

Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga

(A black day mask from the Dedza and Pemba areas)



Themes

- 1) Responsible parenthood
- 2) Unity & harmony

Etymology

The name of the character could translate as, 'My mother (or in a wider sense, parents or the extended family head (*malume*)), you have started to show discrimination' (in this case, by favouring one child over another).

Description

The black mask (35 cm.) portrays an old Chewa (red tribal marks) who is half bald and displays a white painted circle topping his baldness. He has white wrinkles and deep, drooping labial lines next to the nose and extending from the corner of the mouth. His look is severe and aggressive: glaring eyes with red irises, hostile mouth showing teeth on both jaws, straight affirmative nose, baggy jowls and a heavy chin sporting a grey goatee. The seniority and status of the person are further emphasised by the bushy eyebrows and the moustache made of skin. The round ears are purposely enlarged to convey deafness and reluctance to change his ways. The headgear of the mask, made of Samango monkey skins, accentuates old age, seniority and the role of parents. The character wears a vest or a singlet and a kilt made of white sisal or white tatters at his waist. He carries a flywhisk to convey that

www.kasiyamaliro.org

Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

he acts as parent or head of the family group. The dominance of white in the clothing contrasts with the blackness of the face, and betrays duplicity or a double standard of behaviour.

At the *chisamba* rhythm, **Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga** enters the *bwalo* and rotates on the spot, imitating the movement of Kasiya maliro. This dancing style emphasises the function of parents or family head. As he moves around the dancing ground, **Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga** exhibits a lack of manners and reveals ambivalent behaviour. In front of the women, he rotates his pelvis obscenely and engages in lewd talk. In front of a male audience, our character refuses to dance, thus manifesting discrimination and favouritism. This enigmatic pantomime is somehow unveiled in the song sung for him by the male choir: “*We are all yours. My mother (parents), you have started to show discrimination! Yes, as for me, from whom am I? You have started to show discrimination! Yes, you have started to show discrimination! For other (children) you slaughter a chicken, for someone (like me), he leaves (home) after gobbling down a vegetable dish. What kind of behaviour is that? This is discrimination! My mother, you have started to show discrimination! You have started to show discrimination!*” The song describes, in fairly specific terms, the double standard that the parents can apply to their children or those of the extended family. All the children from the maternal bloodline are called brothers and sisters of each other, and the adults are supposed to manifest the same concern and love as they show for their own biological children. Parents and parents-in-law (*apongozi*) should avoid preference and treat the children equally. Any disparity of treatment will be noticed in the Chewa egalitarian family structure. Favouritism in the form of advantages, preferential treatment or better diet will be understood as a form of discrimination. The deprived children will be seen as excluded and the victim of some hidden grudge. These rules apply to the children of a nuclear family as well as to those who come from different mothers who are sisters of each other. The extended family is one, and all the children should enjoy the same rights.

The Chewa summarise their philosophy of life and their pedagogy toward the upbringing of children in the following proverb: “*Mwana wako: tamadya. Mwana wanzako kasambe – To your child (you say,) Come and eat. To your neighbour’s child (you say,) Go and wash.*” In the character of **Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga**, representing the parents, the villagers reprimand exclusivity and segregation at the level of the extended family. They stress the importance of a harmonious relationship between parents and children and children among themselves. Divided children are inevitably the source of division among parents and relatives. The creation of **Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga** goes back to time immemorial in the *gule* complex. In the past, the character was only performed by a senior person, and his performance was heavily protected by sexual taboos. The teaching voiced by **Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga** was dispensed on the occasion of initiation and funeral rituals. These peak moments were judged to be the right time for parents to welcome the instructions of the ancestors concerning the pedagogical attitude they should implement in order to educate their children.

Song

“Tonsefe n’nganu tate! Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga! Inde tate! Nanga ine n’ ngwa ndani? Mwayamba mpandira! Inde, tate mwayamba mpandira! Wena kuwaphera nkuku, wena achoka

*atadya mayani a! Ho iii nanga nchiani chotere tate? Uwu ndi mpandira tate! (2x) **Mwayamba mpandira amai wanga! Tate mwayamba mpandira!***

Source

Interview in 1992