

Chapana (Mua)

(A night mask used by women from the Mua area)

Themes

1) Marriage, preparation & instructions

Etymology

Chapana means, 'that which has trapped'.



Description

The mask or head cover is made of maize husks woven on a bamboo frame. Further details made from the same material are added to the head cover to imply a human face. The mask shows a mouth, teeth, nose, and lips, which are all exaggerated and protrude from the face. The general shape resembles a sunburst. The mask is used by women at the night vigil during the time of girls' initiation. The initiator, who impersonates **Chapana**, secretly borrows a shirt, a jacket and trousers from her husband. She dances to the *chisamba* rhythm moving sideways, left and right, backwards and then forwards. The character of **Chapana** appears on the night that the initiates enter the seclusion hut (*tsimba*). As **Chapana** enters the seclusion hut, the initiators (*anamkungwi*) intone: 1) "Did you ever see **Chapana**, it presses? He has come today, **Chapana**, for you, maiden." A second song reveals a



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little more of the identity of **Chapana**: 2) "*Do not behave like you do when soaking maize grain (without passion). Push! Push! Then it has penetrated (the penis)!*"

The first song talks about the girls' future husbands. Puberty rites lead to marriage and to sexual relations. **Chapana** becomes a euphemism for coitus. The second song is more explicit and teaches the girls about engaging in the sexual act and encourages them to be involved and to facilitate sexual intercourse. Such instruction belongs to the *mwambo*. In recent times **Chapana** is rarely featured in female initiation rites. The reason for its disappearance can be found in the economic realities of today. The women who instruct and assist at the *chinamwali* have to be fed for several days. The increasing costs of sheltering, feeding and caring for those who are required to be present at girls' initiation have become prohibitive. The tendency is to shorten the initiation rite to one day instead of 3 or 4 days. In more recent times the traditional pedagogues have given the same instruction by word of mouth without the extensive symbolic gestures.

This **Chapana** is quite distinct from the character of that name from Ntchisi.

Songs

- 1) "*Wachiona **Chapana** (2x)? Chabwera lero, **Chapana** anamwali.*"
- 2) "*Usachite ngati uvuula mphale! Ede ede! Ndiye yalowa!*"

Source

Interview in 1992