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Gadaa: An Indigenous Democracy of Oromo people on Promoting Gender Equality, Guji Oromo in focus, Oromiya

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals the role Gadaa system in balancing the power of women and men. The aim of this paper is to show the role of women in Gadaa system including the role in ritual, power transfer and other social-cultural activities of Guji people. The study employed qualitative research approach with exploratory research design, because of the nature of the identified research problem. Purposive sampling was employed and the relevant respondents from the target group were selected carefully by the researcher and document was reviewed to get reliable and rich data. The paper come up with the idea that, even though the role of women in the Gadaa political power has been created controversies among scholars Gadaa system strongly allowed the women to participate in the social, cultural, economic and political issue. This paper argued that Gadaa system is unprecedented indigenous democracy in which the rights of women and female are respected. Gadaa system has great role in protecting the right of women, enforced a gender-based division of labor in Oromo society. Under this system husband and wife are obliged to use their properties equally. The instrument and institution through which women's rights are duly respected is known as Siinqee - which is a procedure in which women organize themselves in group to stand up for their rights

1. Introduction

The *Gadaa* system has been an egalitarian socio-political, economic and religious system. Essentially, the system has been the constitution of the Oromo society through which the people administered themselves, defended their territory, maintained and developed their economy (Dereje, 2012). The *Gadaa* system as an invaluable and ancient civilization and indigenous knowledge belong to the indigenous Oromo people which had been registered by UNESCO as one of the world's cultural heritages. Among the Oromo, the Borana and the Guji have relatively retained most of the traditional and original ways of life in accordance with the *Gadaa* system (Asmarom, 1973; Van de Loo, 1991, Gololcha, 2006).

Furthermore, *Gadaa* is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political, and ritual responsibilities. Each *Gadaa* class remains in power during a specific term of eight years, which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony called *Butta*. In this regard, the society is organized into two distinct but cross-cutting systems of peer group structures. One is a system in which the members of each class are recruited strictly on the basis of chronological age. The other is a system in which the members are recruited equally strictly on the basis genealogical generations. The first has nothing to do with genealogical ties. The second has little to do. Both types of social groups are formed every eight years. Both sets of groups pass from one stage of development to the next every eight years (Asafa, 2012; Dejene, 2017).

History has shown that Westminster or American democratic models are **not divine** edicts but very few of the many possible successful models. Mclean (1986) wrote that “democracy disappeared with Greek and Roman civilization, when it appeared, it was in representative form”. But had something being well conceived about representative democracy in the medieval age Africa, 17th to 19th centuries, which still parallels that of the modern era, more could have been said to the *Gadaa* democracy then often realized. According to Jemjem (2011), “*Gadaa* democracy organized the Oromo people in all-encompassing democratic republic even before the few European pilgrims arrived from England on the shores of North America and only late built a democracy”. According to history, the foundation of democracy in United States of America was (1789 GC), Swiss Constitution (Basic Laws) dated back to 1489 (Revised 1874 GC) , West Germany to 1948 GC. Jemejem (2011) wrote “In many European countries after 1918, the system had no roots, and the people have little experience of such a system”. Among the earlier democratic systems of administration found the *Gadaa* multi-*luba* politics vis-à-vis the Western multi-party. However indeed, democracy has been conceived within the Oromo indigenous institutions where people have centuries-old experience of working together within a sophisticated form of government far before the Westerns started exercising multi-party politics.

Therefore, it can be summarized that, as far as democracy is concerned, *Gadaa* System is unprecedented and unparalleled multi-party politics that has been practiced by the Oromo nation for centuries. Among other Oromo nations, Guji

alone has been ruled by 74 *Abbaa Gadaas* from 5 *luba* (rotative governance system by five parties). Including the years of delays in *baallii* transfer, especially due to the previous negative influences of central politics of the country, it has been 660 years since Guji alone started ruling under the *Gadaa* System as people of separate territory. This refers us back to 1355 (GC) (mid of 14th century (Jemejem, 2011).

2. Research material and Method

In this paper, the authors used both primary and secondary data sources. Purposive sampling was employed and the relevant respondents from the target group were selected carefully, by the researcher. Interview was made with the key informants who have knowledge about the title and who were selected purposively. At the end the researchers cross-checked the findings from oral sources with other sources secondary sources.

3. Result and Discussion

Are women excluded from *Gadaa* system?

