



The Tiv Poet And Heroism: A Study of *Inyamtswam* Songs

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Abstract

Heroic poetry, particularly that of the *inyamtswam* extraction, is not just popular but fundamental to the existence of the Tiv people. In this paper, we have attempted to show that aside from providing a channel for the people to express their love for competition, heroic poetry corrects social vices, performs didactic functions, propagates the people's culture and serves as a veritable means of entertainment. It also facilitates the link with the ancestral world. In this age when advances in Information Communication Technology (ICT) have turned the world into a global village, we believe there is the risk of the values inherent in Tiv heroic poetry being corrupted and even eroded unless such works as this present one are sustained.

Keywords: Tiv, Oral Poetry, Heroism, Heroic Poetry, Prestige

1. Introduction

The Tiv are the most populous ethnic group in Benue state, Nigeria. The name Tiv is regarded as the name of a real person who is held as the father of all Tiv. According to Rupert East (2003), Tiv had only two sons, *Ipusu* and *Icôngo*. These two form the two main branches of the genealogy found in Tiv land. *Ipusu* consists of Shitire, Ukum, Jemgbagh and Jecira while *Icôngo* comprises Tongov, Ugondo, Ikurav, Nôngov, Iharev, Masev and Turan. This classification accounts for the social and political organization of the Tiv society.

Tiv society is made up of *kwav* (age-groups). In the various age-groups, members engage in active healthy competitions such as hosting of prestigious dance festivals, organization of community labour force and monetary contributions for the development of their communities. Religion is an essential aspect of the life of a Tiv man. This religious belief revolves around *akombo* (divinities) and *Tsav* (witchcraft). Among the Tiv, witchcraft is an acceptable way of maintaining order in the community, if it is not used unilaterally.

Marriage is very significant in the life of the Tiv man. This is because the wife/wives and their children provide the much needed labour for effective work on the farm, since the major occupation of the Tiv is farming. In fact, the size of a man's family determines his farm size and of course, the wealth he acquires. No matter how wealthy a Tiv man may be, if he is not married, he is by traditional standards considered irresponsible. His social status is thus greatly reduced and he cannot therefore compete with his age-mates. Being married is thus a pre-requisite for hosting the *inyamtswam* (prestigious) dance festival. Bachelors cannot host the festivals because the wife must perform alongside her husband.

The traditional African environment is generally poetic because it is replete with occasions that call for poetic performances. Hardly does an African engage in any activity without one form of poetic rendition or the other. This means the African's poetry is intricately woven in his day-to-day life activities. Tiv poetry is thus, "incorporated in the tribe's way of life, and deals with its day to day issues and problems of life"(Jenkwe, 1). The Tiv have their oral literary pieces and several traditional dances which are performed with songs in their communities. These include: *Swange*, *Ange*, *Girinya*, *Ibyamegh*, *Ingyough*, *Inyinya*, *Ivom*, *Inyamtswam*, just to mention but a few. Out of these, *Inyamtswam*, *Ivom*, *Inyinya*, *Girinya* and *Ibyamegh* are regarded as prestigious (shagba) dances because they have the potential of enhancing a man's prestige. Usually, the different dances in Tiv land are categorized in their historical and artistic contexts by well-chosen names that relate them to their function, history or artistic requirement.

Several reasons account for the organization of prestigious dance festivals. First and foremost, the Tiv are a proud people who take delight in displaying their might and wealth at the slightest opportunity. They see poverty as an evil that must be subdued at all cost. One's ability to achieve this feat is thus considered as a heroic act that calls for a celebration. It is for this purpose that the Tiv have designated some dances as prestigious or heroic dances.

Heroic dance festivals also serve as a way of encouraging hard work and dedication to one's occupation. In Tiv context, a person is considered a 'man' when he is able to host at least one of the several prestigious dance festivals. In fact,

some of the songs contain derogatory remarks about other indolent members of the community, especially the host's age-mates. This act gingers those indicted to work harder in order to get out of poverty.

