

## Chatenga Apemba

(A red day mask from the Mua area)



### Themes

1) Support for traditional medicine & *sing'angas*

### Etymology

**Chatenga Apemba** means, 'He resembles Mr. Pemba.'

### Description

The red colour of this large mask (60 cm.) emphasises that Mr. Pemba is a stranger. Mr. Pemba was an herbalist (*sing'anga*) from the Mua area (Tembetembe village), who left Malawi many years ago. He went to seek employment in South Africa. He stayed there until the time of his death in 1990 and never returned to his homeland or to his village of origin. His relatives considered him a man who had forgotten his home (*mtchona*). The mask has the staring eyes of a seer, a flat nose and alert ears to hear the voices of the spirits. He has scarification typical of a medicine man, a drooping moustache, fancy goatee, a mournful mouth (with teeth on both jaws), and wrinkles on his forehead. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters and wild animal skins to emphasise that he was a man of the bush, where he dug roots (medicine). His mane is topped with

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

two long horns emphasising his power as a medicine man (traditional medicine was stored in horns). His costume is the tattered suit of *gule*. He carries a club, a weapon of the bush, and a long knife for digging out medicine.

The character of **Chatenga Apemba** was created in 1995 at the request of Pemba's brother Juliano, who was terminally ill. Juliano, who had taken up his brother's trade, wanted to remember his late brother. Soon after commissioning the mask, Juliano also died and **Chatenga Apemba** was launched at the occasion of Juliano's funeral. This character fulfilled Juliano's wish of keeping his brother's memory alive and demonstrated to the spirit world that the Pemba family group was still caring for him even if he had died far away. The purpose of this new character was ultimately to praise a man who knew his trade and was a reputed herbalist. By adding **Chatenga Apemba** to the Chewa pantheon of *gule wamkulu*, the two brothers were reunited for Juliano's entry into the spirit world. Pemba's behaviour was also represented in the character's dancing style. His originality and reputation of being a little crazy are featured in the way the dancer spins round and round in the arena following the dancing style of Kamvuluvulu, the whirlwind (refer to that entry). The song is simple: "(What is his *name*? (His name is) *He resembles Mr. Pemba.*" Today the character's popularity has exceeded the original purpose for which it was created. The character of **Chatenga Apemba** appears in a variety of other ritual contexts besides funerals. **Chatenga Apemba** praises all those who are endowed with the gift of herbalist and diviner.

### Song

*"Dzina o tate de? Chatenga Apemba."*

### Source

Interviews in 2001