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RE-EXPLORING SUNDIATA'S LIFE IN DJIBRIL TAMSIR NIANE'S AN EPIC OF OLD MALI

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Résumé

Ceci est une étude explorative de la vie de Sundiata Keita, de son enfance à la royauté. Elle s'intéresse entre autres à son enfance, au réveil du lion (le jour où Sundiata marcha), son exil (son séjour au Ghana et à Mema), la bataille de Krina, Kouroukan Fougá, la formation de l'empire, le règne de Soumaoro Kanté, le retour, les feuilles de Baobab et le retour triomphal à Niani. Le but de cette étude est de mettre en lumière une grande partie de la vie du héros Sundiata qui n'est pas très connue ou pas suffisamment expliquée. La méthode qualitative est la boussole de cette recherche. La théorie littéraire sous l'angle de laquelle les différentes analyses seront faites est la narratologie d'Austen Jane (la narratologie linéaire).

Mots clés : *exploration, le Mandé, sundiata, vie.*

Abstract

This study explores Maghan Sundiata's childhood, his experiences during his exile and his outstanding deeds both as a warrior and Mansa. The different phases of Maghan Sundiata's life to be commented on are his childhood (he was called the lion child, and the day when he walked was called the lion "awakening day"); his exile (his stay in Mema and Ghana); the Krina battle, Kurukan Fuga or the division of the world, Soumaoro Kanté's rule, the empire, Baobab leaves, the return and the heroic return to Niani. The aim of the study is to shed light on some phases of Sundiata Keita's life which we believe are not well known. The methodology of collecting data consisted in reading the work under study and taking notes to illustrate the different steps of the focus character's life. It is a qualitative one. The literary theory chosen to analyse the work is Jane Austen's narratology (Linear narrative) from the third person point of view.

Key words : *exploration, life, old Mali, Sundiata*

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Introduction

This paper is an account of Sundiata Keita's life. He is the founder of Old Mali (Mandé). His father's name is Narhé Maghan Konaté and his mother is called Sogolon Kedjou Kondé. At birth, Sundiata receives two names. The first is Sogolon Diata and the second Maghan. The name Sundiata is a distortion of Sogolon Diata. Sogolon is his mother's first name and Diata means "Lion". So, in a nutshell, Sogolon Diata means Sogolon's lion. In fact, among Mande people, a child's name is preceded by that of its mother. He was a prodigal son whose birth has been foretold by a left-handed soothsayer. The seer also enlightens his father about who should

take over him. Before even Sundiata's mother gets married, the fortune-teller tells his father that his true heir will be the son of a hunchbacked woman. Fortunately, two hunters (Ulani and Ulamba) belonging to the Traoré's tribe come with the woman in question and king Narhé Maghan marries her. Sundiata is the son prophesied to be the redeemer of the kingdom. When he is seven, his father bequeaths him the kingdom and makes him his true heir. Unfortunately, when the king dies, the assembly of the court under the influence of the king's first wife Sassouma Bereté, fails to abide by the guidelines left by the sovereign and appoints Sundiata's half-brother Dankaran Tuman as king. Ever since, Sundiata, his mother and sisters begin living hardship and successive ordeals. Sundiata and family are compelled to leave the country. Yet, after a few years, his kingdom is besieged by the bloody king of Sosso Soumanguru Kanté. Once again, the oracles say that only the man with two names is able to free the country and give it bliss. A search party is then sent to find Sundiata in exile and ask him to come and free his country. He returns and establishes peace and prosperity for his people.

The objective of the study is to give more enlightenment about Sundiata's life so as to find elements in it that can be inspiring to our contemporaries; and then clarify some aspects of his life that are not very well known or are distorted.

Since the study deals with written documents, the qualitative methodology is therefore appropriate. Words are used to account for the findings of the study. The literary theory chosen to analyse the selected work is Jane Austen's narratology (Linear narrative) from the third person point of view.

Structurally, the paper is divided into three parts. The first part talks about the birth and childhood Sundiata, the hero. The second part focuses on the exile of the hero. The third part deals with the return of Sundiata and the liberation of the Mali Empire.

