

GADAA SYSTEM: INDIGENOUS POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM OF OROMO PEOPLE IN ETHIOPIA

Gutama Namomsa Daraje⁰⁰⁰⁰⁻⁰⁰⁰²⁻⁸¹⁷⁹⁻⁹⁶²¹* Aye Kyi Phyu⁰⁰⁰⁰⁻⁰⁰⁰²⁻⁸¹⁷⁹⁻⁹⁶²¹

¹Lecturer at Department of Public Administration and Development Management, College of Business and Economics, Ambo University, Ethiopia, PhD student at Doctoral School of Public Administration Science, Nemzeti Közzolgálati Egyetem, Hungary

²Eötvös Loránd University, Doctoral School of English and American Studies, Budapest, Hungary
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Abstract

The primary goal is to critically analyze the Gadaa system, focusing on its roles in conflict resolution, environmental protection, and women's rights within the framework of Oromo governance. The study utilizes secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journals, books, and government strategies, to gather relevant information about the Gadaa system. The research reveals that the Gadaa system is a democratic political, social, and cultural system that has been practiced by the Oromo for centuries. It emphasizes principles and rules, such as the Seera Gumii, which are designed to protect scarce natural resources and manage their usage effectively. The Gadaa system is noted for its indigenous knowledge in adjudicating both civilian and criminal cases, showcasing its relevance in contemporary governance. The abstract highlights the Gadaa system's egalitarian features in decision-making, accountability, inclusivity, participation, and leadership development, contrasting it with Western democratic paradigms.

1 Introduction

The Gadaa system, an indigenous political and administrative framework of the Oromo people in Ethiopia, emphasizing its significance in promoting peace and democracy [13,6]. This research is intended to answer the following research questions; what are the democratic features of the Gadaa system? How does the Gadaa system resolve conflicts? What rules govern natural resource utilization? What is the status of women in the Gadaa system? These objectives and questions are grounded in the problem statement that highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the Gadaa system's relevance in contemporary governance and social structures, as well as the limited existing literature on the subject.

"Desk review" was the research methodology used for this work. The secondary sources included in this paper's critical analysis include books, published and peer-reviewed studies (Published till September 2024), existing literature, strategies, and policy documents. We have carefully selected top-tier journals from renowned sources such as Springer, Google Scholar, Elsevier, and other reputable publishers for this review. Among the different articles written on indigenous political administration, 13 articles were selected and reviewed in this study. The keywords used to search for these articles were: Gadaa System, Indigenous Political, Administration system, Oromo people in Ethiopia, Kenya, and East Africa.

* Crossponding author. Tel.: +36205198916

Email address: ermi45309@gmail.com, gutama.namomsa.ambou.edu.et, Daraje.GutamaNamomsa@uni-nke.hu

Key points include:

Cultural Context: The Gadaa system is rooted in the Oromo culture and has historically contributed to peace among communities in Africa, contrasting with Western democratic ideals that often overlook indigenous practices.

Historical Background: The introduction highlights the impact of colonialism on African democratic institutions, noting that while the Oromos were not colonized by Western powers, their governance structures were undermined by the Abyssinian Empire, which was supported by Western nations.

Democratic Features: The Gadaa system is presented as a form of participatory democracy, predating Western models. It incorporates principles such as term limits, checks and balances, and community participation, which are essential for good governance.

Role of Women: Although traditionally male-dominated, the Gadaa system includes women's roles through the Siqqee institution, allowing them to influence decision-making indirectly.

Contemporary Relevance: The paper notes a resurgence of interest in the Gadaa system as a viable governance model in modern Ethiopia, particularly in conflict resolution and cultural identity assertion. The recognition of the Gadaa system by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage underscores its importance.

Research Objectives: The introduction outlines the research's goals, which include examining the democratic features of the Gadaa system, its conflict resolution mechanisms, natural resource management rules, and the status of women within the system. The methodology involves a desk review of existing literature.

2 Community Integration Practices in the Gadaa system

Oromos people introduce Guddifachaa and Moggaasaa as adoption practices to the world for the first time. Guddifachaa is one of the social integrations of adopting Oromo or non-oromos persons from their childhood by a given family. Then this adopted child has full rights and freedom with other children of that family [3].

Moggaasaa is another type of adoption in which large group of people by an Oromo clan to be integrated as part of an Oromo society. Like that of Guddifachaa, these integrated people will have equal rights and privileges with the Oromo community family [3].

Moggaasaa and Guddichaa are the means of accepting the other clans (Oromos or non-oromos) and individuals as their society or son and giving assets what they have, in this case, the bottom line is the two-adoption mechanism is not assimilating the other clans, but it is sharing the culture and resource what they have based on the will of the adopted. Through this mechanism, the oromo were turning their foe into a partner in the war.

3. The rights of Women's treatment in the Gadaa system

According to the Oromo worldview, women have a very important role and position in the community. Women positioned high status and honor of waayu in waaqeefta religion. In the Gadaa system, there is the law of 'Muka Laaftu' (The law of softwood) that gives positive special privileges to women given that vulnerability and biological factors are attributed to reproductive issues [9].

