



# Social Justice in Tiv Thought System

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## Abstract

It is a given that every human society demands justice which reflect not only in its laws, institutions, but social systems as well, and, it is expected that the major social institutions should distribute fundamental rights and duties and, determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. This expresses the conviction that social justice is the highest of values in the society and imperative in the ordering of societal priorities. This paper appraised the concept of social justice as understood in Tiv traditional thought system. The paper employed qualitative research where data were derived from books, journal articles and the internet. The historical, expository and critical methods were adopted for this paper. The historical method presented the views of various philosophers on the concept of justice as well as the history of Tiv people. The expository method relayed the concept of justice in Tiv traditional thought system while the critical method focused on the appraisal of Tiv notion of social justice. The paper found out that, lack of social justice has bedeviled the Tiv nation. This is evidenced in jealousy, envy, land disputes, poverty, politics of bitterness, decline in value orientation, individualism, sectionalism etc. These indices have thwarted development in Tivland, retarded growth and bred suspicion and scorn. The paper therefore, concluded that if Tiv people revive their traditional value system of social justice encapsulated in Gbaaondo, swem, as well as ya na angbian, the much needed cohesion, integration, unity, growth and development that has eluded Tiv people and Tivland for so long would be realised.

**Keywords:** Angbian; Swem; Justice; Social Justice; Cohesion; Gbaaondo

## Introduction

It is a fact that the non-adherence to social justice have resulted to neglect of Tiv traditional values which in turn has degenerated to lack of unity, disrespect for elders, individualism or selfishness, political violence, land disputes, domestic violence, greed, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, moral decadence, kidnappings, jealousy, envy, fanaticism, politics of bitterness, sectionalism among others etc. When there is lack of social justice, positions or resources are not fairly distributed among sections or groups in the society and as such, there is bound to be resentment, hatred and

lopsided growth. This has retarded growth and development in Tivland.

It is interesting to note that the contemporary practical human existential condition of the Tiv people which anchors on communalistic ontology cannot be isolated as it underpins their social justice system and socio-economic life paradoxically. As a matter of fact, the Tiv value system of communitarianism is predicated on social justice, metaphysics and morality. It is pertinent to note, however that, with the emergence of the pluralistic and heterogeneous society coupled with the imposing influence



of globalisation and the alarming rate of westernisation of African traditional ideas, the Tiv people are compelled to rediscover and reassess their cultural values and ideal. It is from this background that this study appraises the concept of social justice in the traditional thought system of the Tiv people of Benue State in central Nigeria to redefine it in contemporary Tiv society. Thus, the work shall expose Tiv traditional notion of social justice; identify those factors that affect the practice of social justice in Tiv society today; and above all, critically appraise the Tiv notion of social justice in the contemporary Tiv society.

### Conceptual Definition

The following are concepts used in the work and their definition as used herein: Justice, Social Justice and Tiv traditional Thought System:

**Justice:** In A Theory of Justice, Rawls offers two principles of justice. First: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all (266). Second: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (266) [1].

**Social Justice:** Social justice concerns the fairness with which the goods and burdens arising from collective life are shared among members of society. Social justice is concerned more specifically with the just distribution of resources resulting from the economic, political and cultural organisation of the community. Questions about social justice are therefore questions about the organisation of just distribution in society. It denotes “the just state of affairs ... in which each individual has exactly those benefits and burdens which are due to him by virtue of his personal characteristics and circumstances” [2], or in Rawls’ famous statement: “the adequate repartition of benefits and burdens arising from social cooperation” (4) [1].

**Tiv Traditional Thought System:** According to Wang in Ieren, Tiv traditional thought system refers to “...the system of thought underlying the behaviour of the Tiv people” [3] (xii). It also means the way the Tiv think, talk and act. It captures the Tiv understanding of reality, truth, the metaphysical realm, human relationship and the world at large. Tiv philosophy:

In other words ... can be defined as a way, method and systematic way of doing things and or understanding events reflecting both the mental and experiential capabilities

of the person and or the group....whatever activity we are engaged in, whether at the level of critical thinking, analysis, speculation, and sense experience is all ieren. Tiv ieren is therefore, the fundamental basis of understanding the Tiv people in their metaphysical, epistemological, aesthetical, logical, political behaviors. Tiv ieren ... eschews all undue reliance on transcendentalism of the kind that reduces all phenomena to a supernatural being without the accruing benefit for man (xii).