The role of women in the *Gadaa* political power has created controversies among scholars. Some argue that women were completely excluded from the *Gadaa* system while others strongly indicate that the women held a significant position particularly by referring to their institutions of *Ateetee* and *Siinqee* also spelt as *Siqqee/siiqqoo*. For instance, Qabbanee indicated that the influence and positions of women in a democracy is a matter of the structure of the society but not a matter of physiology (Qabbanee 1991). Consequently, (Kuwee 1991) did not deny the interlocking units between woman and man who comprise the entire society that attempt to understand the one without the other or female without male is incomplete and distorted. One area of controversy was the omission of women from holding political power being an *abbaa bokkuu* or *Abbaa Gadaa*. The other point of exclusion was from attaining all *Gadaa* grades and age sets like males. It is often said that women do not participate in proclaiming *Gadaa* laws nor in deciding cases. They are also not allowed to attend the *Gumii* (*Gadaa* Assembly). But regardless of such claims, some credible sources indicate that some women among the Booranaa had attained some *Gadaa* generations and age sets. Moreover, women can discuss important issues with their husbands and the husbands consult with their wives to contribute their opinions. That way Booranaa woman has indirect participation in decision making. Although women were not encouraged to compete for political power among the Booranaa, there were instances that women kept, the *Bokkuu* (scepter) the symbol of power. This usually happened when the husband dies before completing his term of office. According to De Salviac whenever a chairman (the *Abbaa Gadaa*) of an Oromo assembly dies while exercising his functions, the *bokkuu* passes to his wife and she keeps the *bokkuu* and proclaims the laws. The chairman is inviolable in his person; so long as he is in office, national or family vengeance cannot touch him (M. De Salviac, 2008). However, this does not indicate women did participate for

candidacy of Abba *Bokkuu* like men. But they have a special role and respect in the *Gadaa* system which governed the entire society that safeguarded the values cherished by men and women, though they rarely participated in the decision making process. It is, however, significant to underscore that Oromo women are determined to defend and reinstate the values represented in the *Gadaa* equally with men (Ginbar, 2010).

In spite of the wide-ranging male dominance in the *Gadaa* system, women still hold an important position in the Oromo, in general, and in the Guji *Gadaa* system, in particular. Overall, women have active roles in ritual practice of the Guji society. However, ritual is not an exclusively masculine domain: there are several rituals performed for women. In these and a few other instances women do take an important part. Similar to the other Oromo branch, however, men control the political spheres of their society. Legesse (1973) describes men and women's participation in political activities among Oromo as follows: men take part in the elections of leaders of camps or of age-sets and *Gadaa* classes. While men control the military and political spheres both among the Guji women play a significant role by contributing to peace process in their societies. According to Asafa jalata it is an egalitarian social system, women were excluded from passing through age-sets and generation-sets in *Gadaa* system. However *Gadaa* effectively enforced a gender-based division of labor in Oromo society, although it allowed two equally important separate and interdependent economic domains. The *Gadaa* broadly encompasses the social, political, economic institutions of the Guji and other Oromo branches. He correctly describes the term *Gadaa* as a concept that stands for the whole way of life of the Oromo. Before the invention of the *Gadaa* institution, according to the Guji tradition, five kings and five queens ruled their people. The transition to the *Gadaa* system took place due to bad governance and widespread lawlessness under the queens and kings.

Queens and kings' administrations were not effective to maintain peace and stability, and arbitrary measures became the rule rather than exceptions. They did not have *jaldhaba* and *wamura*, the two important structures for law enforcement under the *Gadaa* system. In addition, there was population growth and territorial expansion, but kings and queens did not have effective control over the people in their enlarged territory. As the territories under the Guji increased, it became necessary to delegate power to the clans and to introduce the *Gadaa* administration. In the *Gadaa* system, unmarried men are not allowed to become full members of the *Gadaa jilaa*, the sacred journey during the power transfer; the *Gadaa* grade of *kuusa* is constituted by unmarried young men and considered the most disrespected grade. Men attain their full status only after marriage. Even though women do not belong to the *Gadaa* grades, they achieve those statuses through Gender and Culture in Southern Ethiopia through their husbands. For example, both men and, consequently, their wives in the same *Gadaa* grade have similar burial ceremonies, according to the status of that particular grade. Under the Guji *Gadaa* system, the status of individuals during their lifetime is reflected through burial ceremonies and the burial ground assigned to the dead. Burials may take place from inside a

home to some distance from the home, depending on the individual's status. When young children and people who are very old die, they are buried inside their homes to indicate their low status; the distance of the burial ground from the home increases with increasing status Hinnant (1984). This practice enables Guji women to achieve some statuses in their society through their husbands which they cannot attain as women.