1. Birth and Childhood

The child is born of a king father named Maghan Kon Fotta and a mother named Sogolon Kedjou Kondé. The king's first wife is a wicked woman called Sassouma Béreté. Yet, a soothsayer predicts that this woman in question's first son who is also the king's eldest son is not going to inherit the throne.

So, the fortune-teller advises the king to marry a wife that is to be brought to him by two hunters. The two Traoré brothers (Ulani and Ulamba) return to Old Mali with Sogolon after their feat in killing the ravageous buffalo in the Do land. Soon after being married, Sogolon gets pregnant. Yet, Sogolon's pregnancy puzzles Sassouma a lot. And, Sassouma wonders about her son Dankaran Tuman's fate because the latter is likely to be disinherited when Sogolon gives birth to a son, as that has been prophesized by the left-handed seer. The worry about a bright future both for her and her son Dankaran Tuman is the reason why Sassouma tries to kill Sogolon. She thinks that if she succeeds in doing that, the prodigal son that Sogolon is to give birth to will not come to life (will not be born). That is the reason why she employs very powerful witches for that purpose, but the latter fail.

Sogolon gives birth to Sundiata¹ and the empire (Mande People) cheerfully welcomes their most emblematic baby boy hitherto. On the eighth day after the child's birth, the infant is named and he bears two names: one name is his father's name (Maghan), and the other one is a unique

¹ The famous name Sundiata is a distortion of Sogolon Diata. Sundiata is given two names after his birth. He receives the name Maghan after his own father and that of Diata which means lion. Mandingo people identify a child by its mother's first name. that is why they call him Sogolon Diata. By the time that name is distorted and becomes Sundiata.

name which has never been born by anyone before. That name is Mari Djata. The two names were whispered in the new born's ear by his father's aunt.

T.Niane (1960) writes: "The king was in his antechamber but he came out followed by Doua. The crowd fell silent and Doua cried: the child of Sogolon will be called Maghan after his father and, Mari Djata, a name which no Mandingo prince has ever borne" (p.14).

Sogolon Djata (Sundiata's nickname in his father's household) has had a difficult childhood. Among Mande people, a child's name is sometimes preceded by that of his mother. Sundiata, at his age is quite different from his age group kids. At three he can neither walk nor talk (speak). He is still crawling and very greedy. He is ugly, unlike his father who is one of the handsomest men of his community. Sundiata's growth spurts do not improve when he is seven, and that state of things worries his parents (Sogolon and Narhé Maghan). But, that situation rejoices Sassouma Berété who does not miss any opportunity to point out the infirmity of the one that the entire empire is expecting to redeem it. Moreover, she mocks the latter's mother (Sogolon) and constantly ironizes her.

After being disheartened for a while about the prediction related to the outstanding destiny (fate) of his son, Narhé Maghan gets the confirmation that Sogolon Djata (Sundiata) is to be the prodigal son that is to make his people and empire greater. From then, he bequeaths the power to him and chooses him as his heir to the throne. He also commands that Balla Fasseké² should be Sundiata's griot, just like Fasseké's father Doua is his, and as the father of Doua is his father's. T.Niane (1960) relates Narhé Maghan's words in these terms: "Balla Fasseké here will be your griot. Be inseparable friends from this day forward" (P.17).

Narhé Maghan dies when Sogolon Djata is seven years old. The council of elders is held and the participants proclaim Dankaran Tuman the successor of Narhé Maghan, heedless the king's order that the torch should be passed to Sundiata when he dies. But actually, all that is schemed by Sassouma Berété. A short while after, Gnankouma dies too.

Sogolon and her children are permanently persecuted and humiliated by Sassouma Bereté. One day, Sassouma Bereté humiliates Sogolon over a baobab leaf, and on that day Sundiata decides to walk. He (Sundiata) sends his griot Balla Fasseké to Farakourou's (the master smith) and commands that an iron rod be sent to him on the spot. When they bring him the iron, he stands up and walks, but not before twisting the iron bar into a bow. All that happens while Balla Fasseké is encouraging him with songs and praise. T.Niane (1960) describes Fasseké's performance as follows: "Balla Fasseké sang out the hymn to the bow, striking up with his powerful voice: take your bow Simbon, take your bow and let us go. Take your bow, Sogolon Djata" (p.21).

