



Research Article

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The Role of the Basic Principles of Oromo Gada in Promoting Good Governance:

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Abstract: Exploring ethical principles of an indigenous people is a crucial issue in promoting good governance. Gada principles are among the indigenous knowledge that the Oromo people produced, accumulated and employed to solve and secure their social and political problems before the establishment of the basic principles (of modern constitution) of the modern government. This paper therefore focused on the Analysis of the Role of the Basic Principles of Oromo Gada in Promoting Good Governance. Some literatures have modern government describe that good governance is the new concept for the Oromo, saying that they are developed by the modern government systems. To explore and identify the above gaps, descriptive type of qualitative research methodology and methods were employed. To this effect, secondary sources were the basic tools and the data were collected through critical text analysis, then carefully analyzed and interpreted. The result of the data manifested that good governance is not the new concepts for the Oromo; that was to say, the Oromo Gada institution is one of the sources of the basic principles of good governance among the people. The research data uncovered that there are fundamental Gada institutional principles in the philosophy of the Oromo that are playing great role in promoting good governance. Among the basic prominent Gada principles: supremacy of law, accountability and responsibility, due process of law, rule of law and fixed office terms are the fundamental once. Briefly, the research data have shown that the Oromo Gada principles have their own indigenous, ingenious and endogenous principles that are maintaining and promoting good governance so as to solve social, economic and political issues of the people. It is a nutshell that exploring, analyzing and interpreting the basic Gada principles of the Oromo helped to promote and create good governance in exercising economic, political and economic rights among the people. So that it is recommendable that employing the important Gada principles of the people is very important in promoting good governance in our country in general and among the Oromo in particular.

Keywords: *Gada, Gada Principles, Good Governance.*

1. Intriduction

The Oromo is the single largest ethnic group in the horn of Africa; occupy a land that extends from North-eastern Ethiopia to east central Kenya and from the South Sudan and the Sudan in the west and Somalia in the east (Haberland, 1970). The Oromo, an African

indigenous people started to live in Ethiopia with their indigenous Gada government organs since the 4th century B.C. (Feyisa, 1998). Regarding the population, the Oromo refers to an ethnic group in east Africa counting about 40 million people live in

Ethiopia, while about four million live in Kenya. In sum, the number of Oromo is estimated at about 45 million live in Africa, that is to say the Oromo constitutes more than half of the population of Ethiopia.

According to Dirribi (2011) after the proliferation of the Oromo people, different Oromo moieties were established their own socio-cultural centres for convocation and congregation under different regional Oda centres. All Odas and Gada centres have similar fundamental principles and specific provisions that are playing great roles in solving social, political, economic and normative issues of the Oromo. Exploring the indigenous knowledge of a society is therefore a crucial issue for the pragmatic development of that society; because it is the knowledge that the society produces and accumulates over generations and in most cases shapes the trajectory of good governance.

The question of good governance has been a pivotal and sensitive issue in the current political system of Ethiopia. Given the nature of the EFDRE constitution (1995), where good governance is the source for economic, social and political development in the country, it is imperative to conduct research on the role of the basic principles of Oromo Gada institution.

The concept of governance is concerned directly with the management of the development process, involving both the public and the private sectors. It encompasses the functioning and capability of the public sector, as well as the rules and institutions that create the framework for the conduct of both public and private business, including accountability for economic and financial performance, and regulatory frameworks relating to companies, corporations, and partnerships (WB, 2011)

Governance is defined as the way in which policy makers are empowered to make decisions, the way in which policy decisions are formulated and implemented and the

extent to which governmental intervention is allowed to encroach into the rights of citizens (Neumayer, 2003).

This is more explained that good governance is based on the pedestal of a knowledge society engineered through human resource development. The private and public sector, civil and political, individual and institutional agents of the proposed social change will also have to be groomed for their future roles and responsibilities by a systemic process of moral transformation and ethical evolution to focus on the collective national and human interests (Khawaja, 2011)

That is to say, it focuses on the participation beneficiaries and effected groups, public sector/private sector interface decentralization of public service delivery functions cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, access to information and quality of service delivery are among others.

2. Oromo Gada Government System

Gada institution is the best-known example of organized forms of social life in traditional Ethiopia that established by the Oromo society (Legese, 2006). As Girma (2005) also confirms that [t]he Oromo people well known by their distinctive Gada institution where-by they were traditionally concerned with equitable distribution of power and privileges.

The government bodies of Gada system such as legislative, the executive, and judiciary organs perform their own duties and responsibilities to serve the community without external interference within their grade (eight years) elected by the assembly of gumi. The gumi elects the above government organs in a general meeting that takes place midway at the current Abba Gada office (Huntingford, 1955; Watson, 2003 & Asefa, 2010). That means the transfer of the power of Gada government organs is takes place from one party to the next according to the fundamental principles of the people.

