

Sunjata

(Narrated by Chérif Keita, sung by Hawa Kassé Mady Diabaté, with Lassana Diabaté on the balafon.)

He took his bow and arrow, the brave son of Sogolon
And conquered the savannah.
He took his bow and arrow, the Master hunter, Son of Sogolon,
The Buffalo Woman, who gave birth to the Lion King of Mande!

Hawa, tèmè naan ye![Hawa, Carry on]

This is the Sunjata Fasa, the epic of the Mande people.
It is a story of the great adversity that befell the people of Old Mali,
This is how they survived an oppressive power, seven centuries ago.

Hawa, Mande kaw tòrò la![Hawa, the people of Mande have suffered]

When Sumaoro the sorcerer King entered the land of Mande,
He unleashed terror on its people.
The day he entered Mande, he was wearing a hat made of human skin
The day he invaded Mande, he was wearing a robe of human skin
Shoes made with human skin! Oh, What a frightful sight!
The people of Mande gathered at Kiri, their oldest village, to lament their plight.

Hawa, tèmè naan ye![Hawa, Take us along]

The Epic of Sunjata is a story of rivalry, of ferocious rivalry
Between the two wives of King Nare Maghan of Old Mali.
Sassouma Berete, the first queen, was beautiful but mean-spirited;
Sogolon, the second, was an ugly hunchback with a kind and generous heart.
Polygamy breeds competition, not only between the wives of one man
But also among the children they bring into this world.

Hawa, teme naan ye![Hawa, take us forward]

Who would be king and inherit Nare Maghan's throne?
Sassouma's son, Dankaran Touman or Sogolon's son, Sunjata?
Who would become the great savior the soothsayers predicted?
It is said that a big tree grows out of a small seed
But patience is hard for human mortals!
Sunjata's destiny was a threat to his half-brother and Sassouma, the first wife, cast a
spell on him; seven years after his birth, Sunjata still could not walk.
He became the object of much ridicule.

Djeli Mosso, Djata taama na![Griot Woman, Djata went into exile]

Today, I will walk, Diata said, to fetch sweet baobob leaves for you, my dear mother!

As he tore himself from the ground, stood on his feet and took his first steps, Sogolon broke into a song: "Come out, men and women of Mande. Come out, witches and sorcerers, your spell is finally broken! Sunjata is marching forward! Sunjata, the Master hunter, king of the savannah, is called Simbõ. Sunjata told his mother: "Gather your belongings, let's leave the land of Mande for a while! Exile is hard but it brings out your good character." Let's go to Mema!"

Hawa, tèmè na yé!

"The hero is not loved but on troubled days", the proverb goes. The Mande were suffering in the hands of Soumaoro, the sorcerer king. They said: "Who will save us today?" Let's go find Sunjata, the son of Sogolon; he has become a brave warrior, we heard." His time has come. His half-brother Dankaran Touman drove him away yesterday But today we need him to free his fatherland.

Hawa, Mande mansaw baara la![The Mande Kings Have worked Hard]

Sunjata came back to unite his people against tyranny. Who are the generals who joined his noble cause? Kamadjan of Siby, prince of the Kamara clan, Fakoli Koroma, who defected from his uncle, the sorcerer king, to fight for Justice. Thus, Mande was freed from oppression. Laughter and happiness came back to its people. Sunjata, the Lion King, king of the kings, was my ancestor. He was called Keita, which means "take your heritage, make it bigger before you pass it on to posterity." Sunjata became an emperor seven centuries ago. His memory rests with the griots or *jali*, that you see here with me. Death will eat your flesh, swallow your bones but it has **no** power over *tògò*, your good fame that will live forever, in stories, in songs.

Diabaté,Refrain

Please sing with us!

Note: Keita is a French corruption of the Malinke(Mande) expression, Kèta, composed of two words: *Kè*(heritage) and the verb *ta*(take).