping sneak”.¹⁷² Women should take their sexuality under self-control. Starting from the birth, women carry firstly her family’s, then her husband’s and lastly her children’s honour on her shoulders.¹⁷³

According to Mehmet Turan dede, women can perform cems like dedes, when the dede is absent in cems. His answer, “Havvali Ana for example, she can perform cems” shows that he believes women can take all responsibilities in cems regardless of their gender. Believing in women is performing capacity as dede is as important as allowing women to hold power in cems. However, the gap between what discourses say and what dedes thought on women regarding to gender of dede is clearly seen in Dursun Zebil’s speech in contrast to that of Mehmet Turan.

On the question whether women can take the responsibility of dede or not, the answers of women interviewees were not clear. In fact, because they have no women role model as dede, they could not answer the question quickly. I was told, “My girl, I don’t think so, may be but I haven’t seen any

¹⁷² Aksu Bora and İlknur Üstün, “*Sıcak Aile Ortamı*”, *Demokratikleşme Sürecinde Kadın ve Erkekler* (İstanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2005), p.68

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.69

example or model until today”¹⁷⁴ or “I don’t know what I can say, but till now, the responsibility of dede has been always occupied by men, so only men can do it, because their nature is suitable for that”¹⁷⁵ or “I could not see any women who are dede, when dede does not come to ritual, then his son is called as dede. Which means that only men are dede.”¹⁷⁶ Other but not the least important issue on that topic is that even women become insensitive on only men are positioned as dede. Alevi women participated to cems also claim the same point in gender equality in Alevi belief, but when talking on who could be dede, they quickly answer it as “men”. Like dedes, gender equality in discourse and women being dede are different which should not be mixed. A woman in the position of dede is out of the gender equality. Even there were examples seen in history as women religious guide, in Cem Vakfı no example is held by women. All dedes and rehbers are men, the sexual asymmetry is considerable, or is opposite to what Alevi discourse claim on gender equality.

On the other hand, in Baladız Cem, thanks to the presence of Havvali Ana as Ana, participant women were of the opinion that women can also be positioned as a religious guide. Aysel Öztürk, 50 year old woman and the wife of Rehber said that “Havvali Ana for example, she could perform cem, actually we have not seen that she perform it. But for me, whether women or

¹⁷⁴ This answer is given by 57 year-old woman, migrated from Erzurum, in interview in 10 January 2010 in Cem Vakfı.

¹⁷⁵ From the same cem, it is the answer of 73 year-old woman from Tokat.

¹⁷⁶ This is the answer of 60 year-old woman, migrated from Gürgentepe/Ordu, in interview made in Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Vakfı in 17 Aralık 2009.

men, it does not matter, all people can do it. Given the responsibility, even I can do it.” Having an example, like Havvali Ana, she was not surprised at the idea of seeing women as religious guide is not surprise for her. She even seemed confident that she can perform cem herself when having a chance. However, only Öztürk gave such answer, not only she believes that women can do it like dede and also she thinks she can also be positioned as dede. Other women, Fadime Çetin, a sixty year-old elementary graduate, said “I have not seen any women who are the guides of cem.” Ziyne Çankaya, 63 year old said that “me too, I could not see any women called as dede but Havvali Ana for example, she can do it. She has all knowledge on that issue, she can do it.” These answers implied that when women have role model figure then they can be aware of that they, as being women, can also perform what dede does. At least they can believe that women can also be positioned like that of men. The other point here is that, women in Baladız told me that their names of them could be mentioned in study. In other words, women villagers had more self confidence than women in Cem Vakfı.

Havvali Ana has made her presence as Ana felt by all people in cem. She sang a song written by her own self, she warned people in necessary occasions. When there arose a misunderstanding between participants regarding to salute in front of dede. Havvali Ana warned the people by saying “Look, what you did is not true. I do not want to make anybody to be mad about me. But, my objective is to teach you the right thing. You behaved in the same way in the previous cem, you should stop this.” By this intervention,

thanks to her experiences in the previous services, she admonished the people on the wrong things she witnessed. The people listened to Havvali Ana respectfully, and moved on as she wanted during they prayed to dede. This case demonstrates that the women in the cem of Isparta have more chance to take the responsibility of conducting the cem than the women in other cems had. The woman is respected, not because of her gender, but because of her giving service to the 'yol'. There is no notion of the less respected ability of women of her gender. It can be argued that the women could ask questions indicated that Havvali Ana had authority in the discussions and decision-making processes as a leader. However, in the cems organized in the Vakıf, the women are excluded from arena of discussion and decision-making.

The rehber is called after dede. The rehber is the assistant to the dede during the cem ceremony. In both of the cems, it was observed that the rehbers sometimes read the 'gülbenks' while the dede was tired. The rehber is followed by the 'zakir'.¹⁷⁷ In the Cem Vakfı, the men are in charge as 'zakirs'. In Isparta, both the dede and the rehber are in charge for doing the duty of zakir. The responsibility of the zakir is significant. He is not only assigned to sing the religious hymns with the musical instruments. Since traditional Alevi culture is an oral culture, orally transmitted tales, songs and poems were the very means by which it was remembered, interpreted and thus constantly redefined. Zakir interprets not only his own poems, but also

¹⁷⁷ A *zakir* is a person who is responsible for singing the religious tunes.

the poems of other aşiks, past and contemporary. His repertoire may comprise of epic tales, songs of love and devotion, religious hymns as well as social and political critiques.¹⁷⁸

Singing religious hymns (the so called 'nefes' or 'deyiş') while playing the saz in the cem requires not only musical but also religious knowledge, and it is a function invested with high social prestige. Bedri Noyan equates the religious meaning of the performance of the nefes during the cem ceremony with the meaning of the recitation of the Quran for Sunni Muslims.¹⁷⁹ Aşık or zakir, is not only a transmitter of poems but also the author of new poems, he has the creative power to reinterpret the tradition. According to tradition, a zakir has to be initiated, either directly by an acknowledged zakir or in a dream by an already departed zakir, an Alevi Saint, or even God himself.¹⁸⁰ Zakir performs in interaction with his audience, and we can describe the performance as a collective memorization of epic material, or as a collective reassurance of matters of cultural knowledge and practice.