A short time after, Sogolon Diata (Sundiata) becomes famous and is the strongest among his age group lads. That overnight fame puzzles Sassouma and the queen mother undertakes a scheme that she hopes would end Sundiata's life. In fact, she promises fine rewards to the nine witches of Old Mali if they succeed to kill Sundiata. But, Sundiata's bounty saves him and the witches become his allies. T.Niane (1960) points out: "I want to kill Sundiata, said Sassouma. His destiny runs counter to my son's and he must be killed while there is still time. If you succeed, I promise you the finest rewards" (p.24).

2. Exile

² Sundiata's father King Narhé Maghan decides to bequeath the kingdom to Sundiata when the prince boy is seven. He also chooses his official griot Balla Fasseké Kouyaté who is the son of his own griot Gnankouma Doua.

Sassouma Bereté does not give up her aim of destroying Sogolon and her children (Sogolon Diata, Kolonkan, Djamarou, and Manding Bory). Manding Bory is the son of Namandjé, Narhé Maghan's third wife. When his mother dies, Sogolon is entrusted with the little boy, for Manding Bory and Sundiata truly get along as elder and younger brothers. And, Sundiata regards him both as a sincere brother, and also as a true friend. Actually, it is Sogolon Diata (Sundiata) who is the main target that Sassouma wants to hit.

One evening, Sogolon calls her children together and tells them that the wisest decision they can make is to leave Old Mali for a while. Sundiata accepts the proposal mostly because Manding Bory and Djamarou are too vulnerable and may suffer from evil done by Sassouma Bereté and her son Dankaran Touman because the two kids are not yet taught the art of witchcraft. The exile is meant to protect them against their enemies' witchcraft and wickedness.

Before leaving, Sundiata warns his half-brother Dankaran Touman that he would return some day. First, Sogolon and children find refuge in Djedeba where king Konkon reigned. Konkon is a very weird king that kills all his guests. He tries to kill Sundiata following Sassouma's instructions that Sundiata. Sassouma sends him gold which is to serve as a reward for killing Sundiata. Konkon organizes a Wori³ game between him and Sundiata, and says that he would kill Sundiata if he loses. But, Sundiata wins the game. In the wake of that, he sends Sundiata and his family away (out his kingdom).

Once again, Sogolon and her children take the path of exile. They go to another kingdom called Tabon. Unlike in Djedeba, they receive hospitality there. Yet, the king of Tabon (Fran Kamara's father) is old and does not want to be in clash with Dankaran Touman. For that reason, he kindly suggests that Sogolon and her children should go as far as possible from Old Mali (Mande). Since a caravan of merchants is about to set out for Ghana, he recommends that Sogolon and her children go there with the merchants in order to seek a peaceful asylum in that place. They go to Ghana and the king Soumaba Cissé shows them the same type of hospitality as in Tabon. One year later Sogolon falls ill and Cissé decides to send his guests to Mema where king Moussa Tounkara rules. In Mema too, the asylum seekers are received with warmth and enthusiasm. Very soon, Sundiata gets admired by king Tounkara, his soldiers and the people of Mema. King Moussa Tounkara initiates Sundiata to the art of war and the latter becomes the greatest warrior (soldier) of Mema. Sundiata is also appointed to the highest position next to the king. He is given the title of Kankoron-sigui (with that title he will rule when the king gets away). However, his mother Sogolon reminds him that he should not forget about the fact that they are in an alien land. Sogolon speaks to her son Sogolon Diata (Sundiata) in the following words: "Do not deceive yourself. Your destiny is not here, but in Mali" (p.38).

Sundiata is still in Mema and had gone to fight his first campaign. Balla Fasseké arrives in Sosso and his host Soumaoro Kanté demands that Mali (Mande) should acknowledge itself tributary to Sosso. Clearly, Mali has fallen under the dominion of Sosso. Balla finds delegates from many kingdoms in Sosso. The envoys have come to give their allegiance to king Kanté. It becomes clear to everyone that no other kingdom dares oppose Soumaoro's powerful army of smiths after defeating Ghana and Diaghan.