Amar mirin also takes place either to welcome a new wife or to celebrate an old favourite wife. Both the host and his wife perform the dances and also feature prominently in the festival songs. Sometimes, too *amar mirin* is held simply to display newly acquired higher status and to announce one's entry into a new class. Also, dances serve as an outlet for physical and emotional release. The nature of the Tiv man's major occupation (farming) puts him under a lot of stress which is relieved in the course of dancing.

The focus in this paper is on heroic poetry performed at *amar inyamtswam* (dance concerts). These songs extol the virtues and heroic exploits of the celebrants as well as other prominent Tiv sons or daughters. Heroic poetry preaches virtues like patience, hard work, honesty, brotherhood, sympathy and kindness. The Tiv use this oral art form to foster unity and also enhance development in their society.

Amar mirin literally means organizing a traditional dance festival. According to Tiv history, the practice of *amar mirin* is as old as the existence of the Tiv. From time immemorial the Tiv have always found dances as a way of expressing their joys or excitement. Sometimes too, dance festivals are organized to commemorate certain important historical events in Tiv land.

2. Theoretical Considerations

This paper is premised on the functionalist approach to oral literature. This approach looks at the utilitarian value of literature and does not believe in the idea of art for art's sake. This school concentrates largely on 'function', in particular on the function of stabilizing or validating the current order of things. The functionalists are interested in oral literary form only if they have a clear social function to perform in the society. These functions could be to educate, draw a moral, or warn people against the breaking of norms in the society. We therefore find this approach suitable for this paper. The data used in this study was randomly collected from the field, transcribed and then translated for analysis.

3. Tiv Heroic Poetry

Tiv heroic songs have some nobility because they are performed at occasions that are convened to demonstrate the higher status attained by the celebrants. They are praise songs therefore they are very rich in metaphor and exaggeration.

In this paper, we have undertaken a thematic, poetic and stylistic analysis of some selected praise/heroic songs with a view to bringing out their function and literary value.

It is important to note that heroism in this context is different from the European classical heroic literatures. The heroes here are not gods or descendants of gods. They also do not necessarily possess supernatural powers nor do they fight against supernatural beings. "In short, they are ordinary human beings engaged in ordinary human activities (Kunene xvi). The poet then figuratively uses metaphor, imagery and symbolism which transport these ordinary activities to an extra-ordinary level. The hero could be described as a monster or a terrible creature destroying opponents.

Inyamtswam, which literally means a dangerous animal or beast is a dreaded masquerade. In this context however, the use of the word *inyamtswam* is metaphorical. It connotes that the celebrant has become *inyamtswam* by virtue of his achievements, therefore other people dread facing him in prestige competitions.

Heroic songs do not only praise and extol the good attributes and outstanding feats of the celebrants, but also condemn vices in the community like envy and jealousy as we see below:

Tiv	English
Ityô yam nahan zee ooo,	My people, its not so,
Abagi wan u Makaa	Abagi, son of Makaa
Tar wen ne mase shin	This land of yours, only has
Iyuhwe, ityô yam,	Envy, my kinsmen,
Ka an a kura ne tar?	Who will safeguard your land?

In the above excerpt, the singer reprimands his kinsmen for allowing jealousy and envy to take over the land. Baffled by this situation, the singer asks rhetorically: "who will safeguard your land?"

Consequently, nobody is willing to support another to succeed as the people conspire to pull down prosperous sons of the community; a situation which the songster finds disappointing. The singer believes that development will come to the land, only if the people eschew envy and jealousy, otherwise their land is heading towards a precipice.

It is also common knowledge that in communities that are full of envy, rumour mongering and gossip are rife. Those struggling hard to prosper become objects of gossip as shown in the next excerpt:

Tiv	English
Zaki wase kpmor	Our king, the man of grandeur
Tyozer Agera,	Tyozer Agera,

Nenge shawon;	See the irony of life;
Ka we za shir ayou ave	If you don't struggle,
Kpa, Zaki	But, <i>Zaki</i> .
Ityô i teman imôngo awe,	People gossip about you.
Er u kungu ichan	That you are poor;
U kungu bee ivu ve,	As poor as unkempt gray hairs.
Wa kaa di we u nôngo	If you decide to struggle,
Kpa u kpera iyongo ibo	But you incur the wrath
Hen ityô ve;	Of the people;
We a zer ikyondo a engem	If you wear nice clothes,
Kpa ukpera iyongo ibo	But you incur the wrath,
Hen ityô ve;	Of the people;
We a nema sule u a kehe	If you have a large farm,
Kpa u kpera iyongo ibo	But you incur the wrath
Hen ityô ve,	Of the people;
Ityô i ôron we iger,	They derogatorily
Er we u hingir tor	Say, you have become king
Or a kuma je ga	No one can match you.