### Background to Tiv Concept of Justice

The ethics of African religion in general and the Tiv in particular is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right and wrong, what is good or bad character. It is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society. Ethics is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behaviour that are considered by members of the society to bring about social harmony and co-operative living, justice and fairness [4].

For the Tiv, Aôndo (God) is the greatest source of ethical values. He demonstrates the desire for good value system through Gbaaondo which means “natural truth”. He created the universe and mankind. When God created human beings, He gave them a moral capacity, will and reason. He also gave man Ishima (heart). The heart is invested with the capacities of knowing, thinking, reasoning, willing, deciding, choosing and exercise of freedom. It is from the heart that thought, motive and intention arise. Thus, the heart is responsible for moral decisions and actions [5].

Ishima is an equivalent of conscience. A distinction between good and bad, right and wrong is based on two types of heart: Ishima i dedoo (a good heart) and Ishima i bo (a bad heart). The fact that a person is capable of doing good and bad actions on different occasions suggests that the heart has two natures. Thus, a distinction between a good and a bad person is made on the dominance of either one of the natures of his heart. A good person is characterised by dooshima (love), Bemshima (kindness), Ishima i wan (patience), Ishima i saansaan (happiness), Ishima i koron lyol tsaha (self-control), Ishima i mhôôn (mercifulness) and so forth. God rewards good actions and punishes evil doers. Thus, God is a moral judge of human conduct. God’s concern for moral conduct is mainly for the purpose of maintaining cordial human relationships and efficient institutions [5].

The Tiv man recognises God as the Supreme Being, that because of His power beyond human control, it is right to do good and avoid evil in order to please him and gain his favour (oral interview). That is why Dzurgba says:

In Tiv traditional religion, divinities (akombo) perform specialised functions in human society. They serve in the areas of human reproduction, health medicine, farming, hunting, fishing, trading, marriage, family and so on. Some of the divinities are Ahina, Igbe, Ikyôôr, gbianjôv, Atsewe, Ikyo and Akombodam. The problems associated with divinities are vomiting, bleeding, abortion, irregular menstruation, sterility, impotence, headache, chest ache, stomach ache, rib-ache, and cough. These problems are believed to result from a violation of the divinities' taboos, which regulate human conduct. Such violations necessitate the acts of confession, propitiation, expiation, appeasement and submission. Acts of adoration, praise and thanksgiving follow divine blessings: sacrifices to the divinities include crops, fowls, goats, except in the case of dog which the Tiv people do not eat; the clients receive portions of their sacrifices. Each divinity has its own rules for its own clients; human conduct is therefore well regulated in everyday life (214).

Gbenda says Akombo in general terms are believed to have been given by Aondo (God). God is active; he takes an active part in affairs of the people and akombo a sôron is what reflects his invocation [6]. Ikyôôr cult which is believed to be one of the akombo as portrayed by [5] can therefore, be traced to the recognition of Aondo in the life of a Tiv man. The desire of the Tiv to uphold morality motivated the introduction of the akombo a Ikyôôr to assist the young girls to be pure and chaste before they are given in marriage. Akombo a kyôôr are as old as humanity, Aondo created the world and gave the Tiv man the knowledge and grace to identify akombo in order to help maintain morality through preservation of virginity. There is no trace as to when and how the Ikyôôr cult came into existence but then the Tiv have a general belief that Aondo gave this cult to the ancestors through deities and it is regarded as one of the akombo that checks morality of young unmarried girls in order to maintain a harmonious relationship between man and Aondo.

The Tiv belief express unalloyed conviction about the values of oneness and belongingness as dictated by ya na anigbian. Thus, concerned with harmonious co-existence of life-forces, the Tiv man himself as a life-force, does not deliberately do anything to dislocate the enshrined coherence (50). Zaato Nor also explains that 'the Tiv man is a life-force who must relate and interrelate with other life-forces. He is also a member of a family, clan, community (society) and the universe'. Nor stresses that to the Tiv therefore, the interpenetrating relationship is a physical, moral and spiritual responsibility to promote the ontological equilibrium in the society through the sustenance of the collectivist/communal living that is embedded in familyhood [7]. This macro relationship as contained in the larger society is equally demanded at the micro level of familyhood

relationships. The implication of this is that members of a particular family lineage must necessarily, as life-forces, sustain the existing congruence which is promoted by upholding the socio-cultural values, beliefs, integrity as well as prophecies, if any, that are associated with the family (236).