Sosso used to be under the domination of Ghana because the Soninké from Ghana are the masters of the smiths from Sosso. Soumaoro decides to snatch Balla Fasseké from Dankaran Touman who has dispatched the griot to his kingdom in order to have good and peaceful relationship with Sosso. Balla officially becomes Soumaoro's griot, and one day he (Balla)

³ Wori is a Mandingo traditional game that is played in digging small holes in which stones are placed. These stones are the pieces of the game. The winner is the player that takes possession of the maximum of holes called houses and of the stones called "kings".

enters the king's most mystical and secretly kept room (chamber). The sorcerer (Soumaoro) keeps his fetishes over there. Inside, Balla discovers the most melodious balafon (the xylophone)⁴ which he plays and sings in honour of the king (Soumaoro).

When Sundiata gets informed that his griot is forced to stay with Soumaoro, war between him (Sundiata) and Soumaoro becomes inevitable. T.Niane (1960) explains: ‘‘ Now it was the king of Sosso, Soumaoro Kanté, who in turn, stole the precious griot from the son of Sassouma Bereté’’ (p.40). Djeli Mamadou Kouyaté resumes his praise of the spoken word in the transmission of knowledge in general and history in particular. He states that man's word is more vivid than writing because writing lacks the warmth of human voice. To illustrate, he added that prophets did not write whereas their words remain everlasting.

Kouyaté continues with the astonishing description of Soumaoro Kanté and his Sosso kingdom. He recalls that Soumaoro is very powerful because Jinn have revealed themselves to him. Soumaoro kills nine kings and makes fetishes out of their heads. He wears human skins and sits on human skins. He also uses to cut his footwear (shoe) from human skins. Soumaoro is pitiless, because he publicly flogs venerable old people. He also abducts (kidnaps) many young girls from their respective families. King Kanté wants all the beautiful girls and young women of Sosso for himself only. He reaches the height of folly so much that he takes his nephew Fakoli Koroma's favourite wife away from him and locks her up in his palace. That action is the straw that breaks the camel's back, for from that day his most prominent warrior (Fakoli) decides to cut both family and political ties with him and goes to Old Mali (Mande).

When Dankaran Tuman hears about Fakoli's rebellion against his uncle, he sides with Fakoli in order to set a large coalition against Soumaoro. But very soon, Soumaoro decides to act and swoops down on Dankaran Touman who flees to cola regions and founds the town of Kissidougou. Soumaoro destroys all Old Mali (Mande) villages which rise against him including Niani. Mande inhabitants who survive after Soumaoro's assault curse Dankaran Touman for having forsaken them.

Right after Dankaran Touman's flight, Soumaoro proclaims himself king of Mali by right of conquest. But, the people of Mali do not approve of that and resistance is organized in the bush.

The soothsayers of Mali are consulted by the elders of the court of Niani and are asked to find the name of the person that can save Old Mali (Mande). They unanimously say that only the ‘‘Man with Two Names’’ is able to redeem Old Mali people. When the elders hear that, they remember that the prophecy is about Sundiata who is actually the rightful heir to the throne. The worry then is about where Sundiata can be found for over the last seven years, no one has had any news concerning Sundiata and his family. However, the seers (soothsayers) give a clue to the search party indicating that they have to search him towards the east in riverine (waterside) lands. T.Niane (1960) underscores: ‘‘ When the elders of the court of Niani remembered the son of Sogolon. The man with two names was no other than Maghan Sundiata’’ (p.42).

When the search party sets out, war reaches its peak between Soumaoro and Fakoli. The search party goes from town to town and from kingdom to kingdom so as to spot Sogolon Diata

⁴ When Balla Fasseké is caught captive by Soumaoro Kanté and held against his will in the Sosso tower, he discovers a mythical musical instrument called the balafon (the xylophone). That instrument has become the most iconic one in Mande artistic and music repertoire. Mandingo traditionalists believe that king Kanté has received it from Jinn.

(Sundiata). Finally, their journey leads them to Mema, and over there, Magnouma begins selling Baobab leaves known as gnougou⁵ in Malinké (Mandingo language).

