

Ukasauka usagwire nyanga

(A pink day mask from the Diamphwi area)

Themes

- 1) Hard work
- 2) Jealousy/envy
- 3) Trust in God & the Ancestors
- 4) Witchcraft to maintain/enhance one's position (*kukhwima*)

Etymology

Ukasauka usagwire nyanga means, 'When you are in trouble, do not grab horns.'



Description

The mask (30 cm.) portrays a senior man with a bald head, wrinkled forehead, aquiline nose, baggy squinting eyes and swollen, salient cheeks. The face appears naive or obsequious. Numerous black warts protrude all over his face representing smallpox scars. His large mouth and his thick lips display a broad, forced smile with prominent teeth along the upper jaw. His square-ish chin bears a disproportionately long goatee made of sisal dyed black. His pricked ears are purposely made large and emphasised. Tribal marks and scarification show that he is Chewa. All these details stress his poverty and disability. The pink or red colours of his face reveal his acquaintance with evil medicine and witchcraft, and his antisocial character. The mask's headgear is made of brightly coloured tatters. The dancer carries a whip and wears the traditional *gule* tatter suit.

The character exhibits rudeness as he roams aggressively around the *bwalo*. The male choir gives him this warning: *"When you are in trouble, do not grab horns, horns, horns! Some (use them) to increase their power (to solve their problems). (They say:) I have too many problems, and they start (playing with horns). The one who has a horn of his own will die from it! This is not for me! When you are in trouble, do not grab horns, but pray to God (for help)! When you are in trouble, do not grab horns!"*

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The song emphasises that the practice of witchcraft and the use of medicines do not always alleviate one's misery. The present character invites the villager to consider that he is not alone in suffering. Many are in the same situation. Popular medicines are commonly believed to bring about a solution, but they are often short cuts inviting bad luck and even death. The good luck or the prosperity of others is not to be envied. Envy increases one's own misery and is not a way forward. Envy and jealousy promote rivalry and witchcraft. Ultimately the village is made poorer through death, misfortune, fear and stagnation through lack of collaboration. In poverty and misery, **Ukasauka usagwire nyanga** proposes that one should persevere through hard work and prayers to God and the ancestors. Fervent prayers will shower blessings and alleviate problems more effectively than the use of horns and medicine.

Song

*"Otate, **Ukasauka usagwire nyanga**, nyanga ae, nyanga tate! Ena amati akhwimire: ndasauka dziwi tate, ndipo adayamba. Wanyanga zawo, adafa nazo! Toto ine! **Ukasauka usagwire nyanga**, koma kupempha kwa Chauta tate! **Ukasauka usamagwire nyanga!**"*

Source

Interview in 1993