The above excerpt comments on the ironical situation where indolent people become objects of gossip and ridicule, while those working hard also incur the wrath of the community. The wealthy are envied for possessing so much property, instead of being encouraged. The rampant cases of land disputes in Tiv land are largely due to jealousy, envy and greed, thus leading to wanton destruction of lives and property. The singer however urges those working hard, not to be deterred by their detractors. The song condemns envy, jealousy and gossip. It prepares the ground ready for the appearance of achievers at the occasion.

The *inyamtswam* masquerade usually symbolizes the might and prowess of the dancers who are often great achievers. Non-achievers or non-initiates of *inyamtswam* are usually referred to as 'women' or children in their communities. They must therefore make way for the dreaded *inyamtswam* as it appears in the arena as we see below:

Tiv	English
Ior zua har shin tembe,	People have gathered in the arena,
Yô mlu ôron,	So, I am warning,
Me shi ve na ian,	That they should make way
Hen tembe fefa, gayô,	In the arena quickly,
Inyamtswam kange	Otherwise, <i>inyamtswam</i>
Bee ve;	Is set to emerge;
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Inyamtswam gba van ve ooo!	<i>Inyamtswam</i> is coming ooo!
Ior i sor ian doo-doo,	People should make way properly,
Mbayev ve yevese ooo-oo.	Children should run-ooo.

One's heroic status is also demonstrated by the involvement of the cosmic forces like the sun, thunder, rain and lightning. The poet tells us below that as Ityôsongo Aga appears in the *inyamtswam* (masquerade) for a performance, there is thunder and lightning and the sun is dimmed. This development is symbolic of the prowess and heroic status of the celebrant. The reactions of thunder and the sun signify the acknowledgement of the celebrant's fame and prestige by even the cosmic forces, as stated below:

Tiv	English
Ityôsongo Aga due	Ityôsongo Aga appeared
Shin tembe, mnenge	In the arena; I saw
Aôndo dura, kume	Thunder and lightning,
Dighin, kume pir iyange.	<i>Dighin</i> , and the sun was darkened.

The next excerpt below is another public display of the celebrant's heroism and bravery, as he is said to have unsheathed his sword to cut off a tiger's head:

Tiv	English
Ityôsongo wan u Aga,	Ityôsongo, son of Aga
Nyôr ôôv sanker	Unsheathed a sword
Er wen a gber	That he would cut off
Nom anyam ityough,	A tiger's head.
Wen a nam gundu.	And give me the carcass.

The above excerpt is a rare display of heroism by the celebrant. He has become *inyamtswam* by virtue of his achievement and can even kill a tiger. The scenario depicted here is best understood metaphorically, as the tiger about to be beheaded is simply *amar* (*dance concert*) that the wealthy celebrant intends to convene for the singer, who cannot afford the cost on his own. In Tiv culture, those who have sufficient wealth do not just stop at organizing *amar* (concerts) for themselves, but also organize for their indigent relations. By doing so, their pedigree continues to rise and their fame equally extends beyond their immediate communities.

Heroic songs do not only praise personalities, but also explore the philosophy of life and its absurdities. The songs equally demonstrate the Tiv belief in the inevitability of death as shown in the next excerpt:

Tiv	English
Wanyam ooo,	Wanyam ooo,
Mo mwa tsav ken vanger,	I am full of wizardry
Kpa mo mkav	But was not vigilant enough,
Kwagh shin ishima ze,	So, Orgee has
Orgee mase yemen nee.	Finally departed.
Me, hile zaan ooh,	Just lead the way ooh!
Wan Chember, kwase	Daughter of Chember, woman
Ingyôr va tôô kweregh	Ingyôr started wailing
Shin gbenda,	From the road;
I de un a nyôr ooo.	Allow her into the compound ooo.
We, Agber Aga Kpehe,	You, Agber Aga Kpehe,
Oooh! Ahoo ne ityô i	Oooh! Alas! you kinsmen of
Jina due jinge war,	Jina have consented to killings
Yô nenge ase,	So, look at this;
Ômbachom gba tar ve.	Mbachom children have destroyed the land.
Avungu kar hemen	Owls have become leaders,
A tar, ua doo	The land
Shawon ze ooo,	Can't prosper ooo.
Ka ifan i Muufu.	It is Muufu's curse.