One day, Sogolon Kolonkan goes to the market place of Mema to buy condiments. She meets the selling woman (Magouma the Baobab leaves' seller) and it turns out that the latter belongs to the delegation that is searching Sundiata and his family. Kolonkan leads Magnouma and the four men with whom she has come to Mema to her mother Sogolon. The visitors of the day explain the reason of their presence which is nothing but Sundiata's return to his fatherland. When Sundiata gets informed that his people wish that he should return and that the seers make it clear that he only is the true redeemer of Mali, he decides to immediately get back to his kingdom. That return is meant to restore rightful authority to Mali. In the midst of the preparations for his departure to Mali, Sundiata's mother (Sogolon) passes away and is buried in Mema. Niane (1960) writes Sundiata's reply to the search party as it follows: "I am going to ask the king's leave and we will return immediately" (P.45).

3. Return, War of Liberation and Foundation of a New Empire

After Sundiata has buried his mother Sogolon in Mema⁶, he decides to fulfill the commitment (which he had made earlier) of going back to his homeland. He slightly clashes with Mansa Moussa Tounkara (king of Mema), but in the end, he gets along with his mentor so that the latter entrusts him with half of his service men (army). Moreover, king Tounkara advises him to seek additional troops in Ouagadougou (Ghana) on his way to Mali.

In Ghana⁷, king Cissé does Sundiata the same favour as Tounkara his Mema counterpart: Cissé gives him half of his troops too. In spite of all the warriors put at Sundiata's disposal, he is still going to be outnumbered by Soumaoro Kanté's warriors. Surprisingly, Sundiata tells his brother Manding Bory that number does not matter. What matters is worth, Sundiata indicates.

When Sundiata is returning, he recalls the promise that he and his childhood friend Fran Kamara have made to work hand in hand when they become kings in their respective kingdoms. Straight away he heads to Tabon. Fran Kamara has become a strong and powerful king and is now nicknamed Tabon Wana Kamara (the Dread One). Sundiata fights his first battle against Sosso Balla in the valley of Tabon and wins over Soumaoro's son who flees before Sogolon Diata's fury.

Soumaoro is told about his son's defeat and he angrily decides to confront Sundiata at Négueboria in Boré country. Sundiata beats Soumaoro's army and the king of Sosso vanishes and then retreats with his army. During that battle too, Sundiata is the winner, but in

⁵ Gnougous are baobab leaves. They are used as condiments in all Mandingo staple foods. These leaves serve as a major clue in finding Sundiata in exile. When the search party sent to find Sundiata in exile reach the city of Mema, the woman among them starts selling Gnougous a few days after their arrival. So, one day, Sundiata's younger sister comes to the market place and buys them. That fact arouses the saleswoman's curiosity and she asks the young girl about her family. Thankfully, it turns out that she is Sundiata's sister and she leads the lady and the rest of the delegation to her family and it is thus that Sundiata's whereabouts is discovered.

⁶ Mema is the city (kingdom) where Sundiata and family find their last refuge after sojourning in Djedeba and Ghana. It is in Mema that he gets his military and political training. And it is from there that he is returning to his homeland to reconquer the kingdom bequeathed to him.

⁷ Ghana is said to be the first empire founded in Sub-Saharan Africa after the glorious era of Ancient Egypt. Sundiata and his loved ones once stay there too as refugees. Yet, they are compelled to leave there because of the hot climate. Sundiata's family left Mandé where the climate is by far more bearable. Because of his mother's failing health, Sundiata is advised to leave Ghana for Mema where the temperatures are lower because the city is a riverine one.

Néguëboria, he discovers that Soumaoro is invulnerable to iron and he can disappear and reappear where and when he wants to. Given the assets possessed by his opponent, he says that other weapons are needed to vanquish Soumaoro.

When returning from Negueboria, Sundiata and his allies halt at Kankigné in order to spend night there. When they are getting ready to sleep inside their tents and makeshift huts, they get attacked by surprise late at night. One more time, Sundiata is the vanquisher (the victor). Niane (1960) says: “ this was near the village of Kankigné. The men set up camps in the middle of the plain whilst guards were stationed on the heights. As usual, the men grouped themselves by tribes and busied themselves cooking food” (P.53).