Women in peace building and ending hostilities

Women's have a stake in maintaining peace with their neighbors and participate in conflict resolutions. The most relevant role to the Guji women in conflict resolution is their involvement as a link between the opponents. The role of women in the peacemaking process is enormous, especially in the conflicts that arise between the Borana and the Guji. Following major conflicts between them, the two groups have a cultural practice of sending peace messengers to the adversary group. The party first interested in peace sends a *lichoo*, a female peace envoy, to the *hayyuu*, judge, of the opponent group. While traveling in the territory of the enemy, the custom confers respect to a *lichoo* and protects her from any harm. Even if the adversary is on a war campaign, the group returns back at the sight of a *lichoo*. Sometimes men also are sent as *lichoo* for minor conflicts, but women are normally considered appropriate for serious conflicts. In general, the *lichoo* prepares grounds for major peace talk between two adversary groups, including fixing the venue for the meeting and reporting the process to their respective *hayyus*. The decisions of the assembly are reported by the *hayyuu* to the *abbaa Gadaa*, *Gadaa* leaders, of the respective groups (Dejene, 2009).

In addition to their participation in the peace process, women also take part in various rituals. Rituals are important elements for the transformation or integration of individuals into groups and reaffirmation of social arrangements. In this sense Guji women are effectively integrated into their society by fully participating in *Gadaa* rituals (Ibid). In each steps of *Gadaa* grade and ritual performance, there are labour divisions that females share.

4. The role of women in Gadaa power transition

They play significant role in supporting their husbands on *Gadaa* power by mobilizing families of *torbii* (the seventh/Guji groups) in *Gadaa* system. Wives of each *torbii* are responsible to *Hadha Bollaa* (title for wife of *Abba Gadaa*). Guji women participate in *Gadaa* system through their husbands' *baallii*. At *Ardaa-Jilaa* women play mainly facilitation role walking in front of the *Abba Gadaa*.

Female would have *Guutuu* on her head when her husband became successful to *Gadaa* power (become *Abbaa Gadaa*), her title will be *Haadha Bollaa*. While her husband has *Ulfaataa*/phallic on his fore head, her *Guutuu* upgraded to *Guutimaala*. Only *Abbaa Gadaa*'s wife entitled to put *Guutimaala* on her head in Guji Oromo culture (Muliugeta, 2017).

During the *Gadaa* power transfer, it is the women with the *Siiqqee* that blesses and decorates the ceremonies for the person who gives and takes over the *Gadaa* offices. The newly elected officials walk under the *Siiqqee* sticks raised up by women standing in two rows and touching the other tips of their *Siiqqee*

together. Thus, both Gadaa and Siinqee institutions helped to maintain Safuu (Oromo moral codes) of Oromo society. It functions hand in hand with Gadaa institution and it has given big opportunity for Oromo women to articulate their views and address issues of concerning to women (Raggatu, 2012)



Fig. #. Gujii Oromo men and women marching to 74th Gumii Bokkoo (a ritual place where the Gujii people exercise their cultural events and hand over Gadaa System) (a photo taken from Endalkachew, 2018)

Gadaa in respecting women's rights

The *Gadaa* system is a system in which the rights of women are respected. The instrument through which women's rights are duly respected is known as *Siinqee* - which is a procedure in which women organize themselves in group to stand up for their rights. In this procedure, women carry a thin stick known as *Siinqee* which is given to every girl by her mother on her wedding day. With this gift, the bride is reminded of her power to demand her rights are respected in her future life. Whenever a woman's right is violated, be it by her own husband or by another person, the women around make a sound (*illillii*) to signify to each other. Upon hearing the sound, women respond by moving to the place leaving everything behind, carrying their *Siinqee* stick. At this time, it is the obligation of the husbands to look after the homes which women have left behind. This shows the strong determination for the respecting of the rights of women. Then, the women go to the *Gadaa* Council singing a song in which they announce out the specific act in which their right is violated and reported the matter. Afterwards, the person who is accused of the wrong doing is brought to justice and the appropriate punishment would be sanctioned against the convicted. A man who happens to come across to the women while they are marching towards the Council, has the obligation to step off his horse so as to show his respect for the women. After greeting them, he would have to ask for their permission to pass them and resume his journey. If the person crosses their way without giving them regards, he would be accused of acting contrary