The zakirs in the Cem Vakfı are all males. The attendants of the cem accompany the zakir. It was observed that the women went on with the zakir more than the men did. The women were not disturbed with the high volume of voice during singing with the zakir. On the contrary, the higher volume they

¹⁷⁸ Markus Dressler, "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century: The Fusion of Political and Religious Identities", *ALIF: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 23, 2003, p.115

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.116-117

¹⁸⁰ Kaya 40-86 and Erdener 53-60, quoted in "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century: The Fusion of Political and Religious Identities", *ALIF: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 23, 2003, p. 117

had during singing, the more they felt that they were the constituting parts of the ceremony.¹⁸¹

In the cem in Isparta, the dede and the rehber undertook the duty of being the zakir. After a while, the dede offered Havvali Ana to sing the hymn. Upon such invitation, she sang a hymn which she had composed. That was interesting because she was illiterate until she became an adult. Following Havvali Ana, two more hymns were sung by the other women. The crucial point is the fact that Havvali Ana sang a hymn, which was composed by herself. In the Alevi belief, in which the 'saz' had very significant status, the aşiks had vital position in the Alevi community, thanks to their ability to transfer of the Alevi belief and discourse to the new generations. Considering the fact that the history is written by the men, the courage of a women during singing a hymn which she composed is quite significant. Composing a hymn by herself, the woman gains her identity from the role of a transformer of a male-produced item to the role of a producer herself. Moreover, her public declaration during the cem about the fact that the hymn was composed by herself demonstrates her self-confidence. Her declaration included the following sentence: "we, as the women, can do everything. I can compose and sing a hymn. We are not petticoats." Havvali Ana stresses that the women, like herself, do not think that they are of lesser capacity than men. Women can compose and sing hymns as much as the men.

¹⁸¹ During the interviews I had before the cem ceremony in Cem Vakfı, most of the women mentioned that they would sing with the zakir. They also stated that the more they go with the zakir, the more they internalize the cem, and the more they feel themselves as a part of the cem.

The Alevi hymns not only consist of religious content, but also carry the historical events to the future generations. Also, the economic and political agenda of present time can be elaborated in hymns. By composing the hymns, the women demonstrate that they can both be invisible and follow the daily agenda. The ability to compose and perform the hymns is demonstrated publicly. This ability to compose and sing the hymns carries the women to the public sphere, from the only-private one. It is significant to announce that the women are not imprisoned in the private sphere, and that the public is not swept wholly by the men.

Regarding gap between the discourse and what happened in the field; it can be said that the gap in these observations was not great. Even the position and the status of dede is not reserved for women; other responsibilities in the *Twelve Services* can be preferred by women.

--- Gözcü (Watchman) and Kapıcı (Doorman): It was observed that both watchman and doorman were men. Doorman is in charge of the control of the outside, while watchman had the duty of organizing the internal order. Watchman uses his crook to reach the silence in the room. Since male watchman and doorman have the authority to control and organize the people attending at the ceremony, the male domination in public sphere is obvious.

--- Peyikçi: Peyikci is the person who is responsible for informing the participants about the time and place of cem. However, the cems are held

every Thursday in the Cem Vakfı. So, the position of the peyikçi is symbolic. In Isparta (Baladız village) the women has the duty to announce the time and place of the cem.

--- Tezekar: Tezekar is the person who distributes the water to the attendants. In both of the cems, one man and one woman did the distribution.

--- Çerağcı, delilci: This is the person who lights the candles. In both of the cems, the çerağcı was a man. The candles are the symbols of enlightenment with the light of the God, Mohammad and Ali, and of being ready to get the information. There is a parallel relationship between çerağcı's being a man and the spread of science and knowledge through the hand of men. The function of men as the leader of the people and the source of the knowledge can be seen in this role of çerağcı. Lighting the candles is a symbolic action, but the symbolic meanings have great impact on the philosophy of different societies. That's why; the role of men in the position of çerağcı is meaningful.

--- İznikçi: İznikci is the person who controls the cleaning of the cemevi. In Isparta, the women whose families demanded to organize a cem undertake the duty of cleaning the cemevi. In cases of necessity, the men help the women for cleaning. The woman carries her roles in the domestic sphere to the public sphere. The reason is that she undertook the duty which the human being could do with his own body. This duty is the one that the human is accustomed to. It is convenient that she should be in a position

where she is familiar with. Even though she comes out in the public area, her premier role is the one she has in the private arena.

--- S  p  rgeci (Sweeper): The role of sweeper was undertaken by a man in Isparta, while three young girls have the same duty in Cem Vakfı. In the other cems of the Vakıf, those three girls do the same thing. Giving the role of sweeping to the women in the cems of Vakıf pushes the women into space reserved for “nature”. In those conditions, the idea of the women on ignorance against the women’s view loses its ground. Similarly, giving the post of dede to a man carries him to the space reserved for “culture”.

