

Full Length Research

An Appraisal of The Expressions Of Love Between Couples In Traditional And Contemporary Tiv Society

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Accepted 14th October, 2020.

The word love may be said to be user-friendly in the sense that it is liable to diverse meanings. Love connotes a strong feeling or deep affection for something. This could be a member of your own family or friend. Thus, one could love his/her wife/husband, children, parents or neighbours. The paper makes an appraisal of the expressions of love between couples in Traditional and contemporary Tiv society. The study is motivated by the need to fill the void in studies on love especially amongst Tiv couples. The study employed the primary source in observation and oral interview and the secondary sources in books, journals, newspapers/magazines and e-sources. The study established that there were several ways by which couples expressed love between themselves in Tiv Traditional Society. These signs were noticeable during courtship and after the couple had married. Signs of love amongst married couples could be seen in hugging, eating together, feeding each other with morsels/pieces of meat and exchange of gift items like handkerchief, etc. The study further established that love breeds respect between the couples and strengthened the family bond. The paper also observed that money seems to have taken over love and its expression in contemporary Tiv society as kindness, unselfishness, helping, smiling etc which expresses genuine love no longer count, money is the vogue such that a person who gives a lady much money is said to love her. The paper calls for the sustenance and enhancement of love amongst couples hence love is the greatest of all things and conquers all things (Cf. 1Cor. 12:31; 13:13)

Keywords: Love, Expression, Couples, Tiv Traditional Society

INTRODUCTION

“Without Love Life Will be Less Than Complete”-Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang 18

The word love is a most frequently used concept in the contemporary society. In other words,

the word love is always on the lips of both the young and the old; the married, bachelors and spinsters. The

word love also finds its way to the mind, hearts and lips of the literate and semiliterate. This, by implication, means that the concept love is user-friendly. This explains why one may get to hear of the word love in churches and mosques, street corners, in schools, lecture rooms and even in hotels and brothels.

In contemporary times, handy is a conversation begun that the word love infiltrates or rents the air. A man discusses with his pals the love he has for a certain woman or lady; just as a woman may discuss with relish, her “new found love” with her friends or close confidants. The word love occupies a central place in the theme of most Religious traditions of the world; for instance in Christianity, love is emphasised to the tune that if a believer performs miracles and speak in the tongues of men and angels yet has no love, then all his/her deeds are meaningless (cf. 1Cor. 13:1-3). Such is the power of love.

However, despite the fact that the word love is user-friendly, most users of the word use it out of context in the sense that it is misused. Most people in contemporary society refer to erotic love whenever the word is on their minds or lips. This explains why solemn events like Christmas, Sallah, traditional religious festivals and the acclaimed St. Valentine’s day (lovers day) celebrated globally on 14th February annually may be erroneously taken by most people as days/occasions on which to display erotic love –sex.

On the contrary, love connotes a deep feeling of affection for a person or something and not necessarily sex or erotic love as is conceived in contemporary times. The paper examines the expression of love between couples in traditional and contemporary Tiv society. The paper is thus, divided into sub-themes for easy comprehension. In the succeeding paragraphs, the paper will pre-occupy itself with investigating how couples expressed love in traditional and contemporary Tiv society.

Loving the Concept

Love means different things to different people. On the basis of this statement, love thus becomes a user friendly concept. To some persons, may mean a deep feeling of affection for a person or thing; while to some, love translates to sex (erotic love). In total agreement to this assertion, Bruce and Carol Britten state that many people worldwide are ignorant about love. According to them, all over America, Africa, Europe and Asia; people talk about love, but don’t understand it (17).

Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang attribute the confusion regarding the meaning of the concept love to the media which has particularly portrayed love as synonymous with sex. This according to them explains

why young people, including some adults, have difficulty deciding what constitutes true love (17).

To Bolander, love connotes a strong feeling or deep affection for something. This could be a member of your family, a child, husband, wife, neighbour, parent, country or God (852). Other persons may also view the love with respect to food, drinks, game or an activity they are interested in. Thus, love is a kind, a passionate commitment that humans nurture and develop. Love usually arrives in peoples’ lives unbidden. Love is often said to be blind or unconditional because humans have no control over it.