Regarding the representation of the women in legislative assembly among Oromo Maccaa from a total of 45 seats 22 seats were given to women whereas in the Siikko Mandoo from 360 seats 180 were reserved for women [9]. Apart from this Haadhaa Urjii, (Mother of stars) Haadha siinqee, (Mother of sticks), and Haadha Nagaa (Mother of Peace) are Indigenous institutions and systems that were established to support socio-economic and political participation of women in the society [11]. Ateetee was also used as an institution in which women posed and exercised divine and normal reign over the male [4].

4. Oromos Democracy Visa-vies Western Nations Democracy

The Gadaa general assembly (Gumii Gayoo) takes place under a sycamore tree (Odaa) that is a symbolic representation of dialogue and consensus [12]. Unlike the Western nation's democratic

system, the Oromo's democracy (Gadaa system) has five permanent political parties, and their members come to power once every year [12]. Within forty years, these five parties lead the Oromo people under one Gadaa. The Oromo's concept of peace is much more complicated than that of the United Nations connotation of peace [12]. because it covers intrapersonal, interpersonal, within community and non-oromos society, with the environment and Waaqa (God). Truth should be a way of life to live in peace within the Oromo community or non-Oromos [2]. The Gadaa system values, norms, and beliefs are accepted by the members of the community and are strengthened via community participation and indigenous institutions [2].

5. Advantages and Limitations of the Gadaa System

5.1. Advantages of Gadaa System

Table 1. Advantages of the Gadaa system

Item	Interpretations
Democratic Governance	The Gadaa system is renowned for its democratic tenets, which include community elections for leaders. By using a participatory method, decisions are made with the interests of the community in mind, and leadership is held accountable to the people [8].
Dispute Resolution	The Oromo society has been able to sustain peace and harmony thanks to the system's well-established dispute-resolution procedures. To provide justice and mediate conflicts, elders are essential [1].
Cultural Preservation	The Oromo people's identity and cultural legacy are greatly enhanced by the Gadaa system. It incorporates cultural customs, rites, and rituals that strengthen ties within the group and ensure that traditions are carried on [5].
Social Integration	The Gadaa system's age-grade structure encourages cooperation and social integration among various generations. It fosters harmony and support among people by offering a precise structure for social duties and obligations [10].
Educational Value	The Gadaa system teaches young people about their cultural values, social duties, and leadership abilities through its planned stages. The dissemination of knowledge and social standards depends on this education [11].

Source: Compiled by the researchers

5.2. Disadvantages of Gadaa system

Table 2. Limitations of the Gadaa System

Item	Interpretations
Gender Inequality	Women are frequently excluded from political leadership and decision-making positions because of traditional Gadaa practices. Women's participation and representation in the governing process are restricted by this gender exclusion [11].
Challenges with Adaptability	Gadaa's historic structure may make it difficult for it to evolve with the political and social climate of today. The incorporation of modern governance techniques and innovations may be impeded by the inflexibility of its institutions [1].

Item	Interpretations
Resource Restrictions	The system mostly depends on volunteerism and community resources. Maintaining the Gadaa system's ceremonies and operations might be challenging during hard times financially or in terms of scarce resources [10].
Political Interference	In modern environments, external political influences may interfere with the Gadaa system, undermining its independence and efficacy. Traditional practices can be impacted and disrupted by political dynamics and government actions [7].

Source: Compiled by the researchers

6. Results and Discussion

The Gadaa system is a democratic framework for the Oromo people, allowing them to elect leaders every eight years and hold them accountable, promoting community involvement in governance. It provides a trusted method for resolving conflicts, with many rural communities preferring it over modern courts due to its effectiveness. The system emphasizes sustainable environmental practices, guiding responsible resource use to maintain ecological balance and prevent conflicts. It plays a key role in preserving Oromo cultural identity and recognizes women's contributions, promoting gender equity within the community. Despite facing modern challenges, there is a push to integrate Gadaa principles into Ethiopia's governance to enhance democracy and address marginalization.

7. Conclusion

The Gadaa System is a traditional way of governance and culture for the Oromo people in the Horn of Africa, recognized by UNESCO as an important heritage. Leaders are elected for eight years, and members have roles in various areas like military and law from a young age, promoting self-rule and community involvement. The system includes rules for using natural resources responsibly, helping to prevent conflicts over water and grazing land, especially for farmers. Gadaa also provides a way to resolve legal issues, with many people in rural areas preferring this traditional method over modern courts. Women hold a respected position in the Gadaa System, but its full practice has been challenged by different Ethiopian governments over time.

8. Recommendations

The Gadaa system should be recognized as a democratic part of Ethiopia's political framework, promoting peaceful coexistence among the Oromo people and serving as their social contract. Education about the Gadaa system should extend to universities, with elders and intellectuals responsible for teaching its values to younger generations. Both regional and federal governments need to support conflict resolution related to natural resources and empower indigenous institutions like Gumii Gayyoo to address ongoing conflicts effectively.

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