In the cems, women are usually placed in departments dealing with women’s issues. Being s  p  rgeci or lokmacı is represented more frequently by women than any other department. Which means traditional role of a woman in the home, is transferred to the public domain. Karin Vorhoff¹⁸² emphasizes that the duty of woman as sweeper demonstrates that there is a limit of women’s freedom, which is thought to be limitless in discourse. Still, the woman does what she is expected to do.

--- Pervaneciler: These are the people who make ‘semah’. The semah is held together by the men and the women. There a number of different versions of semah. In some of them only the men does it, while in some others only women do the same. In most of semahs, there is the mixture of genders on the ground. The semah is the time where the gender equality is

¹⁸² Karin Vorhoff, “T  rkiye’de Alevi Kadını: İddialar ve Ger  ekler”, in *Tarihi ve Akt  el Boyutlarıyla T  rkiye’de Aleviler, Bekta  iler, Nusayriler* (İstanbul: Ensar Ne  riyat, 1997), p.253

experienced and displayed to the greatest extent. As mentioned in the discourse, both men and women can participate simultaneously to the semah. Both in the cems of Cem Vakfı and villages of Isparta, the semah were held together by men and women. No signs of pressure to make semah were witnessed.

--- Lokmacı: The person who is responsible for equal distribution of the lokma¹⁸³ during the cems. The participants to the cem may bring some fruits and vegetables to be distributed to the community. The lokmacı makes the just and equal distribution of those sweet and vegetables. At the end of the cem, they are distributed to the people.

In Baladız (Isparta), the sacrifice¹⁸⁴ is used to distribute. The right and equal distribution of the meat is done by the lokmacı. After dividing in equal amounts, lokmacı sends those pieces to the people inside the cemevi. In that way, he is not able to see which piece given to whom in the cem. In both cems, the lokmacıs were voluntary men. I asked the lokmacıs whether they were continuously responsible for the same job in all cems. They stated that a woman is also responsible for the same duty, but she was not able to attend that cem. In Isparta, it was mentioned that the role of lokmacı is undertook by somebody else, when lokmacı is absent. The gender of the person who does it is not important.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ A kind of desert which is made of dough, oil and sugar.

¹⁸⁴ The meat of an animal, e.g. goat or sheep.

¹⁸⁵ In the interview held on 14 March 2010 in Baladız of Isparta, one of the women mentioned that the responsibility is done only for the sake of religion. No other factors are effective.

In the Cem Vakfı, the organization of the people working for cem is obviously determined. This is an advantage of being a foundation. This gives opportunity to organize the cems better. Moreover, the audiences of the cem do not have to undertake a responsibility.

In Baladız of Isparta, the situation is interactive. Everybody is ready to get a duty in the cem ceremony. This can be explained by the small and social life of the village, where the people know the other very well. The common working of the villagers is perceived very often. The case in Istanbul is different because of the fact that the metropolitan cities make people more individual and organized.

In the Cem Vakfı, the Post is laid out by a girl and a boy; while it was laid down by a man and three women. The candles are lighted after laying down the Post.

The order of the *Twelve Services* has differences between the one in Cem Vakfı and the other in Isparta. The order of the services is crucial. That's why, the observations will be analyzed through the cem organized in Cem Vakfı. In the cem in Isparta, there is a special part, muhabbet, in the cem. This part does not exist in the cems of other regions, including the one in Cem Vakfı. Before going through the cem in Cem Vakfı, I will touch upon the muhabbet part and the role of women in it.

Following the lighting of the candles, dede calls the cem-demanders to the place, in order to undergo them through the 'görgü'.¹⁸⁶ I was asked to switch off the recording, because of the fact that there may be some people who were not in good relations with the görgü passers. The cem-demanders (twelve people composed of six couple) were covered with a cloth. Dede asks the other attendees whether they had any problems with the demanders. The participants declare their own will in favor, or opposite, of the demanders. Then dede asks whether the demanders had any problems among themselves. After every couple declares that they do not have any problems with the other party of the couple, dede asks them to show a signal of satisfaction. After the demanders show the signal (by lying on the ground over the knees) the görgü process is finalized.

The couples pass through the görgü. Both the men and women, if they want to pass through the görgü, they have to listen to the problems of people with themselves, and have to contribute for the solutions. There is no discrimination between men and women in that case. When the man or woman comes in front of the people for undergoing the görgü, she/he has to listen and reply every kind of critique about herself/himself. It was observed that men and women were treated equally in those circumstances. Men and women, by asking both the public and the couples, enjoy given the same rights and freedoms to defend themselves.

¹⁸⁶ Defines the good manners of the people.

One of the leading differences of cems in Istanbul and in Anatolia relates to the part mentioned above. The part of 'going through görgü' is not included in the cems of Cem Vakfı in Istanbul. In the cems in Anatolia, the process of going through the görgü is the most significant part of the cem ceremony. Because the cems are made to solve the problems between the people. The belief argues that the human is the transfigure of the God, and the people do not have the right to hurt people psychologically. However, the main objective of the cems in Istanbul is different. First, those cems aim to transfer the doctrine of Alevism to new generations. Second, they aim to refute the slanders on the Alevis, which predominantly focus on women's sexuality and gender relations. Last, they are held to provide conditions of cem for the Alevis in a big city.