to the tradition and punished accordingly. Likewise, a man who meets on his way a woman who is travelling carrying her stick, is required to greet her properly before passing her. The due respect of women's rights in the *Gadaa* system has enabled women to play considerable role among their communities. Therefore, the role of women in *Gadaa* system is based on *Siiqqee* institution where women formed a parallel organization of their own excluding men, and this *Siiqqee* stands for women's ritual, political and social power in the society (Kumsa, 1991; Mamo, 2017). Thus, the two institutions (*Gadaa* and *Siiqqee*) helped to maintain *Safuu* (moral and ethical order) in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, preserve social status and respect for women, and promotes sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights.

5. Quttoo in protecting the right of female under Gadaa

According to Dagim et al (2018) and informants from Guji the same with protecting the right of women *Gadaa* system has great role in protecting the right of female. The right of female is attached with *quttoo* tradition. *Quttoo* is one of cultural elements practiced in the Guji society. It is a material that is bound or tied on the hair of the Guji girls before the marriage. The Guji girls hold *quttoo* when they reach adolescence stage. This material is made up from different small substances such as tiny, tendons (thin skin), threads, beads, wires and other kinds of decorative materials. Besides, *quttoo* belongs to the Guji girls to show their identity, honor and virginity. This material has wide definition in the Guji community. Some peoples define it as a holly material to show the virginity of the girls. But, others, having this, define it as the material element to imply the identity of the Guji girls and their dignity throughout the community. Some parts of the society regard the *quttoo* as a power and right of the girls in the society of Guji. However, all the community agreed up on the significance of *quttoo* to substitute the identity, dignity and virginity of the Guji girls.

In the community, the girls begin to hold *quttoo* after they developed the breast, locally known as *abuyyaa* meaning the small breast. According to the Guji culture, once the girls begin to hold or bind *quttoo*, no one touch either her clothes or body without her permission. Thus, the Guji people say "*intalti quttoo farda kooraati; hin qaban ,yoo qaban qabaa qabdi* " to mean a girl with *quttoo* is equivalent to the horse with saddle; no one can touch her and one who may touch her will be followed by legal accusations.

Implementation of the customary laws and punishment: According to the Guji customary laws, a person who may touch the girls with *quttoo* is punished by the law. The punishment is a heifer of cattle. A person cannot deny her accusation. Even, there is no need of evidence to examine such a crime in the Guji culture. According to the Guji customary law, if a person refused the punishment, he is enforced to be punished seven hands. This means, a person is punished seven cattle as to his refusal. The men who are authorized to make

decision on such issues are called *Hayyuu* (executive body of *Gadaa* administration) (Dagim et al, 2018)

According to the Guji customary law, the girl should have not leave a place where she is touched by a person and shout for help. This is to show violation of her right and demanding justice. Thus, the mandate of making decision or deciding the required punishment is in the hand of *hayyuus*. The punishment is, customarily, one cow(heifer).But if a person refused to obey the *hayyuu's* decision the *hayyuus* send group of *Jaldhaabaa* (police men of the *Gadaa* administration)to the refused person. The *Jaldhaabaa* can flog or trounce the person and take seven cattle from the accused person. One of the seven cattle is slaughtered for the *Jaldhaabaa*; one is given for the girl and the rest five cattle are possessed by the *hayyuus*. All of these are allowed in the customary laws of the Guji Oromo people. The Guji girls use *quttoo* as their right and identity before they hold *Siiqoo /siiqqee* (thin stick) during their day of marriage. In other words, *quttoo* serves as the right, identity, and dignity of the girls before marriage whereas *siiqqoo* (legal stick of women) serves as the right, dignity, and identity of girls (women) after marriage. The right of the Guji girls (unmarried girls) is respected in accordance with *quttoo* while the rights of Guji women (married girls) are respected in accordance with *siiqqoo* in the Guji communities (Dejene, 2009; Dagim *et al*, 2018)

In the Guji society, the *quttoo* girl is respectable. She is regarded as *woyyuu* (honorable) person. It is only allowed to touch her body during greeting and playing. Unless, touching the body of the Guji girls is considered as a negative action done for unnecessary purposes. In addition, either insulting or frightening the Guji girls is also prohibited by the society.

