Mame Diarra Bousso Or Female Sainthood

Sokhna Maryam Bousso commonly known as Mame Diarra was born in 1250H (corresponding to 1833) in the village of Mbusóbé, Jolof, Sénégal. Actually, her forefathers had left their homeland called Golleré located in the Fouta province (northern part of Senegal) to settle in the Jolof province (central part).

Mame Diarra was the daughter of the pious Serigne Mouhamadou Bousso and the virtuous Sokhna Asta Wâlo Mbacke. Serigne Mouhamadou Bousso was a descendant of Sayyidina Hassan, grandson of the Prophet (PBUH), hence the Cherif status of the Mbusóbé. As for Sokhna Asta Wâlo, she was the daughter of Serigne Ahmadou Sokhna Bousso, son of the man of God Mame Maharam Mbacke; the latter was the father of Serigne Mame Balla, father of Serigne Mame Mor Anta Sally; Serigne Mame Mor Anta Sally was the father of the most honorable Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. What a noble ascendance!

Mame Diarra learnt by rote the holy Koran – which she handwrote several times by memory – from her mother Sokhna Asta Wâlo; the latter was a consummate Koranic and religious sciences teacher (theology, jurisprudence, sufism, exegesis of Koran). Sokhna Asta gave a good religious training to her daughter to whom she imparted commendable social and moral values; on seeing that great pedagogue in her class, one might think she was a man, on account of her dedication to her vocation; she was used to wearing clothes that resembled jellabas. Mame Asta Wâlo would recite the whole Koran every night during her surerogatory Prayers.

Sokhna Diarra had four outstanding children: Serigne Mame Mor Diarra alias Boroom Saam, the eldest son who prayed 100 rakkas each night, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, universal figure and timeless divine Miracle, Serigne Habîboullah and Sokhna Fâty Mbacke who both passed away at an untimely age.

The advent of Serigne Touba i.e the Cheikh of Touba was undoubtedly an evidence of and a consecration for the spiritual dimension of Mame Diarra; as a poet praising Sokhna Mame Diarra Bousso's qualities aptly said: “her works have produced Mame Mor Diarra, but the underlying intention favored her with [Cheikh Ahmadou] Bamba”. Following a talk by her saint mother about the deceased men of God who would spend their nights engaging in praying, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba – who did not then start school yet – immediately followed suit! In that, the future Servant of the Prophet resembled Sayyidina Mouhammad (PBUH) about whom the great poet Bousayri said: “at a very age, he used to get involved in devotional practices, which is indeed the appanage
of God-elect people!”

All things considered, Serigne Touba was an answered prayer as it were for Sokhna Diarra; moreover, it is stated in the holy Koran “as for those who believe and do righteous deeds, He [Allah] will give them fully their rewards, and more out of His Grace”. (S 4, V 172). This verse which is in the Surat dedicated to women is indeed informative of the divine reward which does not make any difference whatsoever between men and women; as a matter of fact, fair treatment in terms of good actions is encapsulated in this verse: “Surely, Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and the believing women, the devout men and the devout women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, men and women who humble themselves, the alms-giving men and the alms-giving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men and women who guard their chastity, the men and women who engage much in remembering Allah, for all of them has Allah prepared Forgiveness and great Reward.” (S33 V35)

Boroom Porokhane i.e the owner of Porokhane, as she was nicknamed, performed her daily canonical Prayers on time and would always renew her ablutions prior to each Prayer; since her early childhood, she would embark upon long surerogatory Prayers and would spend days and days each month fasting voluntarily; she would very often recite the famous collection of Prayers on the Prophet (PBUH) titled Dalâ-ilul Qayrât, especially when she was involved in house chores; furthermore, that generous soul was known for her frequent alms and for her helpfulness to the needy people; her piety, her sainthood, her generosity, her caring support to the elderly and the young people, her graciousness... were so uncommon that people referred to her as Jâratul Lâhi; this exalting name stands for “the Neighbor of God”. Her granddaughter Sokhna Amy extolled her spiritual and moral qualities in her panegyric poem composed in wolof as follows: “o the Saint, the tireless worshiper of God according to the Tradition of the Prophet (PBUH); thanks to God's Grace, you are favored with His Recognition that is praised all over the country, o Neighbor of God! Pretty creature endowed with beautiful qualities, the epitome of the dignified personality, ocean of generosity that showers her grace upon people without discrimination, o Neighbor of God”!