That's why the cems in Istanbul have folkloric indications. This seems inevitable. The reason is that, the migration to Istanbul is multi-centered in Anatolia. That is, the origins of migrants in Istanbul are various. The Alevis in Istanbul are also a mixture of different Alevi groups of Anatolia. So, in Istanbul, it is necessary to include parts of different versions of cems of Anatolia.

After the *Twelve Services*, the sweepers come to the place. The sweepers in Cem Vakfı in Istanbul were three girls, while it was only a man in Isparta. The role of sweeping is thought to be domestic duty of the women. On the other hand, Dursun Dede mentioned that in the 'Kırklar Cemi', there

were three women sweepers. That's why, symbolically, there are three girl sweepers in Istanbul's cem.

In Isparta, however, the duty of sweeping is not perceived as a domestic duty. It is done by a man. It was seen that special roles, like the woman's job, is not put over the sweeping work. The only meaning of it is being the next step in the ritual.

After the work done by the sweepers, dede sings the zakir miraçlama.¹⁸⁷ While it is being sung, the movements depicted in miraçlama are done again in the cem. For instance, one part of the lyrics of miraçlama is as follows:

Muhammed sükuta vardı (Mohammad reached to the silence)

Vardı Hakk'ı zikreledi (He talked to the God)

Şimdi senden el tutayım (Now I shall hold your hand)

Hak buyurdu vedduha (the God ordered vedduha)

While the part of the lyrics on holding the hands of each other, every participant of the cem holds the hand of the other. Both in Cem Vakfı and Isparta, the men and women united in holding the hands. At the end of the miraçlama, the following part is sung:

¹⁸⁷ This is a hymn which tells the story of the Prophet attending the 'kırklar cem', where he visited during the return from his trip to meet the God.

Kudretten bir el geldi (A hand came from the power)
Ezdi bir engür eyledi (it squeezed and made it plentiful)
Hatemi parmakta gördü (he saw the ring on the finger)
Uğradı bir müşkül hale (he fell into a difficult position)

In the Cem Vakfı, when the abovementioned part is sung, the dede began to make the semah and he was followed by his wife. Following them, all of the community, without discrimination, joined them to make semah.

The case was similar in Isparta as well. The candle was held by one of the *Twelve Services* people. Dede was the first to stand up and begin the semah. Then, Havvali Ana followed him. The rest of the community joined them after Havvali Ana. At the end of the semah, the male and female attendees wanted to kiss the hand of the dede. Simultaneously, the women wanted to kiss the hand of Havvali Ana. The status of Ana is special among the women. As Dursun Dede mentioned, dede is for everybody, while Ana is special for the women only.

The ‘Kırklar Semahı’ is the moment of indifference and equality for everybody. The discrimination is out of the agenda during the semah. This religious ritual comes into the reality without any discrimination between the people. This ritual is the practical implementation of the Alevi discourse on accepting everybody as the part of the community.

After the Kırklar Semahı in Cem Vakfı, the young pupils who are taught in the Vakıf demonstrate their show as regional semahs of different parts of country. The high percentage of the girls is remarkable. The semah is held by both boys and girls together. After that, the participants who want to join the semah take part in the semah together. The performance is not synchronized. The ritual source of semah proposes that people should behave however they want during the semah.¹⁸⁸

In the cem in Isparta, a man and woman sit on the ground with a kemerbest¹⁸⁹ in their hands. The woman turns the kemerbest around the waist of the man. Then she bends towards left and rights side of the man before standing up. They both stand up and do the semah together. After the semah, the woman eases the kemerbest from man's waist. After bending on left and right side of the man, this ritual is finished. Following them, the men and women joins the semah in couples. The ritual is finalized in couples' semah action.

I asked the woman why they tied a band on the waist of the man. Total of six women replied that the man was almighty on the religious way. This answer was endorsed by the rest of the woman attending at the cem ceremony. The religion and the practices of the village community showed that the community ignored the discrimination of the genders. However, the belief was in favor of the supremacy of the man over the woman. The belief

¹⁸⁸ From the interview with Sinan Boztepe, on 7th February 2010, that was done before the cem at home.

¹⁸⁹ A kind of band to be bound on waist.

that the man is superior thanks to the idea in the belief is controversial when it is compared with the discourse of equality of genders in the religion.

The women were asked whether the men were praying to the women, as the women do. The women replied that they pray to the men because of the fact that man is superior on the religious way and they are responsible for protection of the women. The women thus seemed to have internalized men's power and superiority. This idea of male supremacy is on the contrary of the claim that man and woman is equal in the Alevi belief. The sanctions of patriarchy had been internalized in the Alevi community.

After the semah action, the tazekar comes to the scene and distributes water to everybody. In the Cem Vakfı, this was done by two men. The dede pours the water three times to the hands of the saki (water distributor), and then the saki pours water three times to the hands of dede. The water is poured to the rehber and demanders then. Finally, it is poured to the hands of a small child, symbolizing the clearing of the 14 innocents.

The women who brought the desserts from their homes wait the dede during he prays. After the pray of the dede, the cem ceremony comes to the end. Following the pray, in Cem Vakfı, the men and women leaves the place through separate doors. They take the equally shared deserts before leaving the vakıf.

