Justice, Equality and Peace: The Necessary Tripod for National Development

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The development of any nation depends on how she handles, manages, coordinates and regulates the tripod concepts of justice, equality and peace. The three concepts work in tandem. The principle of justice simply explained is to give each person, or group of persons whether weak or strong what is his/her due and to demand the contribution of each on the basis of equal contribution. Equality in the same vein focuses on treating equals equally and unequal’s unequally. Peace, which serves as the end result of the first two, is connected with a situation where there is no war, no crisis or fighting; it is a pleasant situation that encourages positive thinking. This paper examines justice, equality and peace as the necessary conditions for national development with particular reference to Nigeria.

Keywords: Justice, Equality, Peace, Development.

INTRODUCTION

The assumption that peace is a panacea for national development is not an understatement and it is incontrovertible. But the workings of this very important concept are not unconnected with other two concepts of justice and equality. The tripod of justice, equality and peace combined to form the bedrock of any development in any nation. These concepts active or inactive had been the main problem facing Nigeria as a nation since independence. In 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation, and by 1963, she became a Republican state, ever since this period, the country had been battling with one problem of crisis or the other arising from ethnic conflicts, political conflicts, territorial conflicts, economic conflicts and most importantly and of recent religious conflicts as witnessed by Boko Haram bombings and killings. If the causes of these conflicts or crises are well scrutinised, one is then, tempted to assert that something is wrong with the way Nigerian leaders and followers and of course the government of Nigeria handles, manages and coordinates justice and equality that stand as the supportive legs for peace. If justice and equality are sincerely and faithfully managed, peace that is eluding Nigeria and causing the country’s socio-political backwardness might have not occurred in the first instance.

There is, however, a moral judgment that peace is good and that peace and justice are compatible and reinforce each other. As a matter of fact, justice and equality are the first casualties of peace. In most peaceful and stable societies, religion and cultural prejudice would be found enshrined in the very laws supposed to guarantee equality and freedom and even more so in actual institutions and practice. In Nigeria 1999 Constitution, for example, under economic objectives, it is stated that ‘the state shall...control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of states and opportunity.’ On social objectives, it is equally stated that ‘the state social order is founded on ideals of freedom, equality and justice.’ In addition, that every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law. This aspect of the constitution is targeting peace or aims at enhancing peace in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria. It is pertinent to quote Moyo (2005) who cited Martin Luther King Jr., the United States Civil Right leader who challenged racism and economic injustice during the mid-20th century, as he fired power as ‘the ability to achieve a purpose’. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change. Whether power advances justice and transforms inequality depends precisely on its purpose, the values guiding it and the way it is used. Thus the practicalisation of equality and justice in Nigeria is still posing a big problem for the sustenance of peace and tranquility in the country.

In his paper, we need to think in deeper terms what we mean by justice, equality and peace and bring out their relative position in enhancing national development in a multi-ethnic society, like Nigeria.
The Concept of Justice

The concept ‘Justice’ has always been on the lips of men throughout ages. The ordinary men, politicians, ideologists, reformers, philosophers, and other great thinkers have reference to it. While the noble ideals of justice have pushed people to protest, revisit, clamour for liberation, freedom and independence from people who deny them justice. The question now is, ‘What actually is the word Justice?’

Justice by way of definition can be said to be the quality of being just, impartial, righteousness, legitimacy, equity and fairness in awarding of what is due. For this reason, Aquinas (1969) views justice as ‘the constant and perpetual will to render to everyone what is due to him. While Socrates sees it as an internal disposition to do the right thing. The principle of justice is to give each person or group, whether weak or strong what is his/her due and to demand the contribution of each on the basis of equal consideration. However, what is due is often expressed in a right, which is determined by natural and conventional laws. If a person has a right, to have or do something, others have the duty to respect that claim on the balance of equal protection and reciprocity. Justice is a moral virtue which inclines the will constantly and perpetually to render to others their due in time and place and in a given set of circumstance.

Justice can refer to simple reciprocity or proportionality in vengeance as for instance in the Old Testament rule of ‘an eye for eye, and a tooth for tooth’ which was the first step towards social order and civilisation. At the other end of the spectrum, it has been equated with virtue in general in ancient Greece or brotherly love in Christian doctrine.

