The Nkoya Society, Chieftaincy and the Kathanga Traditional Ceremony

Information Leaflet

WHO ARE THE NKOYAS

The Nkoya people came from Kola. They migrated from the Lunda-Luba Empire between the 11th and the 16th Century. Map No. 1 shows the migration of the Nkoya people from Congo. The majority of the Nkoya people settled in Kaoma and LukuLu east, which the colonists named Manka. Map No. 2 shows the boundaries of Manka. Others settled in Kafue or Lwenge as it was commonly known. According to Czech Emil Holub, he found the Nkoya people settled in Kafue from 1885 to 1886. The rest of the Nkoya are found in Kalabo, Mongu, Sesheke, Luwanga, Itezembe, Kaoma west, Luakwa, Kaoma, Kabompo, Chibombo and Mumbwa west.

Chief

The most senior (by Nkoya definition) Chiefs of the Nkoya people are Chief Mutondo and Chief Kahare found in Kaoma District. Chief Kahare is in the east while Chief Mutondo is in the west. The Nkoya have Chief Moombe in Kalabo west, and Chief Kabulubwe in Mumbwa west in Kaloma and Mumbwa districts respectively.

There are several installed Nkoya chiefs in Kaoma District. These are Mwene Muloka, Mwene Funkufunika, Mwene Muyunwanyuyi, Mwene Shihoka, Mwene Kalongolo under Chief Kahare, and Mwene Shitumah, Mwene Libusha, Mwene Muhulwa, Mwene Lumang, Mwene Muyani, Mwene Mut, Mwene Kapupa under Chief Mutondo. Nkoya also have Mwene Nyati, Mwene Pumula, Mwene Kangombe, in Luakwa District, and Mwene Kangombe in Kabompo District and Mwene Mutinginya in Kaoma District.

Ethnicity

The Nkoya people have at least 9 ethnic groupings: Lukolwe of Kabompo and Luaku, Shishango of Kalabo, Lukangi of Kaoma, Nusiko of Kaoma, Masancha of Kaoma, Lumambu of Lumambu, Mubwara of Kasempa, Shilanda of Mumbwa, and Shikul of Chief Moombe in Kaloma, Munsamba of Sesheke.

Dialects

The Nkoya tribe has 8 dialects: Shilanda of Mwene Kahare of Kaoma, Shinkoya of Mwene Mutondo of Kaoma, Balumba of Mwene Moomba of Kalabo, Shilulumba of Mwene Kabulubwe of Mumbwa, Shilanda of Mwene Lumula of Lulampa of Luakwa, Shikulu of Mulonde of Sesheke, Shiy dove of Luwanga of Kaoma, Shimbwela of Mwene Nyati of Luakwa, Kabompo, Kalabo and Mongu districts. Under the British Colon, Nkoya tribe was recognized as a language and hence Nkoya language was being taught in schools in Manka land. This ended in 1968 when the Education Officer of Manka at the time burned all Nkoya teachings and pupil books. The Nkoya People is still contesting this issue.

Kathanga

Kathanga is a ceremony that dates back to the beginning of the Chieftaincy of the Nkoya people. Kathanga is a sacred basin dug at the center of a shrine known as Shilulumba in every palace of a Nkoya Chief. A replica of a shrine Kathanga is a ceremony that dates back to the beginning is made at shilulumba the site for Kathanga. A fresh and sweet traditional brew made from a new crop of sorghum called Tonga is placed in the sacred basin for the Chief to drink. In Chief's palaces, prince and princesses partake in the drinking of Tonga. After drinking from the Kathanga, the Chief gives praise to ancestors for a good harvest and asks for ancestral blessings for his people. Nkoyas rely on sorghum, millets, maize and cassava for their staple foods.

The Tasting of Tonga is a purification act. It means the subjects san therefor use the fresh crop because the Chief has paid homage to God for the harvest. According to legend, the Chief has spiritual powers to communicate with ancestors of Nkoya people called Itapashi.

After the Chief has finished with the rituals of blessing the crop, he is prompted by the Chief royal drummer to resume the Nkoma dance. This is a war and hunters dance performed only by chiefs and recognized heroes. Only those that have accomplished some great act perform Nkoma dance. Nkoya traditional say, in previous centuries, Nkoya warriors presented skulls of their victims before performing the dance. Muzzledancers are fired during this stage of the ceremony.

After Nkoma, the arena is now open to subjects to entertain the Chiefs and invited guests, including tourists.

Array of Dances

The array of dances during the ceremony includes Ludwa, Mwachwala, Makakuyu, Tukamukete, and Kabajangwe.

Ludwa is a very important ceremony in the life cycle of a Nkoya woman. Ludwa is celebrated to mark the end of an initiation of a young Nkoya girl. Once an Nkoya girl becomes of age, she is confined for 1-6 months until parents are ready to celebrate the end of her isolation.

During the isolation, the girl is trained in issues of managing the future household, respect for elder family members and in-laws.

On the day, her patron to the ceremony site near the Kanganga’s village lifts the Kanganga on the back. She is made to sleep on the ground covered by a blanket and sheets before anybody goes to the site. This is done to test how disciplined the Kanganga is. She sleeps on the ground for the whole day with no water and no food with occasional turning by the patron.

The drummers with a big xylophone, four drums namely, mundindi, kanyanda, mukupate and ngoma ya nene shape themselves in readiness for makukulu and Kuma.

Soon after the Kanganga is brought to the dance site, the patron and the entire entourage of elderly women ululate and perform the Makukulu dance to symbolize the beginning of the ceremony. Makukulu is a dance performed exclusively by elderly women, which is a demonstration of happiness for bringing up a girl child to adulthood.
2. Kamunyelele
Kamunyelele is a special dance performed by the youth of both sexes. There are no drums involved. The participants line up facing each other in a parallel form. Two people are challenged to dance at any given time.

3. Tunkonkobe
Tunkonkobe is not a dance as such but a special singing, which is done to commemorate a death of a Nkoya person. Both men and women sing tunkonkobe. They are no drums involved but two pounding sticks, and dish full of dry maize. Though sorrowful, but it helps to reduce the burden of those in mourning. Nkoya funerals last very long and tunkonkobe is played throughout.

4. Kashimbo
Is a special dance, which is performed during funerals? It is danced during the night. It is performed when a chief dies and takes at least one month. Both men and women take part in the dance. Only drums are used for this dance without the xylophone.

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