In the cem in Isparta, different than that in Istanbul, there is a separate part of cem called 'muhabbet'. In this part, the dining organization is done on the ground of the place. The people sit in the shape of 'u' to see each other's face while eating. The men and women sit together, without separation. The water distributors take their place in the corners. The young people and those who have not promised yet can not sit in the dining ground. The water distributors wait with full glasses in their hands. This is the part in which the person would talk with himself/herself. The person is expected to ask herself/himself philosophical questions, like the past and future of herself/himself. Dede mentioned that *"we will make effort to be an 'adem'".* *Being an adem is different from being a human. Being 'adem' does not have same meaning with being a man. The human being is not male or female for us."* He emphasized that the important thing is not the gender of the human, but the level to which she/he could educate and train up. Training means growing mature. Those adjectives like being mature and behaving positively were used for the men only. For instance, an educated person was recalled like being 'a man'. Dede uses the same terms of man-made literature without intention. The man-made terminology and literature has been located in the minds of the people. The definitions are made inside the frontiers of that literature. That's why, the malestream structures reproduces itself continuously.

Dale Spender (1990) has described this as "sexist assumptions about speech roles"; he argued that male language was taken as the norm and

identified women's speech, by definition, as a deviation from that norm. Spender pointed out that 'in a society where women are devalued, it is not surprising that their language should be devalued.'¹⁹⁰ She also claimed that the problem is not that women did not speak like men, but that women's ways of communicating were devalued, because women themselves were devalued and because the language was essentially 'man-made'¹⁹¹.

Women are seen to occupy a smaller, more constricted space in literature than men. It is argued that, so much space is devoted for man and his ideas, while only a quarter was reserved for women.¹⁹² Mehmet Dede emphasized that the gender is not important in the belief. The main theme is to be a human, 'er'¹⁹³ or adem'. Here, he uses a masculinist discourse to refer to the gender equality.

The 'dolu'¹⁹⁴, which were distributed by the 'Saki's are turned around the participants in the cem, and every participant drunk a sup of that water. The circle of the water follows the line through men and women together. Every person may give the water to any other person in the community. The genders do not have significance in this case. The main objective is to deliver everybody some amount of the water. Simultaneously, the young girls

¹⁹⁰ Bernice Lott, *Women's Lives, Themes and Variations in Gender Learning* (California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1994), p.10

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.355

¹⁹² Ibid., p.14

¹⁹³ A term used for describing the man.

¹⁹⁴ The water which is believed to be holy by Alevi community.

and boys, holding water with themselves, wait the dede for the prayer. The dining grounds are prepared by both the men and the women.

During the dinner, there are also the religious chats by the dede and other participants. The women could ask some questions to the dede regarding the funeral ceremonies. Dede did not hesitate to reply the questions. What the observer noted is that the women could ask questions and chat with dede without any hesitation. The chat of women and the dede is listened to by the community carefully. The voice of the women in public sphere is very strong in the community. The gender of the people asking questions to the dede is not important during the conversation of dede and other people.

The people who demanded and organized the cem ceremony sit face to face after dede's order. Those who sit can be men or women. Both people hold each other's hands in a figure in which they can hold the waters to each other. It is told that this ceremony was heritage from the ancestors. The dede declares that "in the Alevi doctrine, there is no death of the people. They return back to the world after changing the clothes. Those people did not die, but walked to the God. They are together with us here." Following the speech, Dede asks to whom the cem organizers devoted the water. The dead people are recalled and remembered respectively. After the commemoration of the dead people of community, the two people drink the water while holding the hands together. After that, they prostrate to each other. The men and women, who sit face to face, do the same prostration.

Then, the pray is done for all of the dead people. Then the relatives of the dead people drink the water, if they wish to do. The dede wants the relatives of the dead people to stand up. Dede prays remembering the important people for the way and the country. Then, the rehber plays the instrument, undertaking the duty of 'zakir'. The significant events in the history of Alevism, like Kerbela and Hussein, are recalled wholly. The sakis stand up and hold the water with the towels. One of the sakis, male or female, says 'we do not have scale in our hands, does everybody agree with her/his own share'. If the people repeat the name of the God, that means the people agree and accept. The dede asks people if they accept the saki's role. Then the dining tools are packaged all together. In Isparta, the semah I mentioned above was done after the cleaning of dining tools.

Finally, the *Twelve Service* person comes to the place. The dede prays for them and asks people whether they were happy with the service of those. After the people mention that they were glad for that, the dessert was received. This is the final part of the cem ceremony.

IV.5. Discussion of the Comparative Data of the Cem Rituals

The importance of the human being and gender equality is emphasized in the basic philosophy of the Alevi belief. As observed in both of the cem ceremonies, although there were some exceptions moments, the practices is generally consistent with the basic ideas in the belief. All of the Alevi people embrace the gender equality principle, which has significant part

in the discourse. Even though interviewed with several women in cems, the other women declared their belief in the equality of genders in Alevi belief without any questions.

In terms of gender equality in the religious rituals in Alevi community, the two cems in Isparta and Istanbul Cem Vakfi have similarities and differences simultaneously. Hence, the two cases were selected as the focus of the study explore and comprehend gender dynamics comprehensively.

The gender equality principle is realized more effectively in the cem organized in Isparta. The principle of gender equality had been unambiguously adopted by the dede and participants of the cem. In all of the practices, the signs of gender equality can be found. The presence of Havvali Ana in the post of 'Ana' has great impact over the men and the women. The Havvali Ana has put significant effort in the cem ceremony. The women endorsed her potential leadership in the cem when I asked if she could manage the cem. In the cem, the women and men sat together in some points, and separate in some other conditions. The veiling of the women for the cem was not observed. They attended with the daily clothing in the village. It was explained that there was no insistence by the dede on the issue of clothing in the cem ceremonies.