The surprise attack at Kankigné turns out badly for Soumaoro. Sundiata and his allies defeat him and decimate the whole Sosso rearguard. Further to that, Soumaoro returns to Sosso. As for Sundiata, he gets the support of many villages and recruits soldiers within those villages. All the rebellious kings of the savanna country go to meet in Sibi under the command of Kamandjan Kamara⁸. Fakoli in his turn deals with the enrollment of troops in the south in order to take revenge on his uncle Soumaoro.

All the valorous sons of Old Mali (Mande) accompanied by their kings are summoned by Kamandjan and asked to be present at Sibi. All of them turn up and Sundiata comes to deliver a message of hope after which he makes it clear to the assembly (the participants) that he is going to fight with them beside him in order to free the kingdom. He reminds his interlocutors the fact that their ancestors lived free. So, they need to be free too. To get those present be very well committed, he illustrates his speech with a very heartening saying. Niane (1960) writes: “ *rather death than slavery*” (P.56).

After the august assembly of kings in the plain of Sibi, Sundiata decides to stay for a few days in Sibi. That stay is meant to reinforce his troops, but mostly find how to destroy Soumaoro’s magical power. For that purpose, the soothsayers tell Sundiata that he has to slaughter a hundred of white bulls, white rams and white cocks. While performing those sacrifices, Sundiata is informed about the arrival of his sister Nana Triban and his griot Balla Fasseké, all of whom were kept captives in Sosso. Niane (1960) says: “ After numerous salutations, Sundiata asked the fugitives to relate how they had been able to elude the vigilance of a king such as Soumaoro” (P.57).

Nana Triban tells Sundiata that their hometown and capital city Niani has been completely destroyed by Soumaoro and that their brother Dankaran Touman has had Soumaoro marry her by force. Thanks to her smartness, she manages to get Soumaoro reveal her his totem. When Nana Triban is done with the story of her stay in Sosso, Balla Fasseké begins telling his version of events too. Balla tells Sundiata that the latter’s victory over Soumaoro in Tabon has served as the “click “to their flight. Sundiata also learns that Soumaoro is advancing and trying to block his way to Old Mali.

Before leaving Sibi for the battle field, Sundiata arranges a great military review and asks Balla Fasseké to hearten the warriors. And, thanks to the extraordinary power of the spoken word, all the war chiefs (the kings) perform great feats.

Fran Kamara (Tabon Wana) cuts down a big tree with one stroke of his sword. As for Kamandjan, he rides a charger and raises dust which had never been seen by anyone, while his

⁸ Kamandjan Camara is the king of Sibi and the host of the first rally of the kings of the region that are told to gather in his town so as to prepare the war against Soumanguru Kanté.

horse is swiftly running, the earth quakes. In the end of Kamandjan's performance, the mountain of Sibi splits and a hollow (like a tunnel) appears in its middle.

Sundiata pitches camp at Dayala in the valley of the Niger whereas Soumaoro settles his troops in Krina⁹. The two sorcerer kings send their declarations of war through their owls. After war of words, swords decide what the outcome is going to be.

Fakoli joins in Sundiata's troops at Dayala. After that episode, Sundiata decides to attack Soumaoro before the rainy season. On the eve of the battle, Sundiata slaughters several oxen, now not for sacrifice but in order to raise the spirits of his warriors. After the feast, Balla Fasseke rises and speaks directly to Sundiata. He reminds the latter the ultimate mission which behooves him as the true heir to the throne of Old Mali (Mande). He mostly recalls the latter the hope and faith that all Mande dwellers and the dethroned kings of the neighbouring kingdoms have in his person and mission. Balla tells Sundiata that he is expecting him to come up with feats that he would be able to pass on to coming generations. He urges Sundiata to kill thousands of Sosso fighters to allow him sing "the Song of Vultures" (p.63).