### Understanding the Concept of Justice in Tiv Traditional Thought System

The concept of justice among the Tiv is very central to the understanding of the Tiv Mnege u tar (world view) and ieren (philosophy). It is also built on the principles of appropriateness enshrined in harmony derived from the ontological principle of balance and proportion [8]. The concept of justice in Tiv means sha inja which depicts appropriateness. Justice in Tiv therefore, is an act, an attitude, a system, a policy that is appropriate to many society and the entire cosmic realities [9].

To be appropriate or act appropriately, is to embrace such other values as farmers, communality, accommodation, what is right, what is good, what promotes tranquility and harmony, altruism and brother keeping among others (7). Justice can also be seen in Tiv understanding to mean shami (right). Injustice is therefore, shamiga (not right). Shami has correlates such as Kwagh u vough "right thing", sha tindi (legal), sha mimi (truth), doo (good) and so on. However, "Right" as applied to Tiv understanding of justice assumes many meanings. For Dzurgba A "right" is ian. That is why a Tiv man would say, ian yam "my right" or "mngu sha ian yam" "I am on my right" or "Mngu a ian sha kwagh ne" "I have a right on this thing". But as stated further by Dzurgba, this "right", ian, does not arise from the individual's merit but the merit of the society (111).

In the legal sense, justice is said to be done in Tiv when there is ijir oron I mimi, right judgment. But this right judgment is measured by the standards of the community. In Justice and Judgment among the Tiv, Paul Bohanna explored the Tiv traditional understanding of justice as demonstrated in their judgment of cases. He outlined the numerous cases to demonstrate that justice in Tiv is more evidential in instances of judgments and settlement of disputes (56) [10].

Meanwhile, Atser in "Justice in Tiv Society" demonstrated that justice in Tiv traditional society was closely linked with Tsav, witchcraft, but in the positive sense of enforcing agreements, and maintenance of order, encouraging harmony, fraternity and kinship ties, where individuals act appropriately for cohesion and togetherness (70) [8]. It must be noted that the concept of justice in Tiv also reflects the comprehensiveness, communality, egalitarian and

sacralism of the Tiv society. The conception of justice as appropriateness, sha inja, overwhelms the above indications as expression of what characterizes justice in Tiv society [11].

Politically, the Tiv indigenous religion has employed symbols to ensure justice and fairness among the people. This is seen both in the effective leadership and followership of the Tiv people. Symbols are employed in objects such as tsa, gbough, staff of office, in the administration of their various jurisdiction. Tsa, tail, is used mainly for blessing from either elders or leaders. The same tsa is used on the other hand to reprimand, warn and even punish an offender. Indigenous religion has taught the Tiv people the various ways of evoking their ancestors using these symbolic items [12].

It is also indigenous religion that has taught the followers the values and power of the ancestors. Tiv ancestors in themselves are symbols of the almighty God (which they refer to as Aondo u a gbe sha man tar). Among the Tiv, it is believed that imo I mbavesen kaimo I ivungu, words of elders are words wisdom. They are words of ancestors. When people excel in life, they are simply exhibiting the radiant and splendor exhalation from the ancestors, deities and god. Tiv indigenous religion teaches that each leader not minding the level is a symbol, presentation, of ancestors. This is the belief on which the Tiv people are tied to what is termed swem ritual pot (98).

The swem ritual pot contains ashes of the late Takuluku who led the Tiv fairly and righteously. The belief is that his ashes are present in the swem ritual pot and are an indication that he is present and would still (even long after death) exercise his fairness, truthfulness and justice over whatever transpires in Tiv land or among Tiv people. It is this strong belief that up till today the Tiv indigenous religion leads the people to swear by the swem ritual pot. The pot is believed to make the offender's legs and stomach swell up. And if confession is not made of the offence committed, the offender finally dies. This belief shows that the practice of indigenous religion is strengthened by the involvement of symbols, swem ritual pot. Apart from enforcing quality leadership also ensures loyalty, obedience, justice and fairness among the followers [12].

