

# **GST 113**

## **NIGERIA PEOPLES & CULTURE**

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## LESSON 8

### Major Ethnic Groups of Northern Nigeria

#### THE TIV

P. Bohannan (1953) in his book *The Tiv of Central Nigeria* classifies the Tiv people as the largest single ethnic group in the middle Benue basin of Northern Nigeria. According to him, the southern and eastern portions of the Tiv country, also called “Ityough Kiteragh”, lie among the foothills of the Cameroon highlands and the Sonkwalla or Sankwura hills of the Obudu hills territory. These regions are flanked by the Alago and Jukunized group on the North, the Basta and other Cameroon groups like the Undir and Iyon on the South and South–East, with the Jukun and Chamba to the West. Of course, they presently occupy the Tiv local government areas of Buruku, Gboko, Gwer, Guma, Kwande, Katsina Ala, Konshisha, Vandeikya, Ukun, Ushongo, and Makurdi.

#### Origin of the Tiv

The origin of the Tiv people is not certain. What we know about their origin came from oral traditions of myths and legends and theories of migration.

#### Tiv Version

According to the Tiv oral tradition, a man named Tiv founded the Tiv ethnic group of today. So, the word Tiv refers both to the language and founding father of the group.

#### Swem Version

Other traditions argue that earlier settlements of the ethnic group came from Swem down to their present location through Nwange and Ibinda, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE TIV

Again, P. Bohannan (1953) argues that the socio-political system of the traditional Tiv was very unique. It was a classic example of segmentary or largely decentralized system of government in pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria ever studied.

#### “Tsombor”

“Tsombor” was the name of the family group and was the largest recognized entity as well.

#### “Mbavessen” (Elder)

Mbavessen or elder was the head of a unit. You should remember that in Tiv traditional system, each family group was in turn divided into smaller units.

Also, the Tiv attached much importance to the spirit of brotherhood and mutual relations because of the belief that all of them were from one father and therefore from one lineage. For Bohannan (1953) the Tiv socio-political structure “was so simple that it was difficult to understand.” According to him, Tiv society was very much segmented. It was a hierarchical society. It started with the individual at the lowest level, the family, the extended family, the kindred, and through clan to Tiv, i.e. the whole tribe. In Tiv society, more than in any other Nigerian ethnic group, genealogical affiliation was very strong. Even today, in traditional

Tiv society, it is upon this kind of genealogical framework of hierarchy that kinship relationship is organized.

## **THE IGALA**

### **Origin of the Igala**

Like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, the origin of the Igala people is not clear. However, Idah has always been known as the capital state of Igala people.

### **Abutu Eje Version**

History tells us that Abutu Eje was the first personality to seriously contribute to the development or evolution of the Igala state. Abutu Eje sometimes identified as child reared by a leopard (Eje) or as a prince from Ado (Benin) or Apa (Wukari Jukun), was a foreigner. According to the legend, the sovereignty was transferred to him from an aboriginal population (the Okpoto).

### **Achadu Version**

Some Igala elites attribute the emergence of their state to one Achadu. He is believed to have come from the Igbo country. He married the Attah and later became a patron (ritual husband) and the leader of the kingmakers (Igalla-mela).

### **The Yoruba Version**

Some scholars also argue that the Igala are of a Yoruba extraction. Historical evidence exists to show that the territories of the Igala and some Yoruba speaking peoples had been contiguous.

## **THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE IGALA**

Ayagba or Idoko is best known as the ancestor to all the Attahs. He is also credited to have founded the present Igala dynasty. History tells us that he was the one who helped the Igala people to break away from the Jukun rule. Politically speaking, each Igalla Mela was the head of any effective Igala territory. His administrative power was like that of the Uzama Nihiron of Benin or the Oyomesi of the Yoruba. The traditional Igala political structure was operated on two levels. There was the central and the provincial level of administration. The Attah was head of the centre. A council of chiefs and other officials assisted him in the local or provincial administration of the kingdom.