

Chapter 5

Ethnography of the Lambya foods

Introduction

The Lambya dwells in large well developed settlements around areas with rich soil for agriculture. Food is one of the most common exchange goods in everyday life and as ritual occasions. Marriage arrangements often involve many stages of food gifts and counter gifts exchanged between the groom's family and bride's family. For the Lambya they eat a variety of food below are some of the traditional foods commonly found in Ulambya region

1. Beans (*a-malima*); these are locally grown in many places in Ulambya region. They are commonly eaten as relish and breakfast when mixed with maize crops (*filombe*), the mixture of cooked beans and maize is referred to as *nthyela*. These are commonly eaten during rainy season if preserved well could be eaten in dry season as breakfast, lunch or supper. Most of times the Lambya foods are usually mixture of foods. It is uncommon to find them eating a single food as their dish.
2. Cassava (*a- mayawo*); the cassava is also grown in the plain. This is usually cooked for breakfast and others makes flour from it known as *kondowole*, commonly done by the Tonga and Nkhonde of Nkhatabay and Karonga district.
3. Millet (*a-malezi*); millets are also grown in Chitipa plain. These are commonly used for brewing sweet beer (*u-bala*).
4. Beans leave (*chinkhubili*); these are usually mixed up with grinded nuts or else mixed up with cooked beans.
5. Pumpkins leave (*chiyungwa*); these are common in rainy season, they are usually mixed up with grinded nuts to make relish or mixed together with beans.
6. Traditional Okra (*i-zumba*, commonly known as *pupwe* usually grown on anthills, the Lambya's mixes this okra with cooked beans).
7. Fine grinded nuts (*chinthiwisya*); this one can be eaten as relish
8. Thick porridge (*ugali, ughali*): Nsima
9. Fresh cooked maize and beans (*i-nthyela*) could be eaten as breakfast or supper
10. Cooked dry maize (*inkhanje*) food eaten at the funeral

Ethnography of the Lambya material culture

1. Wincwing basket (*uluselo*); commonly used for wincwing maize, beans and many other cereals crops. In a genuine Lambya house where there is a woman this has to be present.
2. Gourd (*a kapale*); used for making sour milk (*chambiko*) and keeping milked milk (*ulukama*). Often used for drinking local brews (*chipumu*) (Fig: 2)



Figure 6: Some sample of gourd found in amongst the Lambyas in Chitipa district

3. Cooking stick (*umutinkho*) used for cooking thick porridge and other brews.
4. Beads/ornaments (*uwambo*) used to give to the bride and are used for beatification among the Lambya women.
5. Insolo (*Bawo/Mancala*) part of the Lambya game, to pass time. Commonly played by men
6. Mat (*akatefu*); these are used for sleeping; they are given as part of condolence to a woman who has been faced who has lost a family member due to death. Commonly made by Lambya women.
7. Cloth (*umwenda*); given as part of the condolence to a woman who has lost a family member due to death.
8. Head gear (*ichitambala*); what women use to cover their heads, especially hair
9. *Akaya*; is an ascertainable locality in which one or more groups of persons reside in separate house, subject to the authority of a village headman (*mwnekaya*)
10. *Abakaya*; strangers who occupy land in the village with the consent of the village headman and live as co- villages.
11. *Abajeni*; a non animilated strangers who do not occupy land in the village

12. Stirring stick (*umutinkho*):stick used for cooking porridge, thick porridge, sweet beer, beer and relish

Procedure of making sour Lambya milk (traditional Chambiko

One of the elements that constitute the Lambya traditional culture is the making of soured milk (*ulukama, ulutoni*). To dwell among the Lambya one has to enjoy drinking soured milk together with cooked sweet potatoes or with thick porridge (*ubughali*). Below is the procedure followed when making the Lambya sour milk? This procedure applies to many ethnic across Chitipa district; the procedure was observed in a number of Lambya villages and some data was gathered on internet/ face book under friends of Chitipa (F.o.C 2012).

Preliminary procedure

1. Normally one has to have cows which produce milk. These have to be milked twice in a day, thus morning and late afternoon. Before starting milking the milking utensils have to be washed and clean. The milked cattle is usually tied its hind legs. The milking utensils consist of the gourd, banana leaves, and possibly a dish. The banana leaves are withered first on fire before they are turned to be used.
2. After milking a litre, it is first poured in the gourd and is kept in a cool place, while the mouth of the gourd is covered with withered leaves of the bananas, these leaves will help to speed up the solidification of the milk. The milk takes a week or so, but it needs regular checking to see how the bacteria are working on the milk.
3. After doing this then you can start topping up while the process is taking place. This may depend on whether or temperature. If the area is very cold then it is left for at least some days roughly to two weeks and when temperature is high perhaps roughly a week. This is done to let the milk get into solid form. The moment it get solid then some water usually floats on top of the gourd this needs to be taken out, the process of doing this is called *kusuya amasulu*.. This is instantly removal of water that settles down and then top up with fresh milk again repeating the first procedure. After topping up then it is left for two to three days before it is ready for drinking. In some areas amasulu are drunk in some areas they consider them as waste.

