

RAZIA SULTANOVA
FROM SHAMANISM TO SUFISM: WOMEN, ISLAM
AND CULTURE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Discoveries are made by uncovering secrets that do not reveal their existence unless you are a very good observer. It may be surprising to see how much there is still to discover in this world. Razia Sultanova felt like Columbus discovering America when she observed the existence of intensive and various forms of religious rituals in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan in 1989 when it was still a part of the Soviet Union and all people were exclusively supposed to be atheists.

In this book, Razia Sultanova investigates the roles of Shamanism and Sufism in Central Asian religious rituals and culture, especially focusing on female performance. The interaction of Shamanism and Sufism, later also assembled with Soviet atheism, is described elaborately. The rituals are mentioned in detail together with examples of poems, songs and music which provide very useful documentaries for those who are interested in Central Asia, religion and the role of women therein.

Women have traditionally played an important role in religious matters throughout Central Asia. Sultanova examines the experiences of Muslim women in the region and the ways in which religion have shaped their daily lives and still continue to do so today. The book *From Shamanism to Sufism* enlightens the role of women in the transmission of the sacred knowledge especially Sufism to next generations, as well as the delicate interactions between religious belief and the cultural heritage of music and dance. It is the first book that focuses particularly on the role of women which has often been neglected in studies of Islamic culture. This book is useful in this respect, handing over to women their rightful historical and cultural place.

In Central Asian and Islamic culture, rituals and music are very important issues, especially regarding occasions such as weddings, funerals and other meetings of everyday life. This book offers important insights into the lives of the societies in the region. The author skillfully provides an in-depth analysis of cultural life within Central Asian society, together with recollective examples. To mention one which describes the story of a singer, Kommuna Ismailova from Uzbekistan, her becoming famous is illustrated dramatically: "I ran from the stage, and then the director of Philharmonic came backstage and pulled my ear, I started to cry but he said you made a new folk song. Do you hear the applause?"

Anyone with an offering in the history and religion of Central Asia or in Global Islam is recommended to read this book. Razia Sultanova has certainly produced a very useful and original study narrating valuable documentary information, especially regarding the role of female performance in the Central Asian religious rituals, from Shamanism to Sufism, moulding the culture in the region.

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