

Mwana watenga Amwenye

(A red or pink day mask from the Khwidzi area)



Themes

1) Adultery & rape 2) Faithfulness

Etymology

Mwana watenga Amwenye means, 'The child has taken the likeness of an Indian.'

Description

The small red or pink mask (30 cm.) features a stranger. He is an old man, wrinkled, bald headed with a thick moustache proximate to a bushy goatee. The sideburns are painted black. The small eyes are slanted, giving him the appearance of a foreigner or of an Asian. The broad grimacing mouth shows fierce teeth. The ears draw no particular attention. The headgear of the mask is made of tatters. Similarly, the character wears a tatter suit and carries a flywhisk, a sign of power and wealth.

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In the arena, the behaviour of **Mwana watenga Amwenye** resembles that of Kanyoni, the district commissioner (see that entry). He swerves his feet with tremendous determination while the male choir sings, *"Oh, I am surprised at this child! This is the wrong child! The child has taken the likeness of an Indian!"* Using great imaginative licence, the song comments on the case of an illegitimate child. The child was born with the wrong features. He does not resemble his biological father, but someone else who is a stranger. The biological father's identity is likened to that of an Indian as a way of satirising the true father's identity. His origins and nature are the subject of speculation in the village. He could be a passer-by or a man of short stay in the village who has lured the mother with his income and appearance, and given her a child. The character performs primarily on the occasion of funeral and commemoration rites. Such scandals provide a distraction for those who experience sorrow, and assists them to release their grief during the time of mourning. **Mwana watenga Amwenye** ridicules adultery, and deters marriage partners from straying. The character strengthens faithfulness and unity in marriage, and profits from the sad mood of the mourners to inculcate his marriage instructions.

Song

*"Oh tate ndadabwa iyo! Mwana si awa! **Mwana watenga Amwenye!**"*

Source

Interviews in 1992