

CROSSING BOUNDARIES



**Musings on Language, Literature
and Culture**



IIUM Press

Edited by Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Crossing Boundaries

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CHAPTER 3

Quest for Spiritual Guidance and Illumination in Namangi's *Imfiraji* and Kemala's *Ayn*

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Abstract: This paper critically examines the theme of human's quest for spiritual guidance and enlightenment in the poetry of the Malaysian poet Kemala and the Nigerian poet Namangi. Kemala's poetry collection *Ayn* and Namangi's *Imfiraji* are assessed in the light of their thematic preoccupations, such as, the exploration of the predicament of human beings and their relationship with God and their efforts to actualize their ultimate goal in life on earth in order to attain perfection. Both poets portray humans as ambivalent in nature, as they on the one hand are recalcitrant and on the other redeemers of their own image. While Kemala uses an historical approach to define human nature and the need for human beings to contemplate upon historical events and use them as examples for reformation, Namangi admonishes and entices his audience to have inner vision and use it for meditation and reflection. Interestingly, both Kemala and Namangi see the symbolic significance of the "spiritual eye" which is in reality one of the core tenets of Sufism. The purgation of the human soul and its final ascent come not only from the physical and the ritual, but also the spiritual. Transformation comes from within, that is, from the human soul. God looks at humans' hearts and judges them on the inner beauty of their souls and not on their external beauty. Unlike external realities, faith is always in the heart and hidden. Both poets agree that for humans to receive God's guidance and blessing, they have to look inwards. Through this they can arrive at their ultimate destination and become spiritually illuminated and enlightened.

Keywords: Spiritual guidance, illumination, transcendence, mysticism, Sufism, enlightenment, contemplation and redemption

Introduction

The Nigerian blind poet Aliyu Namangi was born in the city of Zaria, Northern Nigeria in 1889. He started as an oral poet and a pious Sufi mendicant, as he traveled across the country chanting his verses to audiences in masjids, markets and streets. His talent was instantly recognized and he gained popularity and a large following. He was a great Sufi scholar of Tijjaniyya *Tariqa* and wrote many books on Islamic theology and poetry in Hausa and Arabic languages. Some of his works have been translated into English by famous Africanists like Neil Skinner and Mervin Hiskett. His styles of oral presentation were so unique and innovative that many people believed that he received his inspirations from dreams which were usually of spiritual origin. During his lifetime, he maintained his own theological seminary or *Zawiyya* where he taught students Sufi mystical sciences and philosophy and trained them to master Sufi oral poetry. Most Muslims from Northern Nigeria regard him as