There are three major classical schools of thought on justice. The Social Contract Concept, propounded by Hobbes and Rawls. This school of philosophy believes that a society is just if its members mutually and freely consent to the rules or codes of the society, which in the short-run or in the long-run are advantageous to all, or for ‘mutual self interest’. One of the basic premises of this is that societies are built around sets of norms, moves or dos and don'ts which are backed by sanctions to the extent that conformists are rewarded while deviants are penalised. A contract between ‘A’ and ‘B’ can be seen as ethically justified if ‘A’ is equal to ‘B’, in other words, neither ‘A’ nor ‘B’ should negotiate from a position of weakness.

The Utilitarian Concept was championed by Mill and Bentham. This school maintains that a society is just if it guarantees the greatest happiness to the greatest number. In his ‘Nicomachean ethics’, Aristotle defined ‘the good as that which everything aims’ and that ultimate ‘good should be self-sufficing and the most desirable thing. And happiness proved to be the best candidate, since it is desired for its own sake and not as a means to an end. The Aristotelian Golden Mean or never too much and never too little seen to satisfy most conditions.

The Respect Concept is associated with Immanuel Kant, who maintains that in a just society, people must be treated as ends in themselves never merely as means. In a just society, people are respected because they are human beings not as a result of their social graces or trappings. Social justice in general involves both moral and legal justice. However, too much relevance to moral principles or codes could run into serious difficulties, since this must necessarily involves the concepts of RIGHT and WRONG, the philosophical exploration of which is in itself very complicated. Moreover, an action is not ‘just’ simply because it is Right or Contrariwise, Unjust because it is wrong. For instance, disrespect to our elders is morally wrong, but we cannot say that it is unjust. On the other hand, paying good for evil is morally sound. However, it cannot be said to be just. Succinctly argued, justice could be subdivided into two kind: Distributive justice and Corrective justice.

Distributive justice as its name suggests is concerned with the distribution of goods in society. Given a certain good to be distributed between ‘A’ and ‘B’, it is to be distributed according to their respective merits. In a democracy for example, freedom is the standard and all free men are deemed equal. Corrective justice is not concerned with the parties but with transactions which are divided into voluntary and involuntary. The connection arises because of breach of contract in the first category. Here, law operates on the basis of equality and looks to the nature of the injury.

Closely related to the above is the social justice which is that exists between citizens of a free state and is characterised by equality. This concept is essential to social life and harmony, that a country of men or nation without social justice would be pathetic agglomeration of villains, cheaters, reprobates and disorderly people. Accordingly, social justice has remained and will continue to be the guiding and decisive principle in the complex but delicate task of balancing and harmonizing the respective rights, duties and obligations of diverse citizens in the society.

The claim of the state to ensure justice for all is a central problem for political philosophy that remains unresolved to this day. The solution may, however, preferably be concerned with the participation of the governed in the governing process. This is Mill’s opinion, to his credit, he argued strongly in favour of cooperative societies, decentralisation of power and greater participation by the people in local government in which he was an early champion of women right. Also, if a society is to be genuinely demonstrated, if the citizens must be sufficiently free to take part in political activity which has a bearing on their own well-being in the community. Not everybody can at the same time be members of parliament on the basis of equality but at least, participation means that the channels of communication between the legislature and the governed must be kept as open as possible. Socrates is of the opinion that the just minded man will have a good life and hence will be happy and prosperous. Justice therefore pays better than injustice. To avoid chaos, men therefore enter into mutual
agreements to establish laws and obey them, a kind of SOCIAL CONTRACT. Justice is then a compromise between what is most desirable and what is most undesirable. Socrates went on to prove that justice is preferable not because of any material consequences but because it is good in itself and brings peace, whereas injustice is intrinsically evil and destructive of the soul of possessor, it brings crises and war.

The Concept of Equality

This is a very complex concept but highly related and strongly attached to justice. In a fairly obvious sense, we are all unequal from birth in that we inherit different characteristics. Some people are more intelligent than others; some are good at music while other are tone-deaf. Some people are good athletes, others have poor physical coordination or, more tragically, are disabled. In a more abstract sense, it can be argued that political inequalities exist within society, the implication being that all men were equal in the pre-social state of nature.

