

## FOODS AND FEEDING HABITS OF THE PEDI

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## I. SOURCES OF FOOD SUPPLIES

Traditionally the Pedi derive their food supplies from the following sources: (a) Cultivated plants, (b) indigenous plants, (c) indigenous fruits, (d) insects, (e) domestic animals, and (f) indigenous fauna.

## (a) Cultivated Plants

The traditional cultivated food plants of the Pedi are:

Kaffir-corn (*Andropogon sorghum*), Kaffir-millet (*Pennisetum spicatum*), Soetriet (*Sorghum vulgare*), Kaffir-bean (*Vigna sinensis*), Njugo bean (*Voandzeia subterranea*), Kaffir-melon (*Citrullus vulgaris* sp.), Kaffir-watermelon (*Citrullus vulgaris* sp.), and Gourd (*Legenaria vulgaris*).

In due course the Pedi farmer, who happens to be the woman, introduced the following foreign crop plants: Mealie (*Zea mays*), Mung bean (*Phaseolus aureus*), Peanut (*Arachis hypogea*), and Pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo*).

## (b) Indigenous Plants

Indigenous plants play a very significant role in the dietary pattern of the Pedi. I have identified and analysed 20 different species and, from a nutritive point of view, most of them compare very favourably with our greens.

## (c) Indigenous Fruits

Although the Pedi have no cultivated fruits, nature provides them with at least 9 different varieties. The most outstanding is the morula (*Sclerocarya caffra*). In a favourable year this tree is capable of producing a fantastic crop. Records kept at Zebediela show that a single tree produced 3,631 lb. (i.e. 1.8 tons) of fruit in 1952. The morula fruit is characterized by a very high vitamin-C content, viz. 54 mg./100 G, compared with 55 mg./100 G in orange juice. Furthermore, the seed contains a very high quality kernel which compares more than favourably with the different commercial nuts.

## (d) Insects

Although this type of food may not appeal to the average European palate, the Pedi consider insect dishes as delicacies. I have identified and analysed 14 different species of insects used as food by the Pedi. The mopane worm (*Conimbrasia belina*) is undoubtedly the Pedi's favourite. In latter years these dried caterpillars have been commercialized and are offered for sale in towns. Dieticians of the CSIR have investigated the food value of these caterpillars and have determined that 4 oz. of this product suffices for the daily requirements of fat, calcium, phosphorus, thiamin, riboflavin and nicotinic acid for an adult.

## (e) Domestic Animals

The Pedi household embraces 9 different species of domestic animals which fall into two categories, viz. (i) those with traditional associations, and (ii) those of recent introduction.

The first category, which includes cattle, sheep, goats and dogs, has an ancient association with these people, and with the exception of the dog is of paramount importance. The animals comprising the second category, viz. the horse, the donkey, the pig, the fowl and the cat, have all been introduced into the Pedi household

during comparatively recent times and are of lesser consequence. A very intimate association exists between the Pedi and his traditional animals and although slaughtering of these animals are confined mainly to ceremonial occasions they nevertheless constitute an important source of the Pedi's protein requirements.

## (f) Indigenous Fauna

There was a time when Sekukuniland, the traditional homeland of the Pedi, abounded with game which provided an important source of protein to the Pedi. This, alas, is not so any more, and the once so abundant animal life has, through unscrupulous hunting, become virtually extinct.

While available most species served the Pedi as food; some however, were closely associated with their traditional rites and ceremonies, while others again contributed towards the philtres and potions of the witchdoctors.

## II. CLASSIFICATION OF PEDI FOODS

Pedi food dishes are classified as follows:

- (A) *Magôbê* (cereal meal porridges).
- (B) *Lewa* (whole-grain stews).
- (C) *Dikgôbê* (compounded whole-grain stews).
- (D) *Masôthlô* (dehydrated kaffir-corn stews).
- (E) *Disebô* (relishes).
- (F) *Lehlabula* (fresh fruit and vegetables).
- (G) *Dinô* (beverages).

