

Khoswe

(A day structure from the Mua area)



(miniature model)

Themes

1) Faithfulness 2) Choice of marriage partner (choice of *mkwamwini*) 3) Avoidance of an early (illegitimate) pregnancy 4) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*) 5) Concealment of the woman's period

Etymology

Khoswe is Chichewa for a rat.

Description

This day structure is about one metre and a half long. Maize husks are woven on top of a bamboo frame. The shape is similar to that of a rat, with its head down and a long tail hanging behind. One dancer activates it, making quick movements forwards and backwards, turning at sharp angles and trying to evade the crowd. The structure is used during the *dambule* ceremony and the initiation rite to puberty. In the song the men call: 1) "*Rat, rat!*" The women answer with this comment: 2) "*The rat, the rat has eaten all my maize!*"

The dancing style of **Khoswe** in the arena teaches the initiates to conceal their menstruation, just as the rat conceals itself in its burrow. **Khoswe** can also represent the male. In this case, the song

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warns the girls that the rat causes damage. In Chewa society men have the privilege of initiating an approach for marriage. Some boys cheat their partners by promising them marriage while they only want to enjoy their sexual favours. They desert the girl after the damage has been done. Like the rat that enters the house eating here and there, they create havoc, leaving the owners hungry. The initiate should be aware that a man can let her down. She should adhere to the advice received during the initiation and protect herself from such opportunists. She should look for the right partner. Once married, she should keep the *mwambo*: practise sexual abstinence when required and remain faithful to her husband for fear of rats that can ruin their marriage, their health and their entire life.

Songs

- 1) "*Khoswe, Khoswe!*"
- 2) "*Khoswe tate de Khoswe tate wandithera chimanga!*"

Source

Interviews in 1986 and 2000