

Kanchiputu

(A day or night mask from the Khwidzi area)



(day)



(night – later version)

Themes

- 1) Roles & powers of the chief
- 2) Inevitability of death
- 3) Responsibility of family heads

Etymology

Kanchiputu is a type of sweet potato with orange flesh that points downward when growing.



(night – earlier version)

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Description

The night version of **Kanchiputu** shows a head cover made of orange plastic and a cowlick made of chicken feathers. Alternatively, it can display a tall conical hat made of palm leaves loosely woven on a bamboo frame, with ten transverse bars at its apex pointing in different directions, representing perhaps the roots of the sweet potato. The day version of the same character shows him in a black mask (30 cm.), which portrays a bald old man, with white hair, moustache and eyebrows. The day and the night costumes differ in other respects too. For the night performance, the dancer wears a short kilt made of sisal, together with leglets and armlets. For the day performance, he puts on a tatter suit. **Kanchiputu** is a type of Kapoli, who sings his own song on the occasion of funerals and commemoration rites. He sings: 1) "**Kanchiputu, no, Kanchiputu, bend down... bend down to the grave!**" or 2) "**Kanchiputu, come and bury him/her!**" As he sings, **Kanchiputu** moves his feet slowly and smoothly as if he were slipping on the ground. He makes sweeping arm movements, pointing to the ground or to the graveside with his walking stick.

Kanchiputu represents the head of the family group who acts on behalf of the chief for burials. The chief is banned from going to the graveyard. In the chief's name, **Kachiputu** gives the order to bury the deceased and identifies the site of burial for a member of his own family. His very name betrays a note of grim humour. He is like a sweet potato who keeps pointing downward on the occasion of the death of each member of his family group.

Songs

- 1) "**Kanchiputu iai Kanchiputu jolika, jolika Kanchiputu e!**"
- 2) "**Kanchiputu ee Kanchiputu eae Kanchiputu dzaike!**"

Source

Interviews in 1990, 1992 and 1999