

Chidzere

(An orange day mask from the Dedza area)

Themes

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

Etymology

Chidzere is an abbreviation for *chidzereni*, which means, 'since he is back'.



Description

This orange mask (30 cm.) shows a man with a round face, big cheeks, small nose and enormous irregular teeth that protrude from his mouth. He is middle aged, with black receding hair, a long black moustache, wrinkles and large staring eyes. Four warts stand out on his forehead and two more on the cheeks. His headgear is made of rags. He wears a tatter suit.

He moves into the arena with a whip and a club. He dances the *chisamba* in an effeminate way. The men sing for him: 1) "**Chidzere** (Mr. Just back): *they say that I try to trace the genealogy of my child... me, Chidzere! They say that I refused to go to the medicine man so that I could father a child of my own...me, Chidzere! No, no, this is not the way to behave. This is to be mad, Chidzere! What kind of impotence is that, which couldn't be cured with medicine...me, Chidzere?*" Then the women answer: 2) "*Those who have no penis should not ask for me in marriage!*" The men reply: 3) "*Those who have no vagina should not offer themselves in marriage.*" The men's song mocks **Chidzere** because of his well known impotence. He has been married for a long time and yet has no children of his own. He does not know the identity of the fathers of those he calls his children. He pretends that he went to the medicine man, where he was cured of his impotence. His wife and her family know that this is not true. That is why the women mock him with their song, stating that he has no penis. The reply of the men addresses the opposite sex and talks about barrenness.

Infertility is commonly associated with obesity, warts and other deformities, such as protruding teeth. The orange colour stresses **Chidzere's** position as an outcast. **Chidzere** is a tragic figure of an

infertile person who tries desperately to hide his misfortune. He struggles in the arena to put up a show and pretends to be a potent male oozing with sex appeal, but he is cruelly exposed in public. He feels deep despair in his heart as reflected in his wide staring eyes and mouth distorted with pain. He manifests his anguish by carrying a club and a whip, which are used as bluff weapons.

The character of **Chidzere** appears at the time of funerals and commemoration rites that include initiation. He provides the mourners with an easy subject for ridicule and levity at a time of grief. **Chidzere** provides a warning to the girls and boys who are about to marry: to be aware of infertility. They should choose a partner who can give them children. **Chidzere** is also considered to be lazy, stupid and inconsistent, lacking leadership and ambition. **Chidzere** has no initiative to better his condition. He is discouraged and ashamed. The character of **Chidzere** wants to incite people with his type of handicap to react and to show more industry, but provides them with no answer to the problem of their impotence or infertility.

Songs

1) "**Chidzere Chidzere** tate ine n'kukumba mwana tate de **Chidzere** kuti kwa asing'anga sindipita **Chidzere!** Kutu n'kaone mwana **Chidzere!** lai iai satero de! Uku n'kupitiratu tate de **Chidzere!** Ugocho wanji wokanika mankhwala **Chidzere?** E tate kwawo kwawo! Ea wopanda mbolo asanene ine oh!"

2) "Opanda mbolo asayang'ane ine."

3) "Opanda nyini asayang'ane ine."

Source

Interview in 1991