Procedure of making a Lambya traditional sweet beer (*Ubala*)

Sweet beer is prepared differently depending on a particular ethnic group. Each ethnic group has got its own recipe and procedures on how they prepare their sweet beer. The Lambya has perhaps could be one of the ethnic group that has got a different recipe different from many other ethnic in Malawi. To make a traditional sweet beer a Lambya woman has to have the following: a big pot, sliced sweet potatoes, grinded millet, water, flour (*umugaiwa*), stirring stick and fire.

1. First water is boiled for some 5-10 minutes in a big pot depending on the people who would be drinking the sweet beer.
2. Then millet flour is added little by little until it is a little bit thick while stirring
3. Later sweet potato flour is also added little by little to give some sweetness
4. After adding these then fire is reduced so that the porridge boils in a gentle way to allow the flour to mix better. This is done for some 3-5 minutes.
5. When this is done definitely then the pot is taken out from the fire to cool
6. When it is cool then sweet beer is done for drinking

Traditional Lambya houses

Archaeological studies done in Karonga district shows the earliest evidence of human occupation in Malawi by revealing various occupation sites one of the earliest site being the Mwanganda elephant butchery site, which was first excavated by J.D. Clark on the plain in 70's (Clark and Haynes 1970). Here stone tools like Choppers, scrapers and flakes were found lying beside the fossiled remains of an elephant which possibly dates back to the later Pleistocene. The sites is currently being studied by the American archaeologist Dr. Jessica Thompson in collaboration with Malawian archaeologists. In Karonga plain there is a wide distribution of artefacts belonging to Middle Stone age (MSA) period. Recent studies shows that these people were hunter gatherers who utilised quartzites raw material in making their tools (Simengwa 2011). These people seemed to have been succeeded by the Later stone age culture. The evidence of this comes from sites like Mwambulambo village far north of Karonga district (Robinson 1982). Artefacts discovered from this early iron working community is characterised by thin fabric, smooth finish globular bodies and channeled curvilinear motifs. Pottery with similar features has been also found in southern Malawi at Nkope (Cole-Kings 1973).

The archaeological evidence from different sites in northern Malawi suggests that by the beginning of second millennium A.D. a new wave of migrants had entered the area (Robinson 1982). The material culture of these newcomers was more advanced than that of the early iron working communities. This could not be different to those who occupied the northern Malawi today. Some of the culture include houses made of wood, daga and grass. The method of building like this is still known to the Ngonde, Lambya, Phoka and to the Nyiha of southern Tanzania.

There seems to be a correlation between these archaeological findings and oral traditions of some descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the Lambya and Ngonde in the region. The Lambya usually build their houses without bricks commonly known as *dindila* or *sindila*, sometimes they build their houses with daga, wood and grass. This traces them back to their ancestors, whose remains were found in Karonga. Therefore the housing style that are common in Chitipa and Karonga are of the same style. No wonder this is what their ancestors left for us.

Settings

The Lambya house setting is common with many northern district ethnics. Usually the father and mother sleep in the same house together with little children. The adults boys and girls after attaining 18 years they are usually advised to build their own small houses within their parents compound. These small houses are known as *i-mphanga*. When building their house they make sure that they have left some space where they can build a kraal (*i-chiwaya*). Usually a kraal is made in front of their houses where it can be visible from predators. Almost each and every Lambya house has to a raised structure usually on a courtyard or veranda where food or utensils are put to dry; these are known as *akatalati* (see Fig 6). The other structures that easily identify the Lambya housing settings are the pigeon pen and maize shells (*inthamba*).

There are ways how traditional houses are constructed in Lambya villages. Some of them are **conical huts**. The earliest form of the traditional huts that could be related to the Lambya could be that which was archaeologically found by Robinson (1982) in Karonga district. The traditional house that was discovered was made of daga (mixture of cow dung and clay

soil) and with perhaps a conical grass huts with an apex. The main construction material is reed or small branches of trees. The technique involves using a rope and poles to draw a circle on the ground then digging holes along the created circle. Reed grass is then planted and bound together using rope and saplings which are placed horizontally. The ropes are made from Miombo trees.



Figure 7: A maize shell and a pigeon pen



Figure 8: some recent traditional houses found in villages amongst the Lambya's