Also, love is more easily experienced than defined. As a theological virtue, adherents are to love God above all things and their neighbours as themselves for His (God’s) sake. Love often seems remote until it is encountered in the life of another in acts of kindness, generosity and self sacrifice. Billy Graham citing Bishop Stephen Neil defined love as a steady direction of the will toward another’s lasting good (249).

According to Akpan, love is a relationship between two persons and it’s fundamentally an “i-you’ phenomenon. Love is therefore, the movement of our appetite towards an object understood to be good. He further maintained that as a relationship, love creates those involved in it (69-70). Love creates and forms husband and wife who give themselves entirely to it. As a result of this outlook, human love is something of a higher plain than the animal’s desires, more lasting and spiritual and directed to the other as a person with qualities of mind, heart and soul (70).

For the purpose of this paper, Bruce and Carol Britten’s conception of love as choosing to do kind, unselfish deeds for the other; it is giving and forgiving, it is helping, smiling and thanking... love is not just a feeling, it is what we do is adopted as the working definition(18). This means that for a person to love, he/she must be prepared to be kind in word and deed to his/her partner or spouse. Love is therefore enveloped in kind actions.

Akpan posits that love binds married couples together despite the conflicting conditions. For him, love ought to be the bedrock on which marriage is made meaningful and stands. He thus, categorically asserted that there can be no lasting marriage without love (70).

It is to be noted that as a feeling, love could rise and fall in the sense that humans have many different feelings. Sometimes, a person could feel angry, lonely and sometimes a person could feel in love. This implies that a person does not have the same feeling everyday – our feelings change always. Despite the fact that the feelings of love may rise and fall, Bruce and Carol Britten advised that couples can choose to be extra careful to do loving actions i.e.

being helpful, generous, polite, patient and forgiving even if low in spirit (20). These actions sustain relatively.

There are several forms of love namely:

(i) **Philia love:** This form of love is non-sexual; it is the intimacy between close friends, family members or brotherly love. It also connotes tender affections, being friendly to a person. Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang look at this form of love as friendship or brotherly love. It is the kind of love that friends share, friends who have lots of things in common, who like and support one another. Friendship love reflects a deep sense of commitment to the wellbeing of those who are close to us (19-20). People in this type of relationship relate to one another as best friends and not lovers. This signifies reciprocal sharing of time, activities, and other aspects of fellowship (20).

(ii) **Agape love:** This is the love for all of humanity, such as God's love for humanity (cf John 3:16), *Agape* love has to do with affection, goodwill, love, benevolence. It connotes caring enough to sacrifice for what is best. *Agape* love involves proper behaviour towards others and it is sometimes against natural inclinations such as in loving one's enemies, neighbours, etc. (Love: <http://www.roseavenue.org/love/importance%20of%20love.htm>).

Billy Graham maintains that *Agape* is the highest and noblest form of love which sees something infinitely precious in its object. According to him, God's greatest demonstration of *Agape* love was at the cross where He sent His son Jesus Christ to die for the sins of mankind (248). *Agape* love is different from contemporary notion of love which is seen as an emotion or feeling. Love is not a feeling-love is doing; true love is love which acts (248). *Agape* love is true love; it takes time to develop. It is difficult to achieve this kind of relationship because much effort is required to sustain it. This type of love requires commitment, intimacy and passion (Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang, 21).

(iii) **Pragma love:** This love is mature love that has developed over a long period of time between long term couples based on goodwill, commitment, compromise and understanding.

(iv) **Phlautia love:** This is self love. Concerning this form of love, it is often argued that to love others; a person needs to love and care about his/her self first. This kind of love, one must admit, translates to selfishness. In the words of Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang, self love involves a person accepting his/herself completely; it involves a person being comfortable with his/herself i.e having a good self image (19). When a person loves his/herself others would love him/her too.

(v) **Eros/erotic love:** This connotes sexual passion

and desires. This is the form of love that most people in contemporary society refer to when they talk about love. Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang state that erotic love is also known as romantic love. They maintained that romantic love involves total absorption with strong feelings of elation, sexual desire and arousal (20). To them, most people first experience erotic/romantic love during adolescence or early adulthood. Those involved in romantic love usually overlook faults, avoid conflicts and ignore logic. The defining features of romantic love are physical attraction and sexual or emotional involvement. It is rooted in strong feelings. Ogunmola, Oyetunde and Gang further explained that the terms often used to describe romantic love are "falling in love" or "love at first sight" (20). It is worthy to note the fact that, romantic love is another form of infatuation, and it cannot sustain a lasting relationship, such as marriage relationship; though it could also develop into true love.