A. *Magôbê*

Cereal meal porridges determine the very existence of these people, and the Pedi housewife shows expert versatility in the preparation of these dishes. Using the grindings of kaffir-corn (*A. sorghum*), kaffir-millet (*P. spicatum*) and maize (*Z. mays*) as basis, she prepares the following food categories:

1. *Bogôbê*. These are plain cereal porridges of which 3 varieties are prepared.
2. *Motêpa*. This category includes 3 varieties of cereal meal gruels.
3. *Dinkgwa*. These dishes resemble dumplings of which there are also 3 varieties.
4. *Legala*. This category is made up of 3 varieties of sweet milk porridges.
5. *Mpshi*. Whereas the previous food category is prepared from sweet milk, this category, which also includes 3 varieties, is made from sour milk.
6. *Ting*. This category includes 3 varieties of porridge prepared from fermented meal.
7. *Bogôbê bja marula*. Using the juice of the marula, the Pedi housewife prepares 3 different varieties of cereal meal porridge.
8. *Bogôbê bja mahlono*. This food category includes 3 varieties of cereal meal porridges using the juice of the keiapple (*Dovyalis caffra*).
9. *Bogôbê bja mmilo*. Using the juice of the mispel (*Vangueria infausta*) 3 different varieties of cereal meal porridges are included in this category.
10. *Bogôbê bja ditshidi*. Sour plum juice (*Ximenia caffra*) is used in the preparation of 3 different porridges.
11. *Sekgôthô*. Using kaffir-beans (*V. sinensis*) and njugo beans (*V. subterranea*) 6 different porridges are included in this category.
12. *Kgodu*. This category includes 6 varieties of cereal meal porridges prepared with either pumpkin or kaffir-melon.
13. *Sempjêrane*. The Pedi housewife prepares 6 different porridges using melon and melon seeds with the cereal meal.

### B. Lewa

This food class includes 5 varieties of plain whole-grain stews, using kaffir-corn, maize, kaffir-beans, njugo beans and mung beans.

### C. Dikgôbê

The food class dikgôbê includes 5 varieties of mixed whole-grain stews prepared with kaffir-corn, maize, kaffir-beans, njugo beans and mung beans.

### D. Masôthlô

Three different dishes are prepared, using marula kernels and dehydrated kaffir-corn, kaffir-beans or mung beans.

### E. Dishêbô

Next to the plain cereal meal porridges, relishes (*dishêbô*) are of greatest importance in the Pedi dietary. As a matter of fact it is inseparable from the porridge dish with which it is invariably served. This food class includes spinaches, roasted seeds, bean gravies, insect dishes, meat, milk, salt and fruit sauces. Of all the relishes *morôgô* or spinaches are of greatest importance. Thirty different varieties of pot-herbs have been identified in Pedi dietary, and of this food the Pedi say: *Nama e a êtêla, morôgô ke wa ka mehla* (meat is a visitor, but *morôgô* is a daily food).

Although meat is greatly sought after as a relish, as the saying above indicates, it is served only occasionally. The status of meat is indicated by their saying: *Monna ke nama, mosadi ke morôgô* (the man is meat, the woman a pot-herb). The Pedi treat meat with great respect, and if it is tainted it will not be referred to as stinking meat but they will say: *Name e dikile seolwana* (the meat has gone behind the antheap), thus alluding to a person who has gone behind the antheap to relieve himself.

### F. Lehlabula

The term *lehlabula* actually refers to one of the seasons of the year, viz. summer, and refers to at least 20 different fruits and vegetables. These foods play an important role in Pedi dietary, but to eat vegetables when still young and tender, as Europeans usually do, is considered wasteful. Thus the food potential of crops is safeguarded by the *go-loma* ritual which forbids their usage before the chief's permission, which is delayed until the crops have reached a stage of advanced maturity and greater food value.

### G. Dino

This food class includes two categories, viz. *metôgô* and *mabjalwa*.