The singer in the above excerpt laments the death of his dear one, Orgee, but is quick to add that Orgee is merely leading the way on a journey that all humanity must embark upon. He blames the elders of Mbachom for the frequent deaths in the land and accuses them of not being vigilant enough, thereby allowing some unscrupulous elements to use witchcraft and kill prominent sons of the land. The poet figuratively says, 'owls' have taken over leadership of the community so, there cannot be any good in the land.

Owls are nocturnal birds that the Tiv associate with evil. They are therefore a metaphor for bad leadership that breeds evil. The issue of death among the Tiv is usually linked to witchcraft because in Tiv cosmology, people do not just die; they are killed by the *mbatsav* (witches and wizards). The singer advises Mbachom elders to rid their land of evil acts in order to prosper.

The tone in the next excerpt changes as the songster expresses joy that his kinsmen, Yaav have convened *amar*, (dance concert) and so there is drumming and dancing:

Tiv	English
Ne on Turan cii,	You, Turan children,
Tile mo kaa neo ooo!	Let me tell you – ooo!

Shi mo kaa ne ooo	And tell you – ooo,
Ne ityô yam Yaav,	You, my Yaav kinsmen
Ityô yam i mir amar	My kinsmen organized a concert,
Yô mlu kaven anom,	So I am boasting,
Torde m yar amar	Torde, I attended the concert,
Tsa ijô-genga sômôn;	Drum beats rent tha air;
Kôkô zômôn iyol	Kôkô twisted his body
Shin gema oooh.	In the grave oooh.

In the above excerpt, the hero, Majir Ker Zungur has proudly convened *amar* (concert) to uplift the name of Mbachom kindred. In praising the convener, the singer uses hyperbole in lines nine and ten above when he says that, the drumming was so loud that it made Kôkô, the celebrant's late grandfather to "Twist his body/In the grave". The significance of the exaggeration is not only to emphasize the intensity of the drumming, but also to show the acknowledgement of the celebrant's heroic feat by his ancestors.

The actions of thunder, lightning and rain are again highlighted in the praises of yet another icon of achievements in the land, called Tyobugh Gbachi. The singer tells us that he is dressed in the brightly coloured *anger* cloth, and as he steps majestically into the dance arena, thunder rumbles in the sky. The action of thunder is obviously in recognition of the great feats attained by the addressee. He is indeed a man of no mean achievements, and the singer concludes that Uifande clan has indeed begotten real men of valour and enviable achievements. The poet states:

Tiv	English
Tyobugh Gbachi	Tyobugh Gbachi
U chir anger ikyondo iyol,	You are dressed in <i>anger</i> cloth
U ngu van amar,	And are coming to the concert,
Aondo kume wura	Thunder keeps rumbling
Yar-yar-a-ah.	Gloriously.

The next excerpt is in praise of yet another traditional heavy weight, Nyitamen Damkor, who is held in high esteem by his community. He is a man of many achievements, whose arrival at the *amar* (concert) arena is being heralded by the drumming of the *indyer* as we see below:

Tiv	English
Nyitamen Damkor	Nyitamen Damkor
Ngu van amar,	Is coming to the concert,
Indyer i Damkor	Damkor's <i>indyer</i> (slit-log drum)
Nyin tsa imo.	Sounded throughout the night.

Indyer, which is mentioned in line three above, is a huge slit-log drum that is regarded as a sacred instrument in Tiv land. The Tiv also believe that to own an *indyer*, one must have some supernatural powers as the demands for its possession are beyond an ordinary man. It is usually sounded to announce deaths of very important and respectable elders of the land. It can also be sounded at some other important cultural occasions. For the *indyer* to be sounded at the instance of a person's presence at a gathering is indeed a big honour given to that personality. The *indyer* being referred to here is owned by Damkor, the celebrant's father, therefore both the father and son are heroic personalities.