In the Cem, the dede, rehber and dede's wife sit together in the leading position. The height of the people and the dede is not different. Dede behaves equally towards both men and women. In the kitchen, the men and

women work together. While preparing the ground for dining, the men and women work together. Although the women outnumbered men, still men undertake their duties. After the cem, the cleaning of the cemevi is done by both of the men and women.

During the cem, Havvali Ana signs the hymn which she composed by herself. The, two other women sang the hymns following each other. Considering the significance of the oral tradition in the Alevi belief, the Havvali Ana's composing the hymns had great significance in the belief. Similarly, Havvali Ana warned people on the problematic points in the cem. She declared her opinions about the conditions in the cem. That demonstrates the power of Havvali Ana in the cem ceremony. She is active and authoritative in the religious practice of the Alevi belief. Her position as an 'Ana' is not symbolic, but has important responsibilities and duties.

When I asked the women whether they could deliver their complaints easily to the dede, they replied positively. They mentioned that they could voice their complaints easily, even about their husbands, easily. This indicates that the women in Baladiz, Isparta, did not come across any obstacles to declare and consult about their problems in the public. The women could consult the dede on issues of their husbands. That is the signal of the easiness in taking the problems of private sphere to public sphere. The women are visible in the public sphere. That provided the opportunity to express themselves in the public domain.

However, this was not found out to be the same for the cem in Istanbul. The principle of gender equality was also observed in Istanbul too. But, implementations of this took a different direction. For example, the men and women entered into the place through separate doors. Moreover, of the *Twelve Services*, only sweeping and ‘tezekar’ duties were given to the women. In the semah, the women veiled their head and wore special black skirts. Those practices imply that the gender equality was not observed in the practices. The women were taken into the place from a separate door. The position where dede, rehber and zakir sit was higher than the ground of the other people. There were more rehbers, zakir and dede than the cems organized in other points. The ground of the protocol where the dede and other service people were located is a male-dominated domain. These observations showed unequal treatment of the genders and in the Cem. The leading three services of the *Twelve Service*, dede, rehber and zakir, implied that the public sphere was dominated by men.

There are other examples for the equality of genders in the cem ceremonies. The parts of semah in the cem were held together by the women and the men. In the Kırklar Semahi, the number of the men and women were equal. However, the facts that the girls in the semah were veiled in the same shape of veiling and wore the same black skirts indicated that there was pressure for covering their bodies. The girls who were educated for the *Twelve Services* held the responsibility to set an example for the rest of the participants. That’s why they were provided clues on how to

wear during the cem ceremonies. Although the women were told that veiling was not obligatory, the recommendations and clothing of the girls that take part in *Twelve Services* would indirect effect over the women who attend at the cem. Obviously this could result in the pressure on the women for veiling and other modest clothing. Hence, control over women's bodies becomes the major terrain whereby the Alevi identity as the "other" was contested and negotiated, and where its encounter with the majority was accommodated.

It needs to be underlined that as the interviews and the observations suggested in this study, one of the objectives of the Alevi community that participate in the cem ceremonies was to demonstrate that the misperceptions about the Alevis are not valid. The ritual practices and gendered interactions in the Cem Vakfi was more oriented to demonstrate to the outside world the reality of the Alevi practices with an implicit concern to portray how they contradicted the commonly held Sunni stereotypes and misrepresentations regarding the Alevi gender dynamics. However, this objective and the ensuing practices ultimately damage and challenge the principle of gender equality in the Alevi belief. Indeed, the data of this study told is that divergence from the gender equality principle was more likely to be visible and to be justified by the members of the ritual group if it is more exposed to the outside. Perhaps more that, as the case of the Cem in the Cem Vakfi in Istanbul shows us, once the group is situated in an urban setting where the group becomes more heterogeneous surrounded by anonymity there is particular pressure to conform to the dominant gender

dynamics of the society at large. In fact, here gender dynamics and women's position (especially women's bodies) has become a central arena of ongoing negotiations both within the group and between itself and the outside group (here Sunni majority) Although these practices remain relatively gender egalitarian there seemed a concern on the part of the people participating in the cem rituals as to how they would be viewed by the (Sunni) majority outside. Meanwhile, gendered practices are justified by both men women even though they do not completely oppose gender equality principle. All this amounts to the fact that, as supported by the empirical data presented and summarized in this Chapter, the tension between the ritual and the belief on gender equality emerges in different forms, and this tension and contradiction is subject to shifting and unstable negotiations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The major concern of this research is with the gender dynamics in the cem ceremonies, specific rituals which have a central role in Alevism as far as they embody the spirit and the philosophical essence of the belief. The study set out to underline the equality discourses in the Alevi belief and it posed the question of “whether and to what extent this gender equality principle was upheld, realized and practiced in the cems”, and regarding any (expected) discrepancy between the rhetoric and the ritual, “how is the contradictory ideas and practices in the actual dynamics of the cems in Turkey, was explained, interpreted, justified and negotiated by the male and female participants in the Alevi cems”. The study is largely an exploratory and descriptive study, which does not specifically inquire into the underlying reasons of the observed gender dynamics, in particular gendered practices, in the cems observed. Hence it does not provide a comprehensive analysis and explanatory framework on the issue especially within the confines of the qualitative research undertaken on selected cems. However, the comparative data collected for this study and their discussion has provided the author with several cues related to certain factors and constraints lying behind the tension

between the doctrine and ritual as far as Alevism is concerned. However, these factors and dynamics can be systematically comprehended only in the context of a thorough analysis of the social and the political context of the diverse life experiences and the evolution of the rituals of the Alevi community, which is clearly beyond the confines of this master's thesis.