Before Sundiata makes for the battlefield, his brother Manding Bory and sister Nana Triban come to ask him if he has not forgotten to prepare Soumaoro's totem (the Tana Bow and arrow). In the meantime, Balla Fasseké enters the tent and tells Sundiata that the soothsayers have seen the end of Soumaoro in a dream (p.64). Sundiata becomes more hopeful with that announcement and soon after he gives his powerful army the order to engage in a fierce battle with Soumaoro's troops.

T.Niane (1960) states: "with a powerful voice, Sundiata cried *an gnewa*¹⁰. The order was repeated from tribe to tribe and the army started off. Soumaoro stood on the right with his cavalry" (p.65).

The two armies collide and men collapse on both sides. That day, the outcome is joy for Sundiata because he succeeds in hitting Soumaoro with a white cock's spur and that achievement is the sign of his victory over the king of Sosso. When his arrow hits Soumaoro, a great black bird (the bird of Krina) flies over above the fray, and that is the symbol of King Kanté's defeat and death. In the wake of that, Soumaoro flees away and naturally Sundiata, Fakoli and Mema horsemen pursue him and his son Balla. They catch up with them at the foot of Koulikoro Mountain, but Soumaoro decides to yield and merely vanishes into the black cavern of the famous mountain.

After Koulikoro's episode, Sundiata and his allies head to the Magnificent Sosso and destroy the legendary city to its foundations. When Sundiata gets done with the total destruction of Sosso, he swoops on Diaghan because the arrogant and sorcerer king of the kingdom in question remains faithful to Soumaoro's cause. Like Sosso, Diaghan is taken in one morning and all the young men that are not killed get enslaved and enrolled in Sundiata's troops as Sofas (soldiers). They get their hair shaved as a sign of their captivity.

After Diaghan's episode, Sundiata divides his army into three groups. The first group is led by Fakoli Koroma and the latter is given the order to attack Bambougou. The second group is led by Fran Kamara to whom Sundiata assigns the mission of fighting in the mountains of Fouta. The third and most important troop is led by Sundiata himself and the hero marches on Kita.

⁹ Krina is a very symbolic place in the history of old Mali (Mandé) for it is in the suburbs of that emblematic city that Sundiata defeats Soumangouru Kanté. The city symbolizes freedom and hope for Old Mali (Mandé) people.

¹⁰ An gnewa means let us go. Sundiata says this phrase to give order to his troops to engage in the battle against Soumaoro Kanté

Taking Kita is not made possible until Sundiata sacrifices a hundred of white oxen, a hundred of white rams and a hundred of white cocks. Those sacrifices are performed to spirits (Jinn) of Kita Mountain (Kita Kourou) to get their support in the fight against the king of Kita (Kita Mansa). The spirits accept the sacrifices, but Kita Mansa refuses to surrender and gets killed. Kita is taken without bloodshed for the king is the only one killed and Sundiata accords him royal obsequies. Immediately, the Kamaras of Kita become Sundiata's allies. When Kita is vanquished, Sundiata continues to Boudofo where he is received with honours due to his rank. He leaves Boudofo for Kourou koto and the atmosphere is alike.

The next trip takes him up the hill of Kita (Kita Kourou) which harbours a magic pool of water called Mogoya-Dji. He goes to the pool guarded by Jinn to thank them for their help in the fight against Kita Mansa. He drinks its water and gets transformed. Niane (1960) puts it: "He drank it three times and washed his face with it. Out of that, he radiated like a star and his eyes had an unbearable brilliance" (pp.71-72).

After the two days trip round Kita Kourou, Sundiata returns to Kita and finds that Fakoli and Tabon Wana are waiting for him and that they have come with delegates from the kingdoms that they have vanquished (conquered). Sundiata leaves Kita and goes to Do. the king of Do and his people receive him with warmth and enthusiasm. He almost gets cuddled like a child because he is in his uncles' land. From Do he sends envoys to Mema to indicate that he wants to be their ally. Niane (1960) explains: "He sent a richly furnished embassy to Mema loaded with costly gifts. Thus, he paid off his contracted debt and the embassy made it known to the king that the Cissé-Tounkaras and the Keitas would be allies for ever" (p.72).