Economically, the Tiv have a series of economic activities apart from farming. The people practice hunting, blacksmithing, cloth weaving and other items of daily need. Ate iwya from where blacksmithing is done is also a ritual. Tiv indigenous religion has it that ate iwya is a place for safety for whoever is fraying in fear of destruction of any kind. Ate iwya is also believed to be a place where theft is never carried out.

All that is left in Ate iwya is never carried away by anybody unlawfully or without any permission. Symbolically, ate iwya is a sacred place based on the teachings of Tiv indigenous religion (8).

As a medium of effective communication, symbols serve as a tool for information dissemination and they are: a bridge between spirits, ancestors and the living; they warn against misfortune, and are tool for dispensing justice; and they also reward the just and punish the offenders. They are instruments for promoting the communal and economic life of the Tiv people. The core experiential and daily life of the Tiv people is collectively arranged. This is because individualism is seen as a taboo, and as such, the Ubuntu proverb 'I am because you are' suffices (8).

In Tiv, Azov, spirits or Mbakuv, ancestral spirits, are capable of changing to anything as it please them any time, the objective is to testify that in their community models are provided for social justice and the welfare of the inhabitants are truly realized in their social life. In a related view, the breaking of swem signifies that justice is set loose in the land, so those who use tsav in evil ways would be punished with illness and death. Gbaaondo therefore stands for the truth, justice unity, brotherhood and that which is truly right [6].

In Tiv religion, truthfulness, chastity and justice are cherished and to ensure that the cherished ethical norms meet their desired objectives. There are taboos, prohibitions and laws that guide members of the society. Violation of such always has consequences from the God, spirits. Preservation of the virginity of a girl is another crucial moral value in Tiv religion. An example of such norm in the Tiv society is tying of virginity to the Ikyôôr cult and sustaining by the Ikyôôr deity [13].

Ya na Angbian is a philosophy that is grounded heavily on the idea of fairness. It also emphasises on justice as a principle and believes that leadership at all levels should not be confined to one particular section, society, region, or group of persons. But rather, it should be a shared responsibility to all qualified individuals or groups. Politically, ya na angbian defamed the Nigeria popular adage of "winner takes all" and ethnic based politics, greed and selfishness. It is a philosophical principle which advocate fairness in everything be it political or economic resources. For Akiga, therefore, the entire philosophy of ya na Angbian is built on equity [14].

From the foregoing, one would observe that justice is indispensable at all levels of man's relationship with his fellowman. Ya na angbian is a philosophy of social justice. It is based on the social nature of man and directed towards

the accomplishment of common good, accommodating the desires of others for headship too. This study seeks to review the aspect of justice called social justice.

### Factors Inhibiting the Realization of Social Justice in Tiv Society Today

The emergence of the modern society which is pluralistic and heterogeneous in nature has affected almost all facets of Tiv socio-cultural system and the concept of justice is not an exception. Since the intrusion of cultural influence and the colonial-missionary activities in Tiv land, a lot has changed. Anshi Martin Wang affirmed this when he asserted that “the destructions of Tiv belief system, worldview and philosophy have affected drastically, the ancient practice of tsav for the benefit of the members of the society and the maintenance of justice” (11) [3].

Swem which hitherto was the symbol of justice has lost its sacredness and mystical force in ensuring justice [11]. Almost everybody claims to be Christians, hence, Bumum Swem, swearing at Swem, is considered ungodly and devilish. The bible has now replaced Swem in matters of oath taking and other related activities. Unfortunately, the bible does not react drastically and promptly at one who swears at it and acts contrary or inappropriately as does Swem. The ‘sit tight’ mentality has permeated the Tiv nation and the sense of communalism is gradually becoming an allusion. Communalistic sense of justice has been replaced by individualistic tendencies. According to Wang, “brotherly love has ceased and has been over thrown by brotherly conspiracy and hatred, collectivity has given way to egoism and uncompromising individualism” (118).