6. Women right to Inherit property through Quttoo tradition

In the Guji community, *quttoo* has also many economical contributions. According to the Guji culture, a girl does not have the right to inherit the properties of her family. For instance, when the girl is born, she is not given land. The land is allowed for the boys only. However, the father may give her the cow called *geegewoo* (accompanier cow) during her marriage. In addition, her father may send other cattle called *dabaree* (assistant cattle) for specific time. But, both *geegewoo* and *dabaree* cattle are not mandatory of the girls' father to give them; it depend on the interest of the father of the girls. Then, the *dabaree* cattle turn back for the family of the girls after the two spouses possessed their own properties. This is discussed by Dejene (2009) as "...the marriage gifts such as *siiqqoo*, *quttoo* and other indirect forms of inheritance from their parents' property such as *geegewoo*, and *jibbaataa* are a few of mechanism through which the women in the Guji may acquire personal/private property...". However, the land or estate of the Guji girls is given them after the marriage. This estate is mostly a cow that is given her in the place of her *quttoo*. For the boy's family, it is must to give this cow before releasing (removing) *quttoo* from the heir of the bride. The bride also has a right to refuse to remove the *quttoo* until she is given a cow. This is also supported by the customary law of the Guji community. Accordingly, if she refused and goes

with *quttoo*, she is considered as a virgin girl. But, this causes the great shame to the boy and his families. In addition, if she informed what happened to her for the *fira* (clan of the boy), it is very frightening because *fira* is a powerful groups of families who control over all activities performed with in the *worraa* (sub-clan). Thus, the *fira* can enforce the family members to give the heifer for the bride. But, if the families of the boy have no cattle, the *firaa* or *gosaa* give their own cattle for girl (bride). It is after this time that she removes *quttoo* from her hair. The *quttoo* girl has the right to possess three cows in accordance with the Guji culture during marriage. These cattle (cows) are known as *quttoo* (a cow given in place of *quttoo*), *Siiqqoo* (a heifer given as a result of holding *siiqqoo*), and *okolee-gaadii* (a cow with calf or milking cow). Additionally, the boy's family may give other properties too. But, these three cows are the most popular in the society. Therefore, the traditionalist girl (girl with *quttoo*) has such rights of property, in the customary law of the Guji Oromo people (Dagim, *etal*, 2008)

According to the Guji culture, these three cows could not be taken from the bride. These cattle are regarded as equal property for the two spouses. Her husband cannot use these property alone he cannot make as required without making due discussion with the bride (the girl). If he used without the consent of his wife, *firaa* or *gosaa* party involves in the issue and punish the husband. The punishment may be flogging the man with small and thin sticks until he promise not to repeat this unlawful action.

Generally, in the Guji culture, though the Guji girls have not the right to inherit the property of their families, *quttoo* tradition enables them to inherit the original property from the families of the boy. Therefore, in the Guji customary law, *quttoo* is considered as the right of property.

7. Political Contributions of Quttoo for female

Quttoo tradition also plays pivotal roles in the political aspects of the Guji community beyond Socio cultural and economic importance. According to the Guji culture, there are five *hayyuus* (parties) who authorized to make the laws. These law makers always go with *Abbaa Gadaa* everywhere. Most of the time, *Abbaa Gadaa* is consulted by them. They are well experienced and knowledgeable about the Guji culture. The *quttoo* tradition is also one of the cultural elements of the Guji that is enacted by these *hayyuus* and other knowledgeable Gada officials. They identified *quttoo* for the whole girls of Guji people. They decided the girls to wear *quttoo* at the time of adolescence. Therefore, the girls are obliged to hold *quttoo* during the time of adolescence. This material helps them to identify themselves from other social class i.e. married women and enables them to be honorable in the society. These Gadaa officials had made the *quttoo* law and principle which is much feared in the society. According to the Guji customary law, one who touch or rape the *quttoo* girls forcefully is decided to pay (punished) one heifer (Dagim et al, 2018).