Rousseau believes that men are equal in their autonomy and perfectibility. It is only within society that this equality is lost. For Hobbes and Locke, political inequality arises as a result of the partial surrender of their freedom by citizens to an individual sovereign or to a ruling class; but for Rousseau, inequality is the necessary concomitant of social conventions which sanction property relationships. Much subsequent political philosophy has therefore been concerned with the problem of balancing ‘natural equality’ against the demands of society in the context of which, seemingly, individual self-realisation has to be sought. This in effect is the problem of justice.

Equality as a concept has the notion that each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive system of basic liberties, compatible with a similar system of liberty for all and secondly, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are attached to positions open to all, under conditions of equality of opportunity and are to the greatest benefit of the least privileged. And as a matter of fact, social injustice arises when the principle of equal opportunity is not observed, where there is discrimination between classes and groups with little or no social mobility, where the natural resources which nature provides for the benefit of all is placed in the lands of a few who exploit the labour of the rest or a great majority of the population who live on the level of paupers or almost so.

Equality is related to distributive justice in a way, since it advocates ‘fairness’ and that equals are to be treated equally and unequals unequally in the relevant respects. What criterion should be applied to ensure equal treatment? An arguably simplistic approach would be to say that in so far as all people are citizens in a particular society, then not only should they be subject to the same laws, but they should have equal income, the same housing, the same education and so on. This approach has the merit of apparently eliminating inequalities and although political inequalities between the ruler and the ruled still obtains, every citizen is in this respect unequal to the same extent. However, it can be objected that this criterion fails to take account of the fact that people who are physically or intellectually unequal from birth must have different needs. Fairness might then necessitate that people unequal in such respects be treated preferentially in compensation. The difficulty here is where the line should be drawn. People have different aspirations—some are more ambitious, or work harder than others, unless we subscribe to some kind of determinist doctrine, we should think of such people as selecting their priorities and choosing their courses of action rationally and freely. Should they not be treated on the basis of merit? Should they not be rewarded for hardwork and achievement?

Moreover, ‘need’ is also a relative term. Certainly, a disabled person is in ‘need’ and in a central sense of equality should be given preferential assistance. But most people who are fortunate not to suffer from mental or physical disability may well have their own special needs and how one decides whether one case is more deserving of unequal treatment than another. In the area of equality before the law, this is not doubt the most widely articulated of all the egalitarian ideals. This is why in all civilized societies, the judiciary is demanded to be absolutely independent from social or political incursions. Such a demand for independence is predicated on the expectation that the judiciary is the ultimate bastion that protects and guarantees treating equals equally and unequals unequally, especially on issues that relate to common man. Thus, we need to observe that the principles of equality or egalitarianism are a fundamental imperative of social justice. And Aristotle prescribes as mentioned above that equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally. As a corollary, differential treatment must be predicated or justified on the grounds of valid or relevant differences.

The Concept of Peace

Plato asserts that no man can live in isolation. Society therefore evolves as the means by which men can satisfy their mutual needs. A simple society makes use of the various skills exercised by differential individuals: some people are good at farming, others at building, weaving and so on. Plato thinks that ‘minimum state’ would consist of four or five men. Now, the best results are obtained when each man does his own job. This gives rise to a fundamental harmony and it may be that it is the cordial relationship between the various elements of the community that peace originates.

Basically, the word ‘Peace’ connotes a situation in which there is no war or fighting, and war on the other hand is the absence of peace. And as a matter of fact, the mere absence of war does not suggest absolute
peace in a country. War is only one form of violence that can immediately be perceived and its impact felt by man but there are other structural violence that disturb peace, this type of violence has to do with social conditions such as oppression, fear, anxiety everywhere, intimidation, crises in all ramifications, and so on. Thus, it will be erroneous to conclude or assert that a country experiencing crises but no war is peaceful.
Ibeanu (2007) concludes that:

\[ \text{‘Although war may not be going on in a country where there is pervasive poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, police brutality, intimidation of ordinary people by those in power, oppression of women or monopolisation of resources and power by some sections of the society, it will still be wrong to say that there is peace in such a country. Consequently, it is quite possible not to have peace when there is no war.’} \]

From the position of Ibeanu, one can see that peace is more than absence of physical conflict. It may be wrongly or correctly asserted that a country like Nigeria is peaceful with the incessant and sporadic occurrences of religious conflicts, oil bunkering, militant operations, political victimisation, as a result of ideological differences and even crisis in education sector.