It is thus, regrettable that, the modern society with its doctrines of consumerism and extreme capitalism has greatly affected the Tiv concept of justice. Swem is a deity in charge of justice, fairness, security, peace, stability, order and welfare. It enforces the right and duties of individuals. The culprit’s stomach swells, his or her legs and arms become thinner and thinner, while the head rests awkwardly on a thin neck.

Other challenges in the effective implementation of social justice in Tiv society today includes:

#### Jealousy

Jealousy is one of the factors inhibiting the practice of social justice in Tiv society. Many today feel that the way to get to the top is by destroying the other person. It is better expressed as ‘Pull Him Down’ (PHD) syndrome. However, Ahile opines that much of what goes on in Tiv society today

can only be understood against the background of the social structures and relations initiated by those who colonised them [14]. “Yes, the structures are so created to fashion the desired disparity amongst groups” (107). Justice Utsaha was cited in his speech to the Mzough u Tiv as saying; why are we so diametrically different from our ancestors? The Tiv man of yester years never believed in employing subversive tactics, including the issue of supernatural powers, to thwart the efforts of his brother who aspired to excel among his neighbours, this is jealousy.

#### Envy (Iyuhe)

Iyuhe ka mtuhwem (jealousy is like ashes) and mtuhwem, ashes, ontologically, does not give to something positive, mtuhwem in itself is the waste product which is obtained from the well burnt wood. Its combination with water produces lmtsem also called potash. It is commonly used by cooks in the preparation of ashwe soup. When boiled with ashwe, it neutralizes that bitter taste in it. It is also used to neutralize poison. Supernaturally, ashwe is also a poisonous potion used in black magic to cause disunity among a family or community members etc. Iyuhe leads to blackmail or slander of others. It also leads to the use of ashwe against a brother or sister. In fact, it is one of the major factors hindering the practice of social justice today. Once a particular person has established that he would not be a beneficiary of what is meant for their community, he or she may go as far as ensuring that others too does not get it. Such resistance go as far as involving the use of sorcery which may result in the elimination of the person designated to benefit from the position meant for the community.

#### Religious Issues

Religious issues also lead to injustice in Tiv society. There is often disagreement over leadership in the same congregation or denomination. The same thing happens when there is a disagreement over interpretation of scriptures, doctrines, sacraments or practice. Where a particular section of society dominates the leadership of a particular religious institution and other parts of the society feel not accommodated, such organisations split into factions and such factions organise themselves into new religious institutions, organisation or movement. Religious controversies and schism in Christianity originate from these sources [15]. Leadership tussle is one reason for the proliferation of churches in Tiv land just as the problem of commercialization of religion. This disunity and personalization of leadership by an elite community also affects negatively the implementation of social justice in Tiv land.



### Politics of Bitterness

Politics in Tiv society has led to the erosion of moral values of honesty, sincerity, transparency, accountability, fairness and good family name. This is best captured in the maxim, *ya sha ageva, win by force*. The effort to win by force has often led to the death of many during elections. *Ya na angbian* being a justice principle ought to have a special place in Tiv politics but due to political bitterness some prominent Tiv sons go the extra mile to stop other members of their communities from flying the flag of a party in line with this justice principle. Often times, they manipulate the process via *injo*, 'loan system', to lease the position out to another community. Since they are not to have the position, then no one else will have it. Political bitterness also constitutes a serious challenge to the practice of social justice in Tiv Society.

### Decline in Value Orientation

In Tiv philosophy, every member of the society have responsibility for the proper training of children born in such a society. Formation of children is not solely the responsibility of parents. One of the values that the society inculcate in the child is respect for parents, elders and others. Where one observes that a particular child is misbehaving, he or she will caution the child and report him to the parents. Nowadays, a good number of parents are not happy to receive such reports from other members of the community. By implication, there is serious decline in moral values in Tiv society. However, this is not supposed to be the case. The communitarian spirit as captured by *Ikima* entails thus:

A true African had always believed in communalism evidenced in sayings like; *ya kwagh na angbian, angbian ka an kpan ga*; among the Tiv meaning; "eat and give your brother/sister, and brother/sister is not a slave" respectively [16].