Tiv heroic poetry practitioners make copious use of metaphors or metaphorical expressions both in comparing their objects of praise to symbols of strength, and in making philosophical statements, as we see below:

Tiv	English
Uyina u Kwangi Ukor Asama,	Uyina Kwangi Ukor Asema,
Tar yô ka	The world
Wan ishegh, ka u a	Is a bottle gourd,
Tsea or yô	If one is lucky,
Nan ta kor.	He hooks a rope on the neck.

'The world' in line two above is metaphorically referred to as "A bottle gourd". According to the singer, one's success in life is also dependent on luck or the benevolence of fate. The gourd is a metaphor for life and its struggles. If anyone

is able to “hook a rope on the neck”, then that person is bound to prosper. The non-achievers are thus those whose ‘ropes’ or struggles in life are yet to hook on the gourd’s neck.

It was earlier noted in this paper that organizing *amar* (dance concert) in Tiv land is usually done on a competitive basis. This is why latter conveners try to surpass the former. Also, in order to distinguish themselves and out-class their age-mates, some achievers convene *amar* (concerts) not just for themselves but also for their indigent kinsmen or relations. This is the scenario depicted in the excerpt below:

Tiv	English
Tamen, wan u Daamom	Tamen, son of Daamom
A er shagba	Has finished celebrating,
Yôr bee ooo,	His prestigious status,
Hide wa wanigba	And has organized a concert
Na amar, man,	For his maternal kinsman,
A yilem icham	And has invited me to sing.
Mve ye.	That’s why I’ve come.

The songster praises the convener of the two *amar* sessions (concerts) for the double celebrations. He must be wealthy indeed, because the financial involvement for one festival alone is usually not a child’s play.

In the next excerpt, the singer is overwhelmed by the calibre of personalities that have converged at the *inyamtswam* dance arena. He confesses that he lacks the qualification to even sing about them, so he is merely mentioning a few of them. He cannot recall all their past deeds and achievements so all he is doing is simply “passing by the sides” of the rapid. He sings:

Tiv	English
Ishol yar haa ngee yum	The dance festival is too crowded
Iyuhwa ne kumbur,	This rapids is turbulent
Gande, mngu	And too dangerous.
Karen i sha	I am passing
Akur-akur ooo;	Only by the sides ooo;
Sha akur-akur	Only by the sides
Di zan-zan, u ningir.	And going round.

The ‘rapids’ in line three above is a metaphor for the calibre of powerful, heroic men and other great achievers present at the occasion. The singer sees himself as not even worthy to introduce the dignitaries present at the occasion. Their achievements must be numerous, that is why the singer cannot recount all of them.

Usually, when personalities are praised at the *amar* arena, they are expected to come out and shower gifts on the songster in appreciation. In the following excerpt therefore, the singer expresses his optimism that he has eulogized some great achievers whom he is sure would certainly reward him handsomely. He therefore states:

Tiv	English
Mtema kon hen	I’m lying in ambush for game
Ape me ker kwagh	Where I must see game to shoot
Ken-ken-ken,	Without fail,
Abunde ga.	This is obvious.

This metaphorical analogy means that, he has sung praises of trustworthy and generous personalities and is therefore optimistic of being adequately rewarded.

Yet another display of heroism is illustrated in our next excerpt, where Shôwua Azômon Gema, one of the personalities who attended the *amar* (concert) is said to have “beheaded *shagba*” (prestige). The singer puts it:

Tiv	English
Shôwua wan u	Shôwua, son of
Azômon Gema,	Azômon Gema,
Gber shagba ityough	Has beheaded <i>shagba</i> (prestige)
Gbihi, akende ooo!	And dropped it down ooo!

The use of personification above shows that the addressee has attained the highest level of achievements by Tiv traditional standards. He has done all that a man needs to do, in order to gain recognition from far and near. He can thus be said to have literally conquered and then “beheaded *shagba*” (prestige).

