

Dzakonda

(A yellow day mask from the Diamphwi, Nathenje and Mitundu areas)

Themes

- 1) Chewa identity
- 2) Faithfulness
- 3) HIV/AIDS & sexual diseases
- 4) Dangers of modernity

Etymology

Dzakonda means, 'that which makes someone happy'.



Description

The large 40 centimetre yellow mask presents a Chewa (tribal marks) who has lost his own identity and whose behaviour has turned him into a stranger (the colour yellow). He is portrayed with a bald head, long thick sideburns, a moustache and a bushy goatee to emphasise that he will never reach old age. These details are achieved with Samango monkey skins to demonstrate his wild behaviour. The eyes squint. The nose is straight and angular like that of a foreigner. The mouth is unhappy, showing gaps between the teeth of the lower jaw. Two black labial lines curve downward from the corners of the eyes to reveal how his worrisome behaviour has made him thin, old and tired. The large ears show that he is deaf to anyone's advice. The headgear of the mask, also made of Samango monkey skins, conveys that he is untameable. The **Dzakonda** character is impressionable and has been completely captured by the power of modernity. This began as early as the 1940s, when the character was created. It appeared to challenge those people who allowed themselves to be preoccupied by novelties. **Dzakonda's** tatter suit clothing, features and skin tone betray that he has set his heart on foreign standards and values. The whip he carries is meant to castigate his own reprehensible behaviour, which strays from the traditional morals of sex and marriage.

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The song, sung by the men, gives us a clue of his wrongdoings: "(Talking about) *me, some say, This is what makes him happy! Yes, this is what makes him happy, **Dzakonda!** This is what makes others happy also! Indeed, this is what makes others happy! But others come back ooh-ing and aah-ing, (feeling) that they have wasted their saliva (in giving advice). (**Dzakonda** answers:) No! I will not listen! (Someone replies:) But look at your friends! As it is common knowledge that some of them marry young women and leave their wives. They went (died), those who did what made them happy. They went (died), those who did what made them happy, **Dzakonda.**" As the drummer beats a rhythm resembling that of Msakambewa, the mouse hunter, **Dzakonda** swerves his feet pompously and flirts with the women, trying to lure them into sex.*

The character of **Dzakonda**, which is popular for any kind of ritual, criticises the behaviour of people who are swept away by the winds of novelty and modernity. They welcome blindly all that is foreign as good and desirable. They lack a critical judgment and a sense of maturity when facing the western world. They are naive and impressionable. They instinctively rush for all that is new and attractive, failing to assess the risks and the dangers, until they are in trouble. Relatives and neighbours feel sorry for them (as mentioned in the song) because all along they have tried to warn them and to spare them these difficulties. But they would not listen and continued to indulge themselves. In the song, **Dzakonda** abandons his wife without reason. He sets his eyes and heart on young beauties who later turn out to be prostitutes. As time goes on, **Dzakonda** realises that he has made a mistake because AIDS or other sexual diseases have contaminated him. Sick and worried, he decides to go back to his first wife, but it will only add to his misery and there is the risk of infecting her also. At his wife's residence, he breathes his last breath and dies. At the funeral, the mourners and the neighbours gossip and nickname him **Dzakonda**, the stubborn man who died for what had made him happy.

Dzakonda is a raw model for the new generation that neglects the ancestors and other people's advice. More than anything they desire to be successful and dream of elevating themselves above their fellow villagers. They dream of a world where they are kings, but end their days in their 20s or 30s, ravaged by their quest for modernity. Indirectly **Dzakonda** reminds the youths of the importance of faithfulness in marriage. He also stresses the necessity of developing a critical mind with regard to foreign influence. Above all, **Dzakonda** attempts to hold in check the young generations, which rush to their death prematurely because of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Song

*"Ine, akuti **Dzakonda!** aye, **Dzakonda** aye **Dzakonda** ena pano tate! Indedi **Dzakonda** ena tate e! Indedi ena abwera atsonya, nataya mate. Toto ine tate! Koma **Dzakonda** ena anzanu tate e! Paja akwata namwali, nasiya akazi awo tate e. Ananka a **Dzakonda** tate, **Dzakonda** tate apita a **Dzakonda**, **Dzakonda.**"*

Source

Interviews in 1993

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