The embassy tells Sundiata that Mema leaders have taken the oath of having Mali as their unconditional ally. Henceforth, Cissés-Tounkara and Keitas are going to be allies forever. While still in Do, Sundiata orders all his generals to meet him up in Kaa-ba (in the land of the king of Sibi). Niane (1960) comes up in saying: "It was from Do, also that Sundiata ordered all his generals to meet him at Kaaba on the Niger in the land of the king of Sibi" (p.74).

Sundiata summons his allies, the new conquered territories' representatives and their warriors and asks them to meet him in Ka-ba. That rally is known as Kourou Kan Fouga¹¹ and is held in a clearing on the outskirts of the town of Ka-ba in the country of Sibi. So, Kouroukan Fouga is the great assembly held to lay the foundations of the new empire set up by Sundiata. On that day, Sundiata is enthroned as the new emperor.

Kamandjan as the host of the ceremony is given the floor and he speaks to praise Sundiata's courage and acknowledges that they owe their victory over Soumaoro to Sundiata. To mark his allegiance to the new sovereign, Kamandjan, with a strong hand plants his spear on the ground in front of the dais and opposite the officials and speaks. Niane (1960) reports Kamandjan's words: "Sundiata, here is my spear, it is yours. Henceforth, it is from you that I derive my kingdom for I acknowledge you my sovereign" (P.75).

When Kamandjan does that, the twelve kings that are present follow his example. At Kourou Kan Fouga, Sundiata establishes the rights of each people and ratifies their friendships. He specially makes the Sinankouya official and decides the banter brotherhood between all the peoples of Mali. Niane (1960) affirms: "He also proclaimed all the prohibitions which still obtain in relations between tribes" (P.78).

¹¹ Kouroukan Fouga is the great assembly held to lay the foundations of the new empire set up by Sundiata. On that day, Sundiata is enthroned as the new emperor. The twelve kings of the country are summoned to Sibi at Kamandian Camara's. They unanimously agree to choose Sundiata as the new Mansa (their emperor). So, from then the foundations of a new empire called old Mali (Mandé) are laid.

After the great rally of Ka-ba known as Kurukan Fuga, Sundiata and his troops head to Old Mali (Mande). On their way to Niani, Sundiata's delegation is welcomed with honour by each village that they cross. Once in Niani, he rebuilds the town and makes it the capital of the new empire. During Sundiata's reign, people live in prosperity and under the rule of law (justice). Niane (1960) explains: " Djata's justice spared nobody. He followed the very word of God. He protected the weak against the strong and people would make journeys lasting several days to come and demand justice of him. Under his sun the upright man was rewarded and the wicked one punished" (p.81).

Niani becomes prosperous and the most envied city in those days. The newly capital of the empire is made the main centre of crop production. Thanks to that, its inhabitants have forgotten about the sad days of hunger which seriously undermine People 's dignity and sense of esteem. But now, all that has become a sad recollection. All the villages duplicate the successful model of Niani and get committed to take up the challenge of making it as great farmers like the dwellers of Niani. Niane (1960) states: " in their new-found peace, the villages knew prosperity again, for with Sundiata, happiness had come into everyone's home. Vast fields of millet, rice, cotton, indigo and fonio surrounded the villages. Whoever worked always had something to live on" (P.81).

Conclusion

This research study has dealt with Sundiata Keita's life in all its aspects and phases. Its main aim was to point out the different sequences of his existence so as to make some particular steps of his life known. The paper explored his childhood, his awakening (the day when he woke), his exile, Soumaoro Kanté's reign, the history (the coalition of kings), the baobab leaves, the return, Nana triban and Balla Faseké, Krina, the empire, Kouroukan Fougua and Niani. At the end of the study, we found that some very interesting parts of Sundiata's life are not at all known or taught. We also discovered the names of the different kingdoms that leagued to form Old Mali Empire (Mandé). Another discovery concerns banter brotherhood (Sinankuya) between tribes and ethnic groups. The Social classification that attributed a function to each tribe is a major discovery too. All these advances got formalized during the historic rally of Kurukan Fuga where the foundations of a modern state were laid by Sundiata (Sogolon Djata, Mari Djata, Narhé Maghan Djata).

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