Peace may be interpreted by people differently as perceived by them. For example, Shaebe (2008) asserts that a society fragmented and polarised by perpetual war and armed conflict may interpret peace as the absence of war. In the same vein, a political community that is driven by unjust structures and policies will equate peace with justice and freedom. Equally people suffering material deprivation and poverty will inevitably perceive peace in terms of equity, development and access to existential necessities of life. Thus, to narrow down the existence of peace as only the absence of war may be incorrect. Plato in explaining peace sees justice as the bedrock to peaceful coexistence, according to him, justice consists in the minding of each individual of his own business and getting on with the job he is most suited to. This must be the virtue that makes possible and preserves the existence of wisdom, courage and discipline. According to him, it is thus present in the perfect state when the rulers are governing wisely, and all the ‘artisans’ are doing their own jobs efficiently and energetically.

For peace to reign in any state, justice must be exhibited; its existence is presupposed in the individual who sees that to get on with his/her own work without interfering with others is just. Plato is of the opinion that justice is a necessary condition for peace, he believes that justice can be seen to be present when each part performs its own special function properly; and that resources are shared having in mind the philosophy of treating equals equally and unequals unequally. Sheaba (2008) asserts and of course correctly that peace should be seen as a dynamic, social, economic, political process that can be worked out on the basis of people’s culture and knowledge of their existential experience.

**Justice, Equality and Peace: The Necessary Tripod for National Development**

One of the cardinal philosophy of education in Nigeria is the development of ‘a just and egalitarian society’ (NPE, 2005). This philosophy becomes a vital instrument for the emergence of peace. A nation that treats equals equally and unequals unequally is undoubtedly walking on the path of peace. Equally important is that issue of ‘a just’ society as a necessary condition for peace. When issues are justly handled without any element of favouritism necessitated by the virtue of tribalism, nepotism or religious inclination, then peaceful coexistence world emerge and then development follows.

As a matter of fact, justice combined with equality will naturally lead to peace (J+E=P). As said by Isabelle (1995), ‘we do not have to look very far to see the foolishness and even dangerousness of thinking about peace as a mere cessation of the immediate hostilities. Lasting peace is always about the presence of justice and equality.'
When justice and equality brings peace, it is then we can talk of development on the real sense of the term. A nation clamoring for development should focus her attention on maintaining an equilibrium between justice and equality to enhance peace which in the end will bring development in all its ramifications.

Rodney (1972) sees development as the process of gradually becoming better and stronger. Development according to Akinpelu (2002) may be concerned as a process of changing the personality equipping it with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to conceive, design and carry out his/her self-development, using the tools and facilities at his/her disposal. The overall result of this will naturally lead to national development. But to realise this education becomes the only morally acceptable way and the only way that ensures durability and sustainability of the expected changes that bring about sustainable development. Thus, justice, equality and peace work in tandem using the machineries of education to bring development. It is when there is fair dispensation of justice, equal treatment of people according to their needs and traits that peaceful coexistence could be guaranteed and thus bring development in all ramifications, be it political, economical, social and technological.

CONCLUSION

In common day-to-day usage, justice implied that equal efforts or contributions are equally rewarded, while laziness or unproductivity is relatively deprived. Obviously, the society cannot be seen as just if it accords the same apportionment or reward to a lazy, unproductive worker, as it does to the active productive worker, since such would clearly be a travesty of social justice. In our multi-ethnic society, therefore, it is imperative in the interest for stability that we discontinue such irrelevant indices as tribal or ethnic connections in our apportionment of reward or punishment.

Merit must be seen by all as having been given its proper recognition. Questionable differential treatments tend to upset essential socio-political equilibrium and thereby creating an inflammatory situation. In this conclusion, one must not forget to assert once again. That for the purpose of national development, there must be a marriage of compatibility among the tripod of justice, equality and peace and the machinery for achieving this marriage is education. As Dewey in Akinpelu (2005) ascribe the heart of the sociality of man is in education. The freedom of man has in education and in more education.

Education makes it possible to traverse the dualism of the individual and the society to arrive at a continuum. Specifically, education is necessary for the sustenance of justice, equality and peace in any society. It helps to equip individuals with capability to embrace justice, to know the importance of equality and march towards enhancement of peaceful coexistence, especially in a tribalised society like Nigeria.
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