Having established the background above, it is worthy to note that the origin of love is traceable to God. God created the earth and all its contents including man and animals out of his love. Therefore, God is the manifestation of love which explains why following the fall of man he sent his son to redeem the fallen man (cf John 3:16). In addition, love breeds jealousy. This implies that a person who is in love with another person may not want the interference of a third party. This creates unhealthy feeling as was noticed in *Aondoakaa Yem shin Alugbem* where Aondoakaa grew jealous when he saw a man talking to Shimenenge his fiancé in the market square. Aondoakaa had to leave the market even though he had planned to leave later than earlier (Bur 32). On this note, the deep love of God and his protectiveness over his chosen people the Israelites made him confess that he is a jealous God who punishes acts of disobedience of parents in the children (cf. Exod. 20:5). Also, a person may love or have deep feeling of affection for a person or thing because of the following reasons: good looks, gentility, good manners, sense of humour, behaviours, attractiveness, etc.

The Expressions of Love between Couples in Traditional Tiv Society

According to Akpan, marriage is a union of two persons in love and by love. He maintained that love is the reason and foundation for unity that exists between married couples. Thus, the couples got married in love and in love; they procreate and remained joined to one another in love. Love is therefore always the mutual relationship between persons (70).

When two persons are in love, certain signs show their expression of love for each other. In

traditional Tiv society, there were several avenues, behavioural traits which clearly indicate that a couple is in love. For instance, Sopuru pointed out that in the case of the woman, she would always think of what to do to please her husband. According to her, this kind of love brings about self-control, discipline and patience in the life of the woman (105-106). Furthermore, these qualities help the woman to train her children correctly and to gain her husband's love and interest.

Furthermore, a woman in the traditional Tiv society demonstrated her love for her spouse by showing him kindness. For instance, in comforting him when he came home from the farm or hunting discouraged. She could cook the man's favourite meals; satisfy him in bed and by being polite and respectful to him even when they disagreed.

Similarly, Iyortyom explained that in traditional Tiv society, a person could tell that there was love in between a couple where there were no destructive quarrels between the husband and his wife. This translated to the fact that there would be no fighting between them. As such, at the appropriate time, both the husband and his wife would buy things and visit the *terkem* and *ngokem* (father and mother in-laws) (32).

In addition, couples in traditional Tiv society expressed love to each other by singing love songs in which the husband or wife's name would be mentioned repeatedly in the stanzas of the song. This scenario is vividly captured in Suemo Chia's *Adan Wade Kohol Ga* where Adan Wade composed love songs for his heart throb Shidoo Agena who did the same for him (86). If the wife or husband stumbled on an object which nearly caused their fall, they would instantly call on the name of their spouse for strength.

Also, after all the people had eaten the food prepared by the woman she would bring a portion she had reserved for the husband alone including a special piece of meat and the couple will eat together. Suffice it to state the obvious fact that this piece of meat was not just an ordinary piece of meat. The woman selected the best or choicest piece or part of meat which could be inferred as special; in the case of chicken, the gizzard. The soup that the couple eats at this juncture could be the one that she had not given to the other members of the family or household. Sometimes, she could even ask her children to leave their father alone to eat as he does not feed on stones. During this meal, the woman would cut a piece of meat from the soup and feed the husband with it and the husband would do likewise. Those who dared to share in this special meal were rebuked by the woman. It is to be noted that because of this issue of a woman bringing food to her husband when every other person had eaten lured some men to also marry their own wives in order to receive this preferential treatment.

As observed by Iyortyom, food played a crucial

role in marriage and the expression of love between couples in traditional Tiv society. As a result, if the husband did not eat his wife's food, she would not be happy (32). This was demonstrative that something was wrong.