Strangely this is not the situation in our society today. Even the elders seem to have lost focus. Hardly have we heard that the elders have met and resolved that there should be moral reforms in Tiv society. This has paved way for vices to a level that there exists today militia groups in the land who kill, maim and destroy properties. Crime is the order of the day, particularly armed robbery, kidnapping, assassination and brigandage etc. The foregoing clearly depicts collapse of moral values and inhibition of social justice.

### Sectionalism

Sectionalism or factionalism in Tiv has manifested itself in many respects: political appointments, in distributing or

allocating/erecting developmental structures and worst of it all, it has manifested in xenophobic dimension. 'Ka Kparev' or 'ka Mbavia a Mbavia gaa', 'ka Ihyarev', 'ka Masev', 'ka Isherev', or 'ka Ityoshin gaa' or generally, ka MINDA (Masev, Ihyarev, and Nongov Development Association). These stereotypes, prejudices, name calling and all kinds of pejorative, derogatory and apprehensive xenophobic feelings and attitudes have only fanned the embers of disunity and divide in Tivland. This had made clans in Tiv to build barriers against their fellow Tiv brothers to such an extent that even land is preferred to be sold to a non-Tiv by the seller than to his Tiv fellow.

### Westernization

Westernisation of Tiv society by the British colonialists entrenched liberalism in human behaviour, particularly the Christian message that no one should be judged and punished except by God. This has given room to looming social vices and crime like sexual promiscuity, armed robbery, theft and loss of respect for elders etc. The Tiv tradition which was known for altruistic pursuit of common good has been sacrificed on the altar of individualism, as everyone seems to think of himself and his family. Today, what is meant for many is hijacked by a few. This uncultured culture instituted by westernization has stagnated true development in Tiv society and has displaced social justice.

### Globalisation

Another challenge to social justice in Tiv society is the use of technological gadgets such phones, laptop, television etc. which exposes the Tiv to social media platforms such as X, facebook, whatsapp, Instagram, Zgo, zoom etc. and television, cinema. These gadgets tend to isolate the individual from the public and exposes him or her to corrupt practices such as pornography and other crimes encountered on those platforms. This 'modern civilisation'

What is captured above is that globalization has somewhat negatively affected the spirit of social justice in the present time as people give or spend more time with technological gadgets than they should in physical contact. But that is not to say that these gadgets do not foster social justice. They do because individuals evolve communicating through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, Zgo, Video Conferencing, etc.

### A Critical Appraisal of Tiv Notion of Social Justice

A systematic treatment and critical appraisal of the Tiv concept of justice will be highlighted as follows:

### Gbaaondo as a Basis of Tiv Theory of Justice

The concept, Gbaaondo means nature in Tiv. It is a combination of two words, “gba” and “Aondo”. Gba can mean “make” and can also mean “create” as well as a conterminous of “exist”. Meanwhile, Aondo, simply means God. In this context, gba is taken to mean create literally therefore, Gbaaondo denotes “God’s creation”. In Tiv worldview, Gbaaondo is used to qualify that which is natural, that which is right, that which is, and ought to be. Hence, the Tiv concept of justice is greatly influenced and informed by Gbaaondo, that is, appropriateness in Tiv understanding which reflects the natural order and cosmic harmony as well as what ought to be and is right [11].

### Swem as a Symbol of Justice in Tiv

Swem is a religious sacralism of the Tiv people. It has to do with meaning, truth, just and logical interplay of coherence in midst of confusion and illogicality [5]. It is a doctrine whose pragmatism and reaction encompasses equilibrium and optimal result (46). The Tiv people believed that, Swem is a very big Akombo (mystical force) by which they swear for harm or protection. Anybody that bum swem (swears by swem) and acts contrary suffers from swollen abdomen and dies. It stands for mimi (truth) chia (justification) and it is a symbol of universal justice and an enforcing power [17]. This is even so because:

While individuals may find Akombo for the whole land, swem summons the power of the community to carry out justice. Every Ityo (patrilineage) is eligible to have swem. It is expected that a far-reaching decision be sealed by the breaking of swem [51].

It is thus believed that Swem has the power of administering instant justice and of enforcing decisions [51]. Based on its known efficacy of securing instant justice Joseph Gbenda observed that “in a court of law, votaries of traditional religion take their oaths by swearing using the sacred pot swem to be just and honest in giving evidence [6].

