

Chana

(A night structure from the Mua area)

Themes

- 1) Infertility – impotence
- 2) Caution against infertility in marriage/infertile people should not marry
- 3) Laziness
- 4) Social stigma

Etymology

The etymology of this word is obscure. It could come from an Indian language. Chana is a local name for the chick pea (*Cicer arctinum*), which is difficult to grow and produces a small yield. The word could also be a contraction of *cha ana* ('of the children') which, in this case, would mean that there are none.



Description

This night structure portrays an empty granary. It consists of a large hat made of palm leaves woven in a zigzag pattern that hides the face of the dancer. His body is concealed from the neck to the feet by a small 'granary' made of a bamboo frame woven with palm leaves.

Chana performs only in night ceremonies involving initiation and funeral rites. It spins around the *bwalo*, following a rhythm that resembles *khunju*. The dancer sings his own song without the support of the women. He disguises his voice with the help of a gazu and a drum made of spider webs. He sings, "**Chana, Chana, this very Chana went on the other side (of the village) to inspect the field, the field of chick peas (chana) that do not reproduce, like himself, Chana, this very Chana.**"

The granary shape gives **Chana** a fat appearance, portraying him as weak, apathetic and lazy. The image of the chick peas, being difficult to grow, suggests weakness. The cultural context of the song and the empty granary implies that **Chana's** laziness is coupled with the problem of infertility. There are no peas (children) to fill the granary.

The character of **Chana** warns the initiate about the tragedy of marrying an impotent man. In funeral rites, jokes about infertile people are often told in order to entertain the mourners.

www.kasiyamaliro.org

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

Chana's tragic story danced at the funeral eases the pain of the mourners for a short while but **Chana's** stigma remains for life.

Song

*“**Chana** dede (2x) chanacho, **Chana** dede **Chana** wapita m'tsidyamo, woyendera kumunda, wakayendera khobwe wasabala, monga achita iye, **Chana** dede chanacho.”*

Source

Interviews in 1994 and 2007

Reference

Williamson, J. (1974). *Useful Plants of Malawi*. Montfort Press: Malawi. p. 67, no. 122