Other signs and indicators of the expression of love by couples in traditional Tiv society include: the cutting of each other's nails, washing of the husband's clothes, warming his water for bath when the season demanded. The couple could also buy love items like *adikpo* (handkerchief), earrings, bangles, headscarf, finger rings, shoes, cream, wrappers, for each other. The couples could also express their love by bathing together, hugging and engaging in chase game when opportunities came up. The husband could also carry his wife on his laps or back as they played together.

Not only that, the couple could also have pet names. The man could call his wife pet names like *udoo* (beautiful one), *ngulianga* (unmistakable), *teram sha shima* (always on my mind), *ashekuma* (one with the beautiful eyes), *kasev kyundu* (one equaled to twenty women) *shima i orya* (the heart of the husband) and *dion kwase* (adorable woman) amongst other pet names. On her part, the woman could base on the skin colour of her husband pet name him *nyian* or *ii or* (fair or ebony black man), *iase kuma* (one with a fitting *diastema*). She could also call him *wondo kuma* (one whom the trousers fit) etc.

Clearly seen from the above is that the pet names for the woman outnumber those for the man. The explanation to this scenario is not farfetched as in the Tiv traditional society; it was not a common thing to see a woman publicly express her love for a man lest she is taken for a slut. In addition to the above, it also shows clearly that the Tiv man loves, cherish and preciously valued his wife. The insinuation in some quarters that the Tiv do not love or care for their wives and families but only concerned with large families is thus not true. Furthermore, pet names for couples in Tiv traditional society were most commonly descriptive of the physical appearance, character and attitude of the person that was so pet named.

Also, Tiv pet names for the husband and wife brought out the beauty of the person and as it is normal with praises; this brought out the self-worth of the person which greatly enhanced love and respect between the couple. Tiv pet names for couples also bring out the fact that the Tiv appreciate beauty and aesthetics and do not mince words about it, as they express this in poetic and prosaic language. Most importantly, Tiv pet names for the couple are not obscene, vulgar or expressed in uncomplimentary or the loose language of obscenity.

A couple who love themselves in traditional Tiv society were always seen together even on the farm or market square. When the woman or man went

to the local market, he/she could buy *keghker* of fried *lchegher* (white melon) and *ishwa* (beniseed/sesame seed) for his wife as a sign of love. When he is given a piece of meat at the communal meetings or social event, he brings same to his wife. It is to be noted that the expression of love between couples in traditional Tiv society is in twofold; during courtship and after marriage.

The expression of love did not stop between the couples alone but extended to other relations also. For instance, the woman would express her love to her father in-law and mother-in-law (husband's parents), if she actually loved the husband hence the Tiv adage that "if a woman loves you, she will equally love your dog". On the other hand, the husband would treat his mother and father in-law well and send them gift items, send money to them to aid in farm work if he is not disposed to go and do the work himself. The man could equally collect and train his in-laws in school or other forms of education, meeting their financial and other related demands. All this was hinged on an obedient wife who really was after her husband's heart and actually took control of it with genuine expression of love in theory and practice. This made the husband to strive to meet up with the demands of his immediate family (wife/children) and that of his in-laws.

The Expression of Love in Contemporary Tiv Society

Admissibly, westernisation and its tool of change have significantly affected the expression of love by couples in contemporary Tiv society. Tiv couples, most especially the educated ones have taken to expressing their love for each other by the adoption of western models. These include: kissing one another, the calling of contemporary pet names including darling, honey, sweetie, sweet heart, mummy and daddy. The irony however is that despite these sweet appellations, most of the women do not truly love or care very much for their husbands especially about whether they eat or not.

Contributing on this scenario, Apenda and Adegga averred that improper feeding of a husband by his wife glaringly demonstrates the absence of love between the spouses. They further contended that:

The absence of love in marriage clearly shows when spouses cannot embrace, kiss, eat together/bath together, etc. There is a destructive quarrel between spouses sometimes leading to full blown fights in which the women may be battered (45).