The *inyamtswam* dance is used in checking the behaviour of members of the community. Tiv tradition has it that anyone who is guilty of using witchcraft unilaterally to harm or kill another person cannot perform the *inyamtswam* dance. Only those who have been cleared by the elders of any wrong doing are permitted to perform this prestigious dance.

Lamentation is a recurrent motif in Tiv heroic songs because the Tiv do not only praise the living, but equally praise great achievers who left indelible marks in the lives of individuals or the community as a whole while alive. This category of songs could be referred to as ‘praise laments’. The Tiv belief that deaths in the community are usually due to the activities of the *mbatsav* (witches and wizards) is again illustrated in the following excerpt:

Tiv	English
Ajayi u Ikoyive Akortse,	Ajayi the son of Ikoyive Akortse,
Kpaa a yem ee	Too, has gone
Akendem tsa mgbe vaan,	He has left me and I’m mourning
Wan u Gom, mama wam	Daughter of Gom, my mother,
Mama huan nen mliam,	Stop weeping
Mo wen me vaa gbem	I’ll weep unceasingly,
Tsô ior a kav asema ooo.	Till the culprits realize their guilt ooo.

The singer promises in the last two lines above to keep tormenting perpetrators of this act with his wails, until their guilt overwhelms them.

In the next excerpt, the singer again expresses his predicament as the *indyer* once again announces the death of yet another hero, Utela Dôhò. Consequently, the singer is restless and cannot sleep. He sings:

Tiv	English
Mnyôr me yav,	I retired, to sleep,
Mnyam ka me vam ashe ga,	But sleep eluded me,
Tsa m ungwa indyer	Then I heard <i>indyer</i> ;
Itsa imo kaan er:	It kept saying:
Takuruku anyam azenga,	<i>Takuruku</i> , the tiger,
Tile, tile jigh-jigh.	Stay and wait for your brother.

The *indyer* is here calling on Takuruku, the father of Tiv to make way for one of his sons, who is on his way to the spirit realm. “Takuruku was a great warrior and a hero of incomparable status, so he is respectfully called Takuruku anyam azenga”, meaning that he was a dreaded “Tiger”. The tiger and lion are both kings of the jungle and are thus metaphors of strength and might. It is therefore logical that the Tiv refer to great achievers as either lions or tigers. The singer advises that the frequent deaths in the land should be checked, in order to move the Tiv nation forward.

Inyamtswam festival dance is anchored on the belief that poverty is a weakness and an evil. The person who breaks free from it must therefore have fierce skills and strength comparable to those of the *inyamtswam* (dangerous wild animal). In the next excerpt therefore, the poet states that Anom Guuja is a great achiever that has attained enviable heights in the community. He has thus become *inyamtswam* and therefore cannot be stopped from going further with his exploits, even with ‘thorns’.

Tiv	English
Or a za kaam Anom Guuja,	Someone tell Anom guuja,
A kar kwagh u shagba	His achievements
Je gande.	Are unequalled
Mbaagwa ve gema kôrôn	Mbaagwa now suppress him,
Sha mboho.	With thorns.

The issue of wickedness in the land is again depicted in our next excerpt. The poet opines that the Tiv nation is not making any significant progress because there are too many vices. He indicts the leaders over wicked acts that have become prevalent in Tiv land. The elders no longer protect other people’s children, when they are exposed to imminent danger. Consequently, the poet likens such wicked elders to ‘hyenas’, ‘foxes’ and senseless killers. The song reminds

the Tiv people that they have abandoned their value system and therefore “Bad times have set in”. They must therefore urgently retrace their steps in the interest of future generations. He states:

Tiv	English
Mbashôr nyôr ioor cha-cha,	Mbashôr have all become hyenas,
Gema kôrôn ivo	Stealing goats
I angbianev tyôr;	From their brothers’ pens;
Mbaza mba kera ye luam	Mbaza no longer
Mba lehe angbian ga,	Share food with their neighbour;
Tar u bo nyôr;	Bad times have set in;
Usambe lumun er	Usambe approved
Iwua wue-er,	Senseless killings,
Ve lumun er iwua wue er;	They have approved senseless killings;
Mbagbar nyôr anyam-kyegh	Mbagbar have become leopards
Ve gema kôron ior ikyegh ooh.	Stealing other people’s fowls.