Dejene (2009) also suggested that "transgression against such laws is punishable and exclusion from the social relationships..." The organ whom has

the mandate to investigate and proceed justice is given to *hayyuus* (traditional executive bodies) that are elected in the community. Accordingly, the principles of *quttoo* become a pillar for the statutory law towards the rights of women. The principle, supports Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian constitution stipulated in Article 35 which refers about women's rights. However, this indigenous is not comparable with it. Gender equality in the society is dictated by the *firaa* or *gosaa* parties who have the power to control all clans. These officials look after the women not to be alienated and harassed by their husbands and to have equality on their common properties obtained with the honor of *quttoo*. They also control over all the activities performed with in their clans. Therefore, *quttoo* tradition plays the great roles both before and after marriage in the Guji society. Even its significance proceeds throughout the entire life of women. Beside to this, divorcing the *quttoo* girl is immoral in the Guji society. If the husband divorced the wife married with *quttoo*, she has the right to refuse this marriage dissolution. During this time, *quttoo* assumed as her right evidence before the *gosaa* party.

Thus, there is no doubt that this *quttoo* tradition has great roles in avoiding violence happens to the women. The Guji community has an array of customary laws under the Gadaa system. One of the law within this system is the *Quttoo law*” which underlines the rights of the girls. The system has already endorsed women and girls with a legitimate rights protected by the laws and recognized by entire community members. Therefore, any immoral acts (violence, discrimination) against women & girls by individual or group, which some outsiders (like Western) and gender practitioners consider cultural elements, are neither culture nor accepted by cultural people.

8. The inclusiveness of women in economic sector under Gadaa system

In *Gadaa* system, family asset is controlled by women. Elders states that among oromo people men have the responsibility of cultivating and harvesting as well as keeping the cattle; and, it is the responsibility of women to manage what is harvested and to allocate the proportion to be used for household consumption, to be sold in the market to earn cash, to purchase other goods and services needed by the family. Any man who may challenge this mandate of women is despised by his community and he is labeled a name *qorqora* (greedy).

Gadaa effectively enforced a gender-based division of labor in Oromo society, although it allowed two equally important separate and interdependent economic domains. Explaining how the *Gadaa* system brought these two domains together by establishing mechanisms of balancing, regulating, and safeguarding these domains. Men have controlled the mobile resources -- those that required going out from the homestead – herding, defense of livestock and land, tilling new fields, plowing, etc. Women have controlled the stationary resources – the house, the grain and other products of the fields once they are brought. Even the cattle around the house are under their control; women milk them, decide how much milk goes to the calves, how much to the people in the

household for drinking, how much for butter or cheese to eat or sell, how much to guests who bring valuable information, become friends in time of need.

9. Gadaa in protecting gender equality on property

On the other hand, regarding equality of property, both the husband and wife are obliged to use their properties equally according to *Gadaa* system. Gender equality in the society is dictated by the *firaa* or *gosaa* party, who has the power to control all clans. These officials look after the women not to be alienated and harassed by their husbands and to have equality on their common properties obtained with the honor of *quttoo*. They also control over all the activities performed with in their clans. The study of Fafchaps and Quismbing (2002) show that...the assets held in the sole ownership by the wife during marriage do not raise her bargaining power since it is likely to be shared equally between spouses upon no-fault divorce.

The elders from Guji and (Dagim *etal*, 2018) stated that *quttoo* girl has the right to possess three cows in accordance with the Guji culture during marriage. These cattle (cows) are known as *quttoo* (a cow given in place of *quttoo*), *Siiqqoo* (a heifer given as a result of holding *siiqqoo*), and *okolee-gaadii* (a cow with calf or milking cow). Additionally, the boy's family may give other properties too. But, these three cows are the most popular in the society. Therefore, the (girl with *quttoo*) has such rights of property, in the customary law of the Guji Oromo people. According to the Guji culture, these three cows could not be taken from the bride. These cattle are regarded as equal property for the two spouses. Her husband cannot use these property alone he cannot make as required without making due discussion with the bride (the girl). If he used without the consent of his wife, *firaa* or *gosaa* party involves in the issue and punish the husband. The punishment may be flogging the man with small and thin sticks until he promise not to repeat this unlawful action.

Generally, in the Guji culture, though the Guji girls have not the right to inherit the property of their families, but *quttoo* tradition enables them to inherit the original property from the families of the boy. Therefore, in the Guji customary law, *quttoo* is considered as the right of property. According to the Guji culture, there are five *hayyuus* (parties) who authorized to make the laws. These law makers always go with *Abbaa Gadaa* everywhere. Most of the time, *Abbaa Gadaa* is consulted by them. These *Gadaa* officials had made the *quttoo* law and principle which is much feared in the society Dejene (2009).

