
To many, in the mystical milieu of Islamic Sufism, the notion of the shamanism acts as a distinctly celebrated theme, more significantly so in respect to its connection to the higher realms of spirituality. This work contains an ardent exploration of the relationship between Islam and shamanism in present-day Muslim world. Linking the travel of shamanism and Islamic perspective, it offers an extensive analysis of how the old practices of shamanism were brought into comparison to the structure of Sufism, and how such aged practices were amalgamated with various segments of Islamic mysticism in the first instance. The shamanic practices, including music, dance, and poetry and the complexities involved in various rituals have been thoroughly described. For instance, the concept of honouring spirits of animals, plants, rocks, etc., and caring for these spirits stems back in the belief that if this veneration is not performed, there will be a consequence of the land going hostile. Therefore, the protection and balance of the environment through harmony within one’s self by shamanic practices when the environment is in harm are mandatory and biologically contractual. In such circumstances, the master shamans are needed. The belief is that they have a correspondence to the world of spirits.

Despite various striking similarities, there is no absolute uniformity in shamanism. The various, fragmented shamanistic practices and beliefs coexist with other beliefs everywhere. Geographical strands significantly influence the formation of different myths and rituals. As the sacred rituals are essentially used to promote agricultural affluence in some parts of the world, they were used to ensure prosperity in hunting and breeding livestock in central Asia. Animals are one of the most important elements of the native shamanism because of the role they play in the survival of the nomadic civilizations of the steppes as well as sedentary populations living in lands not conducive to agriculture. According to their historical narratives, shamans wore animal
skins and feathers and underwent transformations into animals during spiritual journeys. In addition, animals served as humans’ guides, rescuers, ancestors, totems, and sacrificial victims on different levels.

As a religion of nature, shamanism throughout central Asia held particular reverence for the relations between sky, earth, and water and believed in the mystical importance of trees and mountains. Shamanism in central Asia also places a strong emphasis on the opposition between summer and winter, corresponding to the huge differences in temperature common in the region. The harsh conditions and poverty caused by the extreme weather drove central Asian nomads throughout history to pursue militaristic goals against their sedentary neighbours. This military background can be seen in the reverence for horses and warriors within many indigenous religions.

The book further expounds on the origin and prevalent practices of shaminism in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans, and explains how the Muslim shamans have actually developed immediate experimental relations with spirits to help ailing souls through healing and divination. An insightful analysis has been provided, exploring the complexities and variety of rituals, involving music, dance, and, in some regions, epic and bardic poetry, demonstrating the close links between shamanism and the various arts of the Muslim world.

Moreover, the work tends to question the intense association of sufism and shamanism in the contemporary Muslim world. Various kinds of healers and their inclinations have been investigated. The shaman healers of central Asia (e.g., bakhbs, emchis, and parikhs), who do not adhere to a homogenous movement but to several trends—though these trends have a common origin, that is, the mixing of Islam with ancient shamanism—have been thoroughly emphasised. The Islamised shamanism largely exists in a geographic area, which covers today the Republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, the northern province of Afghanistan (Afghan Turkistan), the Turkoman province of Iran, and the Uygur autonomous district of Xinjiang. Moreover, its practices—largely under the theme of shadow play—are noticed to be exceedingly growing in Java and Bali islands of Indonesia. The practicing healers are depicted as Muslim shamans by many since they use healing rituals, which are more or less close to those performed in central Asian Islamised shamanism.

Soumia Aziz

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