

Chindipha

(A dark brown day mask from the Thete area)

Themes

1) Jealousy/envy



Etymology

Chindipha means, 'It will kill me.'

Description

This large dark mask (55 cm.) has a hideous face representing an ugly person. The head is bald and the headgear is made of rags and skins of wild animals. The face is wrinkled and has numerous warts protruding from the cheeks and the chin. The eyes are red and deeply set. His eyebrows are heavily hirsute, and he has a long shaggy moustache. He has a distorted mouth with protruding teeth and an enormous chin. Overall, he has the appearance of a killer. The dancer wears the tatter suit of *gule*. He carries a long knife and a flywhisk. The women soon join **Chindipha** as he walks arrogantly around the arena. They dance the *chisamba* with him. He vehemently moves his hips and caresses the ladies with his flywhisk. Only women dare to go near him. Men avoid him and keep a distance while they sing, *"It will kill me! Why should it not kill you, if you play with danger? No, no, no! It has already started, it has already started. No! Some transform (into ghosts) but they should not do this. No! It will exterminate the tribe! What is it (that kills)? It is jealousy! It will kill me! It will kill me!"*

The song reflects on the danger of jealousy to the community, and personifies jealousy as a killer. People recognise that jealousy is frequent in the village and that it is an important motivating

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force in their lives. People can be jealous of each other's position, qualities and possessions. This is particularly true for people who are known to be short tempered, irascible and prone to fighting. One should avoid provoking their anger and triggering their evil nature. Such people can't control themselves and can easily commit murder. When jealousy is given free range, quarrels and fights tear the community apart. **Chindipha** normally performs at funeral and commemoration rites that incorporate initiation to puberty.

The character of **Chindipha** is shown with a head of a killer to emphasise the hideous vice of jealousy. He deters the Chewa from playing with fire and behaving in an irresponsible manner. He warns of both the flirting that can cause jealousy and the weakness to yield to it. In the art of community living, one has to avoid interactions that can lead to trouble.

Song

*"**Chindipha** ee yeo (2x)! Chipanda kuphadi utachiyamba dala? Toto toto ai toto! Chidayamba kale chidayamba kale toto (2x)! Wena adzuka, koma asatero toto! Chikutha wanthu! N'chiani toto de? Nsanje elele tate de! **Chindipha, Chindipha!**"*

Source

Interview in 1992