1. *Metôgô*. This category includes 6 varieties of non-intoxicating beverages prepared from kaffir-corn, kaffir-millet and maize respectively. These popular beverages function in Pedi dietary as coffee, tea or milk does in that of the European. They are refreshing and nourishing; a 48-oz. ration having a calorific value of about 700.

The nutritive significance of these beverages is illustrated as follows: At Zebediela the daily task of an orange picker involves travelling a distance of about 28 miles and carrying a total weight of 1.5 tons of oranges. Experienced pickers complete this task within 6 hours, and the only nourishment taken during this period is about 48 oz. of *metôgô*.

2. *Mabjalwa*. The *mabjalwa* category includes 4 different varieties of intoxicating beverages prepared from malted kaffir-corn or kaffir-millet as well as two varieties of intoxicating beverages prepared from marula or prickly pear. Apart from the possible evil effects of their alcoholic content, these beverages, and especially those prepared from malted cereals, are of vital importance to the general health of the Pedi. They are excellent sources of the vitamin B complex as well as vitamin C. Marula beer is a dramatic source of vitamin C.

### III. CULINARY UTENSILS

In handling food the Pedi employ a wide range of utensils, many of which serve a specific purpose.

In recent years certain modern utensils have been introduced into their households, but the traditional hand-made ones are still used extensively.

I identified at least 60 different culinary utensils made from: Clay (13), gourd (20), wicker (11), wood (7), shell (3), green leaf (1), iron (4), and horn (1).

The Pedi housewife takes a great pride in her food utensils, especially those reserved for her husband's use. Thus the formal porridge bowl (*mogopo*) of the husband is scoured thoroughly with sand and water and the exterior whitewashed with clay; the interior of this bowl is also treated with white clay up to where the porridge ration reaches.

### IV. SERVING FOOD

The Pedi wife never summons her husband to a meal, but delivers his food to where he may be. Meticulous care is taken in cleaning the food dishes reserved for his use, and the food is served neatly in a spotlessly clean receptacle. When approaching her husband she curtsies, goes down on her knees and places his food on the ground in front of him.

While she introduces her maiden daughter to the art of cooking, the Pedi mother also trains her in the art of serving a man's food—when it should be served and how much should be served—so as to retain his goodwill and affection. It is tradition with the Pedi woman, when serving her husband's food, to gauge the helping so that it constitutes just a sufficiency. If she serves too little and he asks for another helping she will blame herself for being niggardly; whereas if she serves so much that some is left over, she will construe this as bad cooking. Each wife, irrespective of the number a man may have, is expected to serve him with a meal from her hearth, and this is when he displays shrewd diplomacy by eating a little from each dish so as to avoid slighting one wife and flattering the other. Although the husband normally eats in the company of other men, no tradition forbids him to join his family circle for a meal; but his food is still served separately.

### Serving Women and Children

In comparison with men, women and children are served haphazardly. They are summoned to a meal, and they eat their food communally from the eating mat (*sethêbê*) or more often than not from one of the dishes discarded by men. Food is prepared primarily for the man, women and children eating what is left over after his share has been served. In times of scarcity a woman will starve

herself as well as her children to feed her husband.

Pedi dishes are invariably served either cooled-off or cold; the reason for this is probably due to the fact that virtually all foods are eaten with the fingers, which makes the serving of hot dishes impractical.

#### V. PATTERN OF PEDI DIETARY

Pedi dietary conforms to a clearly defined pattern outlined as follows:

*Food priority.* Traditionally the very existence of the Pedi household and, for that matter, the existence of the tribe, depends on the wellbeing of the man whose comforts and needs consequently enjoy preference over all else. Thus food is prepared primarily to satisfy the man, and his traditional share is ensured first before the left-overs are served to the women and children. This custom is observed even in times of scarcity when the man still receives his full share and the woman and children go short.

*Preparation of food.* The Pedi regard preparation of food beneath a man's dignity, and consequently this chore is left entirely to the woman, who is initiated in the tradition of cooking from her very early childhood, to become a thrifty and proficient cook. The Pedi male is a fastidious feeder and will not tolerate bad cooking from his wife.

