

Chakanika or Msanduka

(A red day mask from the Kaphuka area)



Themes

1) Limits & restrictions of *chikamwini* system 2) Leadership from the mother's line 3) Thirst for power 4) Witchcraft

Etymology

Chakanika means, 'He who failed' (in this case, to be chosen chief).

Msanduka means, 'He who changed his nature' (in this case, to that of a witch).

Description

The red mask (30 cm.) portrays an outsider or a witch. The face shows a senior man with a receding hairline, a heavily wrinkled forehead, jowls, bushy sideburns, a moustache and a small goatee. The heavy bags below the eyes stress that he cannot sleep because of his thirst for power and authority. The aggressive and vengeful eyes are highlighted by frowning eyebrows. The wide mouth displays clenched teeth expressing hostility. A slim, clean moustache gives the character an air of meanness. The nose is heavy and flat. The small ears show deafness to the advice of others. Local Chewa tribal marks adorn the face. The mask has a shaggy wig made of sisal. The dancer

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wears a kilt, leglets and armlets made of the same material or of jute and a jute shirt stitched with rags. He carries a long whip and a walking stick.

Chakanika is danced by a senior person who is bound to keep the rules of sexual abstinence. He performs for funeral rites and initiations to puberty that take place at the occasion of funerals. The dancer carries a stick and enters the arena at the rhythm of the *chisamba*. He soon starts shaking dramatically. He walks around the arena clumsily, imitating an old man. He plants his stick in the ground and keeps holding it firmly while he swerves his feet with moderation, signifying his advanced age. His age does not prevent him, however, from moving his pelvis and shaking his hips suggestively. Meanwhile, the male choir sings for him the following song that unveils his story: "**Chakanika** used to say, *Look at me, my friends. I am now old but I still wish to become a chief. (The villagers) keep giving the position of chieftainship to young people... They keep passing me over. Here as a husband (mkamwini), I still find myself (a stranger), a person who can only observe and fail to be chosen. He's a failure, Mwale, a failure!*"

The song describes the position of the husband in the matrilineal set up. As a stranger in the village of his wife, he cannot be chosen for a position of authority while his own children and grandchildren are eligible. Some husbands are unhappy with such limited prospects for advancement and openly voice their frustration, revealing their desire for power and responsibility. They show discontent and behave arrogantly, as if they are from the chief's lineage or nobility. Their frustration and jealousy spur them even to practise witchcraft on those whose position they envy. They are believed to use medicine to kill those they envy in order to take their place. Villagers are convinced that incidences of premature death in leaders are caused by the envy of people like **Chakanika** who have no respect for blood and marriage ties. They kill even their own relatives. The character's double name emphasises this. A person who has frustrated ambitions can easily become a competitor and a rival. He knows no relatives and no friends. His thirst for power blinds him and releases from his heart the ugly beast that slumbers inside. 'He who failed to be chosen' can become 'he who changed into a witch', a horrible antisocial person. After all, greed and envy are more powerful than blood or marriage ties. The Chewa believe that evil wishes and envious thoughts lead a person to practise witchcraft, the infallible weapon of those who are motivated by jealousy and the ultimate explanation of all misfortune.

Through **Chakanika** the spirits of the ancestors teach of those who make unreasonable claims for power and authority. The character mocks the stupidity and greed of those fixated on assuming unjustified power by reasserting the rules that regulate the village hierarchy and succession of the Chewa. Indirectly, the character of **Chakanika – Msanduka** has the purpose of defusing the time bomb of jealousy that threatens their social order.

Song

"A **Chakanika** amanena, tandionani anzanga. Ndakalamba koma ine ufumu ndikuchita kuufuna. Akupatsa anyamata... musala ine tate e. Ine ndingoona pano, m'pa eni. Ine ndine mkamwini. Kwanga kungoona tate de chalaka chisankho. Chalaka a Mwale chalaka!"

Source

Interview in 1992

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