In Tiv metaphysics, an individual’s right to life, to his children’s lives and welfare is protected by a divinity known as swem. It is responsible for social justice. It protects the innocent people, but punishes those who violate the principles of social justice and fairness by bringing all kinds of sufferings upon the lives of people, whether they do their evil deeds under the auspices of azôv, akombo or mbatsav; swem is capable of dealing with the matter effectively. It swells the stomach of the guilty person and kills him, but protects the innocent. Thus, it is the last resort in seeking for justice. Swem’s emblem is made up of a small pot which is filled with soil and ashes. Certain feathers of certain birds are

inserted in the contents of the small tsua (pot) and camwood is smeared at several places round the pot. A rope is tied at the brim with a loop as a handle. After swem is fully prepared, the priest asks the person who is receiving swem to make his or her declaration of his or her oath.

It is through swem that the individual and society’s rights are protected and justice ensured for all. In the swem oath alone, we can observe that there is great ethical consciousness among the Tiv, which serves as an operative factor in assessing the moral behaviours of the Tiv. It restores confidence, trust, love, peace, pride of virginity and chastity, prohibition of incest, prohibition of adultery and rape.

### Justice as a Means of Social Cohesion in Tiv

The Tiv worldview even believes that both man and the universe should work together in harmony [18]. In this derivation, what is appropriate is that which help to enhance and sustain the above conviction; hence the understanding of justice as appropriateness. The philosophy behind the intended-preserved-harmony between man and the universe is that, for the Tiv people, the excesses of man disrupt the relationship between man and the spirit of the universe and such causes disorder and malfunctioning of the entire cosmic nature and social equilibrium. Therefore, justice in the sense conceived, ensures appropriateness, and orderliness that avoid social disruption in the working of the society. Corroborating this point, Wang notes that justice is that which “serves to preserve the balance of the macro and microcosm, that which holds the equanimity of the totality, produces the greatest good and as such is true to the structure of the whole” [3]. Social justice is therefore an essential element of ensuring social cohesion in Tiv society.

### Ya na Angbian as Tiv Philosophy of Justice in a Socio-Political Sense

Informed by the Tiv doctrine of communalism and egalitarianism, ya na angbian becomes an appropriate philosophy of justice in the political sense. Ya na angbian is translated to mean “eat and give your brother”. According to Terkura Tarnande, “to the Tiv people a just and equitable society can be attained through the application of the principle of ya na Angbian in the appropriation of the commonwealth” [19]. It is a communalistic theory and practice directed towards brotherhood. It is strongly opposed to individualism, selfishness and egocentrism. This belief is captured in the sayings like “kon mon ngu lun ikyo ga” (a single tree does not make a forest), “ka tema imongu mbagbera ve fe iwa ye” (it is only by sitting together that the people of Mbagbera have come to know the art of blacksmithing). Outside expressing the communalistic philosophy of the Tiv people, it also shows that justice for the Tiv people is also communal and

not individualistic. It reveals the distributive justice of the Tiv in terms of political power. It is in this sense that Terkura Tarnande further avers that:

The import of the principle of Ya Na Angbian is to ensure the equitable distribution of social wealth in such a way that none of the constitutive components of Tivland is neither alienated, marginalized nor discriminated against. Fundamental to the conception of the principle 'is a sense of community sharing, harmony, inclusiveness, unity, partnership, ownership and fairness' .... consequently, monopolization and primitive appropriation of wealth and possession of power by a few privileged persons or families is forestalled (2).

This is why the Tiv have no dynasty or royal family, for them, it is justice for all to experience kingship or royal hood. Hence, the rotation of political offices and traditional positions in Tiv land.

### The Practice of Social Justice in Tivland Today

It is believed that, no society can build a solid foundation of national development and cohesion without visiting its past cultural heritage. Thus, Government should accord recognition to traditional institutions and marry traditional value systems with the modern-socio-political system. There is also the need for Government to reintroduce moral instruction in all levels of our institutions of learning allowing moral instruction draw its content from philosophical teaching. It is observable that this will instruct the value of social justice amongst the people and also inculcate discipline in people which will greatly minimise their tendency to be corrupt.

