

## Chakula mkamwa

(A red day mask from the Khwidzi area)



### Themes

1) Limits and restrictions of *chikamwini* system 2) Discretion in keeping secrets

### Etymology

**Chakula mkamwa** means, 'He has a big mouth.'

### Description

The red mask (35 cm.) shows a senior man who is balding with white eyebrows, white hair and tufted moustache. The red colour of the mask denotes a man who is a stranger to the village. He has a very wide mouth, a flat nose and round staring eyes. His huge ears are exaggerated to suggest deafness. The headgear of the mask is a combination of tatters and white strips of goatskin. He wears the conventional tatter suit and carries a whip. He appears at funerals, commemoration ceremonies and the inauguration of chiefs and initiations. The character of **Chakula mkamwa** was popular in *gule*

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some years ago but is rarely seen performing today. An explanation for this might be that the dancer must remain sexually abstinent before performing.

Entering the *bwalo*, the character swerves his feet with great determination, imitating the dancing style of Pombo. The male choir comments on the reason for this tenacity: "*Oh! he has a big mouth, he has a big mouth, really big!*" **Chakula mkamwa** cannot keep his mouth shut, and he is not reliable when entrusted with secrets. As a member of his wife's family (*mkamwini*), he has the duty to show discretion and to avoid mixing in the politics of the family group or the village. Instead, he indiscriminately broadcasts internal family matters that should remain in the privacy of the home. His lack of sensitivity and discretion lead to quarrels and disputes amongst the family members and create problems especially for the head of the family group (the *malume* or *mwini mbumba*).

The character of **Chakula mkamwa** reminds the husband who joins his wife in her village (in keeping with the matrilineal system) of his responsibilities. To ensure a long lasting marriage and a healthy relationship with his wife's family and the village he will be required to adjust to his newfound secondary status. He is not to be overly vocal with his opinions and must show discretion with the members of the family that he has joined through marriage.

### Song

"*Oh Chakula mkamwa tate de (2x), Chakula mkamwa chakula!*"

### Source

Interview in 1992