

Mum'derANJI chinkhope?

(A pink day mask from Mitundu)



Themes

1) Wisdom 2) Witchcraft & old age

Etymology

Mum'derANJI chinkhope means, 'Why are you put off by my big ugly face?'

Description

Mum'derANJI chinkhope portrays an old bald man with heavy wrinkles, numerous black warts all over the face (35 cm.), white eyebrows, moustache and long sideburns. His small eyes manifest worry. His mouth is open and five teeth protrude (symbolic of a 'man-eater'). His disproportionately long and straight nose, his low ears, and the pink colour of his face show that he is an outcast. The headgear is made of wild animal skins to emphasise that he comes from the bush, the country of witches. His features display the tribal marks of a Chewa. The dancer wears a tiny kilt, leglets and armlets constructed of white sisal and bark strips. In the past the short kilt, now obsolete in the *gule wamkulu*, concealed the naked body of the dancer. To be naked is a characteristic of witches. He also carries a knife or a spear, the weapons of antisocial beings, and a

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walking stick to show that he is old. He performs on the occasion of puberty rituals, commemoration rites and funerals. In the arena he alternately swerves his feet, walks, limps and leans on his walking stick. The wearing of this mask and the dancing of this character has to be protected with strict observance of sexual taboos. The song of the men gives the key to the understanding of his personality: *“Why are you put off by him in this village? (He answers:) You are put off by my face! If it was for him, (I would have said:) It is because of sickness, you my children! Why are you put off by my big ugly face? Mr. Big ugly face used to complain, Why are you put off by these white hairs? In his case it is because of sickness! Moreover, I didn’t know that I would become old. You say that I am the witch, you children. Does a witch reach old age like me? Mr. Why are you put off by my big ugly face?”*

The song voices the complaint of an old person who is crippled by age and sickness. The white hair and the distortion of the face accentuate his/her weakened condition. The legs have become stiff and the body weak. The person is also considered to be a witch. People wonder why this person is still alive while most of his or her contemporaries are dead and young children from the family group have also died. The old age and the deformity of face increase the suspicion that the person must possess hidden powers that enable perpetuation of the life span at the expense of others. The high mortality rate among the children is understood to be a consequence of their greed. When people grow too old, they cannot look after themselves. They are too weak to cultivate or to feed themselves. They have to be fed by the younger generations, and their family can consider them as a heavy burden. The character of **Mum’deranji chinkhope** deters the Chewa from thinking along these lines. Old age is God’s gift from the ancestors and a blessing for living a good moral life. Senior people are to be considered as the bank of wisdom in the village. Their long experience has made them wise, and has enabled them to guide the younger generations with their advice and their example.

Song

*“A **Mum’deranji** tate pa m’dzi pano tate? Mundidera nkhope ine tate! Chikhalatu awa n’matenda, ana inu tate! **Mum’deranji chinkhope**? A chinkhope tate iwo amadandaula tate mum’dera imvizi tate? Chikhala awa, n’matenda tate! Ndiponso sindikadziwa kuti ndidzakalamba tate. Inu mumati mfiti ndine tate, ana inu! Mfiti sikalamba ngati ine tate! **Mum’deranji chinkhope**?”*

Source

Interview in 1992