Other areas to be looked into and reshaped include the following:

- The Tiv need leaders who can encounter and turn setbacks into comebacks. A leader with vision to use judiciously the wealth provided by the administration of President Bola Tinubu, to ensure national cohesion, development, unity as well as integration. A leader that can add value to the people, use their influence at the right times for the right reasons. He must walk away from political crisis and face development with utmost commitment [20].
- There are ethical principles of social justice such as ya na angbian, gbaaondo etc. which leaders of Tiv society need to re-enact in modern society and ensure compliance to save the society from total collapse. This could be done by employing social workers under the local government system to visit communities from time to time and teach them fundamental principles of human relations to

promote peace, unity and development.

- Tiv value system needs to be strengthened and reconstructed. Stakeholders in Tiv need to come together and identify those negative, destructive and harmful elements in Tiv culture and jettison them. Instead of the negative 'iyuhwe', the positive 'iyuhwe' should be imbibed. This is the situation where one aspires to imitate role models in order to build on legacies. It is a situation where one is anxious to outdo and or outshine already established achievements of others. This method can ensure progress, advancement and growth in Tivland.
- Similarly, government ought to promote entrepreneurship attitude by introducing policies that will develop skills among the teaming youths and make loans available for those that need finances to boost their businesses. The absence of a clientage culture among the Tiv youth have made people to apportion blame to 'mbatsav' witchcraft as noted by Kenneth and Benjamin in their work "Strengthening Tiv Value System through Socio-Cultural Reconstruction: A Reflection" (137-138) [21]. Therefore, where job opportunities are enabled by the government and Benue is opened for business to thrive through establishment of factories to cater for the abundant agricultural produce that the state possesses, a lot more of the vibrant youth could be encouraged to engage in these productive ventures, it will prevent the youth from sitting and brooding over 'tsav' and 'mbatsav', for their predicament. After all the Tiv say even the 'imborivungu' is not given to lazy or idle people. So the youth should be encouraged to engage in creative and productive activities.
- The Tiv philosophy of 'mom kohol mom', 'ya na angbian' and 'ayatutu ka uno? ka se!' should be upheld. This is the only way Tiv people can bridge the gap of animosity, sentimentality, acrimony and disharmony between Tiv clans and eschew 'iyuhwe', the destructive elements.
- Furthermore, efforts of spiritual leaders aimed at riding Tivland of the activities of the destructive tsav should be encouraged and supported by the traditional institution by banning the practice of sorcery. Meaningful efforts of successful sons and daughters should be appreciated, supported and imitated instead of blackmailing, backbiting, slandering and engaging in politics of acrimony in order to bringing such people down. Similarly, those who have made it to the top should equally aid the younger generation to also embrace the progressive patterns in order to attain the same height.
- There is also the need for Tiv sons and daughters to appreciate their indigenous value system of social justice, eschew the attitude of individualism, selfishness, greed, jealousy etc. and imbibe the spirit of brotherhood, promoting common good as children of Takuruku [22].
- Certain days should be set aside to honour and appreciate Tiv sons and daughters who have excelled



in their various endeavours. This would spur them to intensify their efforts at developing both human and material resources [23].

- Musicians, poets, academicians, the media, the entertainment industry, spiritual leaders and traditional institutions should intensify campaign promoting the Tiv traditional value of social justice towards ensuring progress, cohesion and development.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious from the study that the Tiv concept of social justice was a cherished tool for enhancing communal living and harmonious co-existence among them. It also serves to promote fairness, equitability, communalism, trust, legitimacy and goodwill for the physical and spiritual regulation of the different life forces of the society. Without appearing anachronistic, it is imperative to rediscover and re-assert our traditional concept of justice so that peace, progress and social cohesion can be realized in Tiv society, Benue and the larger Nigerian society. Justice is for the common good of society.

It is important therefore, to also state here that there can be no peace without social justice and there can be no development without peace. The implication here is indicative of the fact that for development in its entire ramification to take place in any clime, the attainment of and the provision of social justice is both paramount and indispensable. This is why the principle of social justice is deeply enshrined in the operational values of the Tiv people and indeed in almost all cultures of the world [11].

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