# Community Assembly / Cemat (Cemaat Çekırın)

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**Summary**
Cemat or cemaat çekırın refers to an assembled community within the belief and social order of Raa Haqi, particularly the collective forum in which individual or communal problems are discussed and resolved. Although in everyday language it may refer to any gathering formed for a particular purpose, within the context of Raa Haqi it primarily denotes the communal structure convened to address religious, moral, and social issues. Cemat functions both within religious rituals and in the resolution of social disputes outside ritual contexts. In this respect, it is not merely a meeting associated with worship, but also a traditional institution of conflict resolution and social regulation grounded in consent, collective wisdom, testimony, and social justice.

**Keywords:** Cemaat, Cemat, Düşkünlük, Halk Toplantısı, Raa Haqi

## *Cemat* in the Social Order of *Raa Haqi*

In the *Raa Haqi* tradition, *cemat* is one of the principal mechanisms through which the moral and social order of the community is maintained. Problems arising between individuals, families, villages, or tribes are often addressed through *cemat*. This structure ensures not only that the parties involved are heard, but also that the collective conscience and consent of the community are brought into the process. In this sense, *cemat* constitutes one of the primary arenas in which the *Yol* operates at the social level

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(Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60).

*Cemat* appears in two main forms. The first is the *cemat* conducted within a religious ritual. This form usually takes place during the annual visits of *pirs* to their *talips*. Spiritual representatives such as the *pir*, *rayber*, or *mürşid* listen to disputes among *talips* and evaluate issues such as estrangement, injustice, deviation from the *Yol*, or moral transgressions before the community. Once the problems have been resolved, unity and *rızalık* are generally completed through a *cem*. The second form is the social *cemat* conducted outside ritual contexts. Such gatherings are organised in cases of disputes between individuals, families, villages, or tribes. At the initiative of one of the parties or of a respected person from the surrounding community, a *cemat* is convened. The parties involved, their representatives, respected elders, and individuals with spiritual or worldly authority come together. Particular care is taken to hold these meetings in a neutral location and at a time agreed upon in advance (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60).

**The Principle of Collective Decision and Consent**

Within the *cemat*, decisions are not made solely by the person presiding over the gathering. Although the spiritual leader occupies an important position, he does not possess exclusive decision-making authority. What matters is the collective will and consent of the community. The views of those present are heard, and the opinions of the community are incorporated into the process without distinction between young and old, women and men. This characteristic may be understood as the practical expression of the principle that "no one stands above the *Yol*" within the social order of *Raa Haqi (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60)*.

After listening to the parties and gathering opinions, the person leading the *cemat* summarises the issue and presents the matter once again to the community for approval.

Discussion then turns to the form of punishment or restitution. The sanction to be imposed is likewise determined through collective agreement and submitted for the approval of the party deemed to be in the right. Once that party accepts the decision, the judgement becomes final. In this way, decisions derive their legitimacy not merely from authority but from the consent of the community and the acceptance of the parties involved (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60).

When a punishment is considered too severe, a member of the community may request mercy or a reduction of the penalty by saying *"bêre rame"* or *"bêre comerdiye."* This demonstrates that *cemat* serves not only a punitive function but also a restorative one aimed at rebuilding social unity.

**Punishment, Restitution, and Social Exclusion**

Sanctions imposed through *cemat* are generally spiritual and social in nature. They may include sacrificing an animal, assisting the poor, refusing to receive *niyaz* or sacrificial offerings, or refraining from speaking with a person. The most severe punishment is social exclusion. Exclusion means the severing of an individual's relationship with the community and, in some cases, even with their family. However, this punishment is applied only rarely (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60).

When a person is excluded, a stone is placed at the entrance of their house after prayers have been recited by a spiritual authority. This stone functions as a symbolic seal marking the suspension of the person's relationship with the community. Social relations with that individual are then suspended. When the period of punishment ends, or when the excluded person expresses remorse and requests a new gathering, another *cemat* is convened. Whenever possible, those who participated in the original decision are expected to attend this second meeting. Since the community imposed the sanction, only the community has the authority to remove or extend it (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009,

55-60).

If the punishment is lifted, the individual offers a sacrifice. The stone placed at the entrance is removed with prayers, and the exclusion comes to an end. A *cem* is then held in order to reinforce social unity and reintegrate the person into the community. This practice demonstrates that the ultimate purpose of punishment in *Raa Haqi* is not exclusion itself but repentance, restoration, and readmission into the community.

**Social Assemblies Outside Ritual Contexts**

*Cemats* conducted outside religious rituals are primarily used to address disputes between individuals, villages, and tribes. The presence of a spiritual leader is not obligatory in such gatherings. Representatives of the parties, respected elders, tribal leaders, and individuals known for their honesty, integrity, and social standing come together. The parties explain the dispute themselves, but the resolution is generally left to the collective assessment of the representatives and the assembled community (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60).

In these forms of *cemat*, the sacrifice of an animal serves as an important act of confirmation and binding commitment. In some cases, individuals are also required to swear oaths upon sacred places, sacred objects, or *jiares* in order to confirm decisions. In this way, the collective decision is understood not merely as a worldly compromise but as a commitment made under sacred witness.

**Objection and Appeal**

Although *cemat* decisions carry strong social authority, they are neither absolute nor beyond question. Individuals who believe that a decision is unjust are allowed to appeal. For example, a person who objects to a decision reached in a *cemat* supervised by a *rayber* may bring the matter before a *pir*. The *pir* re-examines the issue and, if necessary, questions both the *rayber* and the appellant once again

before the community. If the appeal is found to be justified, the *rayber* may himself be sanctioned (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60).

If the *pir* considers the matter beyond his authority, he refers it to the *mürşid*. The *mürşid* either examines the matter personally or convenes a new *cemat* through a council of respected individuals. The same principle applies to *pirs* and *mürşids* themselves. Decisions supervised by a *pir* may be appealed before a *mürşid*, while decisions supervised by a *mürşid* may be appealed before the *mürşid*'s own *pir*. This process demonstrates that no office or authority is regarded as standing above the *Yol* within the social order of *Raa Haqi (Gezik & Çakmak, 2010; Muxundi 2009, 55-60)*.

**Conclusion**

*Cemat* or *cemaat çekırın* is an important institution within the belief and social order of *Raa Haqi*, founded upon the principles of consent, collective wisdom, testimony, and justice. It functions both within religious rituals and in everyday social life as a mechanism for resolving individual and collective problems. The fact that decisions are reached not solely by spiritual leaders but through the collective will of the community demonstrates the participatory and restorative character of this institution.

In this respect, *cemat* is one of the fundamental mechanisms through which social order is maintained, injustices are remedied, estrangements are resolved, and unity on the *Yol* is re-established. The stages of punishment, exclusion, repentance, sacrifice, *rızalık*, and readmission reveal that *cemat* is not only a judicial institution but also a restorative mechanism that heals and reintegrates the community.

**Endnotes**

[1] This entry is based on the corresponding entry published in Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak's Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi: A Dictionary of Religious Terms in Dersim Alevism (Ankara:

Kalan Yayınları, 2010). The text has been reviewed and updated by the authors of the original publication.

**References & Further Reading**

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