10. The role of women to pray ‘Waaqaa’

The other social role of women is making prayers to Waaqaa on behalf of the whole nation. Moreover, where people gather for prayers, it is the women among the community who go in the front only seconded by little children. In particular, when there is a problem facing the community such as drought, epidemic outbreak, etc., they go to a river or lake in the nearby carrying green grasses to perform the ritual of prayers so that *Waaqaa* intervene and solve their problem. This role of women is due to the belief that women have the

power to mediate between *Waaqaa* and the whole community. People respect and revere a woman because *Waaqaa* made her to be respected and revered. So, interference in a woman's sacred authority is regarded as violating *Seera Waaqaa* and they are waayyuu.

Women in general are symbolically and politically luminary and correspondingly enjoy a special sacred power as a class (Daniel, 2002). The religious superiority of women compared to men where explained by their closeness to God. Women are closer to God because she is more humble and weak; soft, she is innocent and she does not fight. “Their spirit is with God”(Hafuura *Waaqa wajjiin qaban*). These are qualities which contribute to the fact that God listens more to women than to men and was among others articulated in the following belief: “What a woman blesses will be blessed, what she curses will be cursed .”

Some of the key Global and Regional Convention to Gender Equality (UNDP, 2014)

There are series of global and regional policy frameworks and practices on gender equality and women empowerment. The most common one are described below.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides a comprehensive framework to guide all rights-based action for gender equality. Under this treaty, gender inequality is understood to be the result of discrimination against women.

The Beijing Platform for Action: The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action is “an agenda for women” empowerment” signed by all governments that is seen as a “necessary and fundamental pre-requisite for equality, development and peace.”

The Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals by 2030

The MDGs, in effect, consolidated previous agreements, including those on women’s rights, women’s empowerment and gender equality, into a single set of core goals, targets and benchmarks for the development community. The Millennium Declaration from which they were drawn took a clear position that gender equality is both a right in itself and a driver of development. The development community is in the process of reviewing lessons learned and progress toward the achievement of the MDGs with a view to accelerating progress before the 2015 MDG deadline and elaborating on a post 2015 development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Galma, 2012).

UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the first international human rights instrument to exclusively and explicitly address violence against women, affirms that the phenomenon violates, impairs or nullifies women’s human rights and their exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Women, Peace and Security Framework and Commitments: The UN's guiding documents for women, peace and security are Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1889 (2009) on women, peace and security and 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013) on sexual violence in armed conflict. These resolutions have laid the foundation for the efforts of the UN community to expand the role of women in leadership positions in every aspect of prevention and resolution of conflicts, including peacekeeping and peace building efforts, and to improve protection of women and girls within a framework of rule of law and respect for human rights.

UN Framework Convention for Climate Change: The Cancun Agreements emerging out of the UN Framework for Climate Change COP-16 in 2010 were the first global climate change policy to include multiple references to gender equality.

Conceptual and operational Gaps in modern Gender policies and practices: The feminists and gender advocates propagate an understanding and conception that generalize, without any differentiation, all non-Western indigenous communities and traditional cultures at everywhere in the world subordinate, discriminate and violate human rights of women.

If one compares the indigenous and modern gender aspects, he/she could conclude that the indigenous one had practiced women rights far before the modern one. For one thing, customary rights and law of women under the *Gadaa* system is much older than the modern one. On the other hand, the *Gadaa* system provide such rights and laws of women right from its origin, while however the UDHR (1948) itself is highly criticized in that it laid out the idea of the universality of rights, but failed to take into account women's needs and interests as women (Galma, 2020).

11. Conclusion

Gadaa is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political, and ritual responsibilities. Each *Gadaa* class remains in power during a specific term of eight years, which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony called *Buttaa*. It is a system in which the members are recruited equally strictly on the basis genealogical generations. The role of women in the *Gadaa* political power has created controversies among scholars. Some argue that women were completely excluded from the *Gadaa* system while others strongly indicate that the women held a significant position particularly by referring to their institutions of *Ateetee* and *Siinqee* also spelt as *Siqqee*. Therefore, this research concludes that like men, women strongly participated in different affairs of the society through *Gadaa* system. Under the system woman play a great role in economic sector, ending hostility, in power transfer and in praying to *waaqaa* to intervene in the problem of their people. Therefore, *Gadaa* system is an indigenous and unprecedented democracy of Oromo people in promoting gender equality.

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Conflict of interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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