The *indyer* is again brought into service at the *amar* of Nomishan Ukande. His might is demonstrated in the fact that the *indyer* is sounded as his wife, Ugber Ukor appears in the arena. As earlier stated in this work the *indyer* is not a common musical instrument and is thus sounded only at special occasions. The celebrant must therefore be an important personality indeed. He is thus being honoured with several praise names as we see below:

Tiv	English
Tor ka Achineku,	The king is fire and
Mngerem ma sha awuha;	Water at rapids,
Tor ka begha man anyam,	The king is lion and tiger,
Tor ka nor u tar ooh!	The king is an elephant ooh!

In the above excerpt, the strength, wealth and influence of Nomishan Ukande are so great that the poet likens him to “water at rapids”, lion and tiger. This is another instance of using metaphor and hyperbole, which are common features in Tiv heroic poetry.

Yet another display of greatness is at the *amar* (concert) of Amase Yônkyô. The singer states that the celebrant’s wife was adorned with ‘*tukure*’ before coming into the arena for her performance. The ‘*tukure*’ are strings of beads that are endowed with some mystic powers and are usually kept where the community’s witchcraft items are stored. It is believed that each bead represents a human head. If a bead gets missing, it must be replaced by one death in the family responsible for the loss. It is therefore only great men that have the ‘*tukure*’ displayed at their *amar* as stated below:

Tiv	English
Mbaduku yar amar,	Mbaduku attended the <i>amar</i> ,
Atorough Kor har	Atorough Kor
Ingyôr na tukure shin tembe,	Adorned his sister with <i>tukure</i>
Kpire i gbidye	Kpire bird squawked,
I kôrom a wan ooh.	Someone, hold my child – ooh.

The *tukure* which is mentioned above in line three is also believed to have the ability to make the person wearing it to radiate extra-ordinarily in the eyes of the audience. The poet further states that when the *tukure* was displayed on this occasion, the bird, *kpire* began to squawk. *Kpire* itself is a mystery bird that the Tiv associate with *tsav* (witchcraft). The cry of the *kpire* heralds the appearance of something spectacular. Sometimes its cry also alerts the people of an impending death within the community.

The heroic status of yet another great achiever, Shima Nomanyam is equally being captured in the next song as the poet states:

Tiv	English
Shima u Nomanyam Vembe,	Shima Nomanyam Vembe
Dugh or ityough hen kpe Mkula,	Beheaded a man at the bank of Mkula,
Awambe sen nyôr shin Amile	Blood flowed into river Amile,
Mbagbar u cii gudu-gudu,	Mbagbar are trooping,

Usambe gudu-gudu.	Usambe are trooping.
Atsem Vembe, nenge	Look, Atsem Vembe
Er a honom sha jime inyinya,	Is posing on a horse's back,
Wan u Mbajun kar	Daughter of Mbajun
A nambe icham sha ivo	Has offered me a goat,
Me kera yer ne ga,	I won't hide it from you,
Vembe hembra wanger-wanger,	Vembe is clearly the greatest,
I ver ashe, i nenge oooh.	People should watch out oooh.

Beheading of human beings from neighbouring tribes was considered heroic among the *girinya* (warriors' cult) in some parts of Tiv. In the above excerpt therefore, the celebrant is probably a *girinya* dancer and is said to have "Beheaded a man..." in the past. Also by successfully hosting the *amar* and appearing majestically on a horse, his achievements have made his age-mates to lose their faces. They grudgingly acknowledge his supremacy as they are filled with shame. The celebrant's wife is so generous that she rewards the singer with a goat.

4. Conclusion

Tiv oral poetry is a genre that is practised in many Tiv communities and comes in different forms, performing different functions. Generally, every activity of the African is accompanied by one form of poetic performance or the other. Tiv heroic poetry is thus aimed at extolling the virtues and highlighting the attributes of prominent sons and daughters of the community. This effort is meant to encourage people to strive to achieve great feats so that they can be recognized in their communities and thereby bring about the progress and development of the Tiv nation.

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