The preceding quotation clearly paints a gloomy picture of the Tiv family system which is embroiled in chaos and on the brink of collapse. Most ladies in contemporary Tiv society do not have the spirit of endurance as did Tiv women of old who were

living and in this spirit endure all kinds of hardship. The caring and loving Tiv woman of yesteryears even while suffering would retort: *Mngu yan ichan ka sha chi u mbayev av* literary meaning 'I am suffering because of my children'. The contemporary Tiv lady would tell her spouse in total disregard to the welfare of her children "*iwya ya tar wam ga*" (a dog has not devoured my land). This posture often leads to separation and divorce. The impact of this action seriously affects both the spouses, children, relations and friends.

The absence of love and its expression in contemporary Tiv society occasioned by the hostility of some wives has sent some husbands into the waiting arms of women of easy virtues where much time is spent drinking and keeping of late hours out of the family house. Most men would only return home to sleep and disappear the next cockcrow. Tiv family values are indeed on the verge of collapse. Some Tiv women are also frustrated out of their matrimonial homes due to the absence of love in their homes.

Above all, money seems to have taken over love and its expression in contemporary Tiv society; thus instead of kindness, unselfishness, helping, smiling and forgiveness, etc which expresses genuine love, money is the vogue such that a person who gives a lady much money is said to love her. It would therefore not be out of place to state the obvious fact when Kura Gungul sang in the late

1970s that "*or u mimi yo kera ka inja ga; kpa or u mimi yo saa naira*" (the truthful or morally just and honourable person is not that with good habits/character but the one with naira- money), he was indeed singing of the contemporary TIV society where money has usurped and dismantled all good virtues including love.

In line with the above conception, a good man who is said to 'love' his spouse is that who has a car and in the borrowed western culture, opens the car door for his spouse; he washes her clothes including under wears, scrubs the rooms, kitchen, toilets and bathroom during his turn. A loving spouse in contemporary Tiv society must and should be able to cook for his spouse, fetch water from the stream; such a 'loving' man must take care of babies and sleep under when having sex with the wife. This is a ridiculous expression of love between couples in contemporary Tiv society. This is not love if it must be emphasised. Love for the contemporary Tiv lady is understood in terms of the man *being able to buy jewelries for the lady, eat out in restaurants, buy designer clothes, wrist watches, shoes, bags, etc. On the one hand, some men have reduced love to sex or erotic love. A woman who says 'no' is seen not to be loving enough and provides reasons for the man to go sampling.*

Some schools of thought have attributed the absence of love between couples in contemporary Tiv

society and the enthronement of conflict, chaos and violence to several factors which include: the enthronement of money over and above genuine love; economic hardships which has turned couples into angry, impatient, and unfriendly people. These categories of couple were not ready for marriage in the first place. On the other hand, is the third school of thought which suggests that the absence of love in contemporary Tiv society has to do with a category of ill-trained, ill-tempered, ill-mannered and hostile Tiv ladies who lack respect, kindness, politeness and show of love to their spouses. These issues have the prospects of not only brewing conflict between couples but of sending the egoistic man away (Adega, "Girl-Child Education"..., 40-44).

CONCLUSION

It is worthy to note that though western values seem to have overthrown the traditional way of expressing love between couples amongst the Tiv; the traditional ways of expressing love is still being observed by a large chunk of Tiv spouses in the rural areas as was practiced by the forefathers. The substitution of the traditional ways of expressing love by couples and the entrenchment of western values has brought about chaos and conflict is most in Tiv homes. This changing trend needs to be addressed to avert a total collapse of Tiv marriage values. Without love in the family, there will be no spiritual, educational, social and economic development in the family. Love and its expression between couples bring about peace, tranquility and the overall development of members of the family. The children from a peaceful home where love reigned supreme are properly brought up and become useful members of the society. Love also begets respect between the couples.

Also, Tiv couples should understand that love is the foundation of everything an individual does. As such, if a person does every other thing but is lacking in the virtue of love; such a person has not started anything yet. In addition, love originates from God and He is the manifestation of love. As such, Tiv couples must imbibe the culture of sacrifice in their relationships anchored by love for each other.

Finally, even though love may cost dearly; it does not hurt anyone. The paradox of love is that it is free, yet it attaches humans with bonds stronger than death. Tiv couples must also remember that love cannot be bought or sold. There is nothing love cannot face for indeed, love is life's greatest blessings and as the Christian sacred book atteststhree things endures: love, faith and hope –But the greatest is love (cf. 1Cor. 13:13).

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