*Colouring of food.* Most Pedi dishes are characterized by an unattractive drab colour, which is apparently ignored. The colour of a dish is never changed either by bleaching or the addition of colouring matter.

*Flavouring of food.* The Pedi palate is definitely partial to a musty-sour flavour, as encountered in the various fermented foods. Furthermore, the bitter astringent flavour of certain wild leaves is greatly sought after, such leaves actually being used to impart their bitterness to some of the sweeter pot-herbs. Salt is greatly favoured to add piquancy and, if the supply permits, is used rather copiously. Spices are unknown in Pedi cooking, and no sweet ingredient is used deliberately to sweeten a dish. Despite this, however, the Pedi is partial to sweet fruits and vegetables. Honey constitutes a favourite tit-bit, but is never used in cooking.

*Serving of food.* As stated previously the man's share of food normally conforms to a traditional portion served with a measure of exactness and formality, each dish being served in a separate container.

No regular apportionment of food occurs for women and children who, after the man has been served, eat the left-overs unceremoniously from a communal receptacle.

*Frequency of meals and meal times.* Traditionally, the Pedi eat two, and frequently only one meal per day; and although light refreshments may be taken in between,

feeding is confined essentially to these meals.

The first meal of the day is served when the sun is hot, i.e. about 11—12 noon, and the other one after dark. During the hoeing and harvesting seasons, the evening meal, more often than not, has to suffice for the day.

*Basis of dietary.* The traditional meal of the Pedi consists of two dishes only, viz. cereal meal porridge (*bogôbê*) and a relish (*sesebô*). In certain instances the relish is actually incorporated in the porridge, in which case no additional relish is served. Starchy foods are never served alone but are invariably supplemented with a protein-rich dish. Malted beverages are included in the basic dietary of the Pedi male.

*Dietary balance.* Pedi dietary embraces a wealth of food varieties, viz.:

*Cereal meal porridges (magôbê),* 48 varieties.

*Whole grain stews (lewa, dikgôbê and masôthô),* 13 varieties.

*Relishes (disêbô).* These include: Pot-herbs (*morôgô*), 30 varieties, seeds (*dithôtsê*), 4 varieties, bean gravies (*setôpja*), 3 varieties, bean stews (*lewa*) 3 varieties, meats (*dinama*), extensive, insects (*manyeyeyu*), 13 varieties, fruit (*mabilô*), 2 varieties, milk (*maswi*) and salt (*letswai*).

*Fruits and vegetables (lehlabula),* 20 varieties.

*Beverages (dinô),* 12 varieties.

Thus the Pedi housewife has a wide selection of foods to choose from, and although variety in dietary is subject to seasonal fluctuations, she displays an uncanny sense of balancing her meals.

*Calorific intake.* Under normal traditional conditions the daily calorific intake per male Pedi approximates the following:

Malted beer or fermented gruel (*bjalwa* or *metôgô*): 4 pints — 1,500 calories.

Noon meal: Porridge (*bogôbê*): 35 oz. — 1,000 calories. Pot-herb (*morôgô*): 6 oz. — 25 calories.

Evening meal: Porridge (*bogôbê*): 35 oz. — 1,000 calories. Roasted seeds (*dithôtsê*): 2 oz. — 200 calories. Total, 3,725 calories.

The calorific intake of women and children is appreciably less, and during the busy time of the year or during times of shortage, that of the man may be reduced to one meal per day only, i.e. approximately 1,200 calories.

#### CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that the traditional foods of the Pedi provided an adequate diet. It is a deplorable fact, however, that under Western influence many of these foods have either fallen into disgrace or are ignored, resulting in deficiencies manifested in malnutrition.

In my close association with these people and a life-long study of their habits I am inclined to conclude that the recognition and encouragement of their traditional foods and feeding habits could be the means of alleviating and perhaps even solving the great problem of malnutrition and disease among these people.