Equality between the genders occupies a significant part among the leading principles in the Alevi doctrine, which is defined and treated as "the other" by the major Islamic sect of Sunnism. The Alevi discourse stands on a unambiguous premise of gender equality and on the absence of gender discrimination in the Alevi belief and social and ritual practices. This has always been underlined as one of the most significant aspects of the belief as distinct from the Sunni belief, which has maintained to date many of the sexist practices of the Islamic tradition. In fact, as Chapter II underlined, the relationship between patriarchy and religion has been complex, shaped by cultural and structural factors in the evolution of the mankind. In general, in the monotheistic religions, the supremacy of one of the genders over the other is not mentioned explicitly. The patriarchal tradition was however gradually consolidated in all the three big monotheistic religions on the basis of the different and the lesser nature of women than men. Interpretations and ritual implementations of different religions reflect and justify the subordination of women to men in both social and ritual practices. Although the nature and the reasons of gender asymmetry in religions has always been subject to debate among those who essentialize religions and those

who do not, religious discourse and sources, practices in and gender discrimination in the religious institutions provide examples of the related asymmetry. It was argued that Islam was also influenced by the patriarchal structures of the society in which it was born. It was claimed that Islam preserved and enhanced the patriarchal structures of the society. On the other hand, some others claim that Islam introduced equality in terms of the gender dynamics into the Arab society hence it transformed and improved women's status. As the heterodox branch of the Islamic tradition, interaction between Alevism and the rest of the Islam civilization was inevitable, but Alevism has always defined itself relative to the Sunni belief. However, the problem of the prevailing contradictions between the egalitarian-discourses and the rituals has remained in the case of Alevism although due to the introverted nature of the Alevi communities and closed rituals, and the diverse ways in which the Alevi identity was defined, it has never been openly accepted and/or was brought under critical view by the Alevi intellectuals and researchers.

In line with the theoretical framework in this thesis, the perception of woman in the Alevi discourse was firstly elaborated in this study on the basis of the relevant literature. In the Alevi belief, the people are accepted as the members of the religious community without discrimination among the genders. Downplaying the sexed nature of the human beings, the members of Alevi community are appraised on their contributions to the belief and the community. The sex of individuals is considered matters of the material

world, instead of the spiritual realm. Sexual identities are considered to be only a cloth or cover which the members of Alevi community wear in their lives on the world. After migration (migration referring to death in the discourse to the world of souls) one's sex will be left behind in the material world. The 'life' of the person will continue to live in the world of souls. That's why, life is the essential part of the person rather than the sex.

In particular, two major views emerge concerning the issue of gender in the Alevi belief: those who support the equality of the genders, and those who claim the supremacy of the woman over the man. The proponents of the gender equality emphasize that the unity of the community in the cem rituals, the *semah* ceremony that is held together by both sexes, the existence of the women in the "Twelve Services" (On İki Hizmet) in the cem ritual as the indicators of the absence of gender -discrimination. Moreover, all human beings are perceived as the reflections of the God. The two sides of the face of God are called as 'cemal' and 'celal', symbolizing the woman and the man respectively. Those who claim the supremacy of the woman over man refer to the image of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammad. According to the myth of creation, Fatima, the source of the light, is the first person created on the earth. At the same time, Fatima is the person who combines the prophecy spirit of her father Mohammad and the leadership spirit of Ali, her husband. Briefly, both arguments in the Alevi discourse do not involve the man domination in the theoretical grounds.

In this thesis, the problematic nature of gender equality in the ritual practices of the Alevi community was analyzed on the basis of the positions and functions of men and women and the interactions between them by observing and studying the cem ceremonies. The researcher attended and observed a total of six cem ceremonies. Four of these were the cems organized in the foundations (vakıf). One of them was held at home, and the last one was in the village Baladız of Isparta province. Of these six cems, specifically two, the one in the Cem Vakfı in Istanbul and the one in Baladız Village in Isparta, were selected as the site of the field research for my comparative analysis. The main rationale of the selection of the two cem ceremonies is the fact that they stood out as contradictory cases between the discourse and ritual regarding gender. The data for the study was collected in these ceremonies. The comparisons and contrasts between these two cems were examined in descriptive method. However, because the main theme of the thesis is not the reasons behind the gender dynamics, the sources of the gender aspects of the cem ceremonies were not systematically covered in the analytical approach.

Methodologically the ceremonies attended were recorded in the camera tape. Moreover, structured and semi-structured interviews with the leading figures of the ceremonies were carried out before and after the cem ceremonies. In this way, the approaches of the religious leaders to the problematic of gender in general in terms of the Alevi discourse were obtained. These interviews with the religious authorities revealed their

commitment to and support of gender equality. However, in the specific questions asked to the dedes, the responses demonstrated that the patriarchal structure of the society is also supported by them as their answers were in line with the sexist outlook regarding women. For instance, it was argued that the women cannot undertake the duty of being the dede in the ceremonies, because of their biological nature. The women are granted the responsibility of being wife and mother basically. On the other hand, some dedes mentioned that the women can be the dede as well. The basic reason behind the different views of dedes on this issue is the differentiated definition of Alevism by each dede. Considering the fact that the position of dede is very empowering in the Alevi community and belief, women's exclusion from this position categorically on the basis of their gender emerges as an indication of sexism justified by women's biology by the males in the Alevi community studied.