It is worth pointing out that worshiping God for a woman does not only boil down to devotional practices; in fact, fulfilling one's conjugal duties do partake of devotional practices in Islam; in his “advising message to Penda Diop”, Cheikhoul Khadîm warns the Muslim woman
against disobedience to her husband: “Do not worship God while showing disobedience towards your spouse who fears the Almighty. [...] do know that women's holy war unquestionably consists in abiding by their spouses' orders”. The famous anecdote about the Saint of Porokhane and the picket fence is a relevant testimony to the right attitude of an obedient woman towards her husband.

Mame Diarra is, in all respects, the spiritual heir of saint ladies such as Sayyidatuna Amina (saint mother of the Prophet[PBUH]), of Sayyidatuna Asiya (spouse of the Pharaoh), of Sayyidatuna Fatima (daughter of the Prophet [PBUH]) and of Sayyidatuna Maryam or Mary (the saint mother of Jesus and the namesake of Mame Diarra); furthermore, the spiritual resemblance between those two Maryam is striking indeed: their elevated sainthood and sublime piety, their exceptional spiritual and moral qualities, their wonderful son...

In the Koran, Sayyidatuna Maryam is praised as follows: “And when the Angels said: O Maryam! Surely Allah hath chosen thee, and purified thee and chosen thee above the women of the world”. (S3 V 42). In his beautiful poem dedicated to Sayyidatuna Maryam (Saint Mary), Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, writes: “truly, you are favored with immense graces, o Queen of virtuous women; Maryam, you have actually spiritually outranked pious women. [...] I hope through this poem a [divine]Recognition that makes eternal your Proximity with God”. Anyway, this lyric poem would fit Sokhna Diarra, the-Neighbor-of-God like gloves. For the sake of argument, her proximity with the Almighty allowed her to achieve some miracles the most famous of which was that wonderful feat that was recounted by the 3rd caliph of muridism, honorable Serigne Abdou Ahad Mbacke: when Serigne Touba was put into a deep well by the French colonizers, the angels called “Mala-ul a’lá” along with those named “Muqarrabûn” came to him so as to drag him out; the Cheikh asked them if they had come upon God's Order; their answer being “no”, the Cheikh sheerly turned down their offer; at this juncture, someone grabbed him by his shoulders and freed him from the abyss, telling him: “go and carry on your Mission”! On turning around, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba realized that person was her own mother – who had passed away decades and decades before! Sokhna Amy, the renowned poet of Boroom Porokhane, rightly composed these lyric verses in wolof: “you [Mame Diarra] did what nobody else did; you acquired what nobody else could; you achieved what nobody else was capable of, O Neighbor of God!”

The life of Mame Diarra, short though it was – it lasted only 33 years, should be a good example for the Muslim woman in general and Murid in particular to muse on; as the 5th Caliph of
muridism honorable Serigne Saliou once said, being unable to accomplish a thing should not be an excuse to give up; instead, we should contrive a means to imitate men of God as much as we can. As a matter of fact, our endeavors, according to Serigne Saliou, will place us above our generation.

Women are pillars of society. As wives and mothers, they play a significant part in the progress of nations; accordingly, they should be aware that their offspring will be what they make out of them through their behavior; they should realize that upon the conscious or unconscious way they fulfill their educative, social, moral, and spiritual duties will depend the status, good or bad, of their children – the future and hope of the world.

Dear sisters, do not be misled by those people who are constantly invoking misused terms such as equality, parity while at the same time shamelessly using you in derogatory fashion shows, downgrading commercials, infamous shows of models that stain your image and warp your personality. Stay away from such practices and all others that do not give you a good image!

Whoever visits the religious town of Porokhane will assuredly realize that Sokhna Mame Diarra, the epitome of female sainthood, was undoubtedly a perfect role model for women; she was the only woman in the history of humanity to have these things at the same time: her own town, a big mosque, an outstanding mausoleum (annually visited by hundreds of thousands of people), an annual Magal or religious celebration (attended by about one to two million people), a religious and vocational complex where hundreds of girls – all of them are named after her! – are given a religious, social and professional free training.

At the end of her life full of blessings, the saint mother of the founder of muridism passed away in the town of Porokhane in 1283 H (1865). It is worth noting that Sokhna Diarra emigrated to Porokhane along with Mame Mor Anta Sally in order to preserve and promote the Islamic religion which was then aggressed by the French colonizers and local aristocrats: “And whoever emigrates for the sake of Allah will definitely find in the earth many a haven and abundant resources; and whoever forsakes his home in the cause of Allah and His Messenger and death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with Allah, and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Merciful” (Koran, S 4[Women] V99). May God acknowledge all the works of Sokhna Mame Diarra Bousso and favor us with her benediction for the sake of her outstanding son, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the eternal Servant of the Prophet(PBUH).

Cheikh Amadou Bamba Seye, teacher of English and Fulbrighter, USA, April 2011.