The next set of the interviews was carried out with the women who participated in the cem ceremonies. Thus, the opinions of the women on the issue of gender and women as well as problems in the belief regarding gender dynamics were taken into account. The responses by these women demonstrated the consistency of the women's views with the discourse and with the opinions of the dedes in terms of gender equality. But, as the interviews with dedes showed, specific questions asked to the women revealed the patriarchal premises in the views of the women in Alevi community. Although they are proponents of gender equality upheld in the

belief, the responses of the women provided also revealed interesting data regarding their internalization of the prevailing patriarchal relations and practices in the society.

Despite the fact that there are similarities in terms of the gender dynamics in the religious practices of the cems of Cem Vakfi and Isparta, the discrepancies were also noteworthy. In the Cem Vakfi, the entrance to the cem ceremony was done through two separate doors for men and women. The men and women sat to different points of the cem room. The platform of dede, rehber and zakir was higher than the other people. The concentration of the males in the platform of dede and his colleagues was striking. Women were granted the duties of *süpürgecilik* (sweeping) and *tezekar* (water distribution) out of the *Twelve Services*. The women wore black skirts with the veiling on their heads. The reason behind this was explained as a measure to prevent the sexual incitement of the men. In the ceremony organized in Isparta, the *Ana* took part in the ceremony. She shared the responsibilities with the *dede* during the ceremony. She sang the hymns by herself in the cem. There was also more space for the women in the *twelve services*. Although there were different types of positioning in terms of spatial arrangements settlements, men and women sat together in some parts of the room. The distinctive features of the cems in Cem Vakfı and Isparta were clearly observed in these practical realities. The practices in the Isparta cem ceremony (Baladız village) were more in cohesion with (hence more egalitarian) the discourse of the Alevi doctrine.

Moreover, specific practices in some parts of both cems demonstrated the implementation of the equality much than other parts of the ceremonies. First, in both cems, the women and men participate in the ceremony together in the same room. The case is in opposite direction in the Sunni worship practices. Second, the semahs in the cems are done together by the men and the women. Third, the prays and hymns are sung collectively by the men and women together. Forth, the women take part in the services, even though they are constrained in the *twelve services*. Fifth, in prays of the ceremony, the female members of the religious clergy, like Fatima, Hatice and Zeynep, are enshrined and remembered along with the men. These examples s are practical implications of the principle of gender equality.

Overall, however, even though significant indications of gender equality principle in the Alevi belief can be observed in the cem ceremonies, the impact of the patriarchal social and cultural structures of the Sunni belief were evident as well. This could be related to several factors, which were implied in the interviews and underlined in the discussion of the findings in Chapter IV. First, the Alevis are generally engaged in a conscious effort to sustain and legitimize their creed in Sunni-majority Turkish society. The patriarchal structure in Sunni belief is stronger than Alevism. To be able to survive in the Turkish Sunni society, the Alevi groups are under thr pressure having to find common features for organizing social linteractions. Sharing specifc patriarchal practices emerges here as a ground for such sharing. This pressure is likely to be stronger in cosmpolitan settings than smaller and

more conservative settings in Anatolia. Hence, and secondly, the migration to the cosmopolitan big cities had great consequences for the Alevi groups. The difficulty to maintain the rituals periodically and to hold the community together in the urban centers also brought about a period in which rituals could not be organized. During the period of revitalization of the ritual, some aspects of the dominant patriarchal structures permeated into the structure of Alevi rituals. The need to integrate with the society in the big metropolitan cities resulted also in the transformation of the rituals which are no longer based on anonymity. As this study demonstrated these processes could be discerned in the differences of the dynamics of the cem rituals of the Cem Vakfi in Istanbul and the cemevi in rural Isparta. The Alevi community in both cases experienced a commonality in terms of a shared “otherization” and even stigmatization by the Sunni majority. This “otherization” takes place mainly through the approach of the Alevis to women and gender relations as they have long been subject to biases and even accusations regarding sexual promiscuity stemming from their distinct (and more liberal and egalitarian) attitudes toward women’s position. Although the pressure for survival seems to be the same for all Alevis, the way that this gender aspect of the Alevi identity and belief are negotiated during its encounter with the majority group varies in different settings. The tension between the belief and the ritual on the gender issue and the woman’s position emerges as a result of these ongoing negotiations within the Alevi group as part of their survival strategies in the larger society. As this study also uncovered, the control over the woman’s bodies and “their protection” constitutes a major terrain whereby

both the Alevis try to display their difference from and also their similarity with the Sunnis. The fact that in the Cem Vakfı in Istanbul the cems were more conservative in terms of gender relations than that of Isparta shows us that these negotiations were not stable; they also took place within the group. Differences and even parallels in terms of how both men and women interpreted the discrepancies between the equality discourses and the ritualistic practices need to be considered under this light. It can also be stated that as patriarchal practices do adapt themselves to the settings in the cities, this has significant repercussions for the Alevi community in the context of marginalization and an ongoing quest for survival and power.

The position of 'women in the Alevi rituals' is one of the subjects which is still understudied and which awaits new research to be explored and analyzed. This study has been an attempt to contribute to research on Alevism, whose belief system and social and ritualistic practices still remain subject to uninformed and stereotyped understandings, from a feminist perspective. Similar studies along the same lines and with relevant new questions should shed further light on the different aspects of the subject in the future.

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