In a more brief way, Asafa (2008) explains that the Gada system has the principles of

checks and balances (such as periodic transfer of power every eight years and division of power among executive, legislative, and judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five Gada grades). The writer gave emphasis that in the Gada government system there are also power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Other principles of the system have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies; accountability of leaders; the settlement of disputes through reconciliation; and the respect for basic rights and liberties.

In this section, a brief background of the basic principles of the Oromo Gada institution in promoting good governance is given to lay groundwork for the rationale of the paper.

3. Rationale of the Research

Every society has its own indigenous knowledge that helps to direct, govern, and solve its social, economic, political, and normative issues based on the philosophical thought the society. The Oromo is one of the indigenous African people living in east Africa for many centuries with its own ingenious, endogenous and indigenous basic principles.

However, there are misunderstandings about the authentic implementation and practice of democratic principles and principles of the Gada Oromo in maintaining peace and security among the people as well as in promoting good governance and democratic principles in the among the nation. More importantly, the modern local government organs prefer to implement imported and transplanted laws and administration systems rather than promoting and giving principles for the local indigenous knowledge of the Oromo.

The main objective of this paper is to examine the role of the basic principles of Oromo Gada institution in promoting good governance. Specifically, the paper attempts to address the following specific objectives.

- To identify the basic principles of the Oromo Gada institution;
- To examine the basic principles of the Oromo Gada institution and its implementations;
- To describe the role of the basic principles of the Oromo Gada institution in promoting good governance.

4. Research Methods

The research methods of this paper are essentially based on survey of reviewing secondary sources including books, articles, journals and other research works by employing purposive sampling techniques and employing descriptive type of text analysis. This is supplemented by the author's exposure to the rural area of the Oromo who are ruling under the umbrella of Gada principles..

Finally, after the relevant data have been collected and organized, data were qualitatively described and presented.

5. Results and Discussion

Basic Gada principles in this paper are described as the Gada principles that help to govern and solve social, economic and political issues of the Oromo in promoting good governance among the people.

5.1. the Basic Principles of the Oromo Gada Institution and their Implementations

Ethnographic and historical evidences revealed that the basic principles of the Oromo Gada institutions are: accountability, due process of law, rule of law, democratic election, fixed office term, fair trial and fair law, application of procedural laws.

These fundamental Oromo Gada principles have their own political, economic and social function. However, this paper focused on the political role of the basic Gada principles in promoting good governance. The roles of the basic ethical principles of the Gada Oromo listed above are described accordingly.

1.1 Accountability

The research data in this regard uncovered the fact that every Gada government organs are accountable for mala adjustment, mala administration and mal-practice. That is to say every Gada government organs of every member of Gada party is responsible for inconvenience related to empowerment. The accountability of the three Gada government organs: legislative, executive judiciary organs are vested to the general assembly

Similarly, the Basic principles of the Oromo Gada institution are striving to the implementation of the principle of due process of laws. The enforcement of Gada law focused on fair trial and fair law. That means everybody without gender; age and social status can have the right to appeal to the higher Gada officials if the decision made by the conflict resolution institutions is bribed.

Likewise, neither minority nor majority rule; every person is equal before the laws of the Oromo. In other words, cassation is possible in the Oromo Gada principles as of the modern legal systems.

1.2 Division of Power

The division of power is one of the fundamental Gada laws that are identified in this research. That means, For instance, among the Macca Oromo, the power of Gada party is vertically divided among the four central organs.

- General assembly (the society)
- Caffé/Gada council (three government organs)
- Gumis (four Gumis, Boarana, Caffé, Uлага and Birbirsa)
- Qallu Institution

However, the separation of power among the three government organs (executive, legislative and judiciary) as well as among the four gumis (Borana, Birbirsa, Uлага and Caffé) is horizontal relationship.

Accordingly, the power of the making of law is given only to the legislative part, the execution is given to the executive organ and the decision is given to the judiciary organs.

In other words, general assembly is the highest, Caffé is the second, Gumi is the third and Qallu institution is the four organs (Fille, 2015).

1.3 Separation of Power

The separation of power according to the democratic Gada value under the division of power fails to horizontal position. That means, the ethnographic data have shown that in the enactment of the law of the Gada there are four Gumis with equal status or horizontal relationship. The Gumis are Salgan Borana, Salgan Birbirsa, Salgan Caffé and Salgan Uлага. However, they have their own separate responsibilities and duties.

This is clearly addressed by Asafa (2008) that checks and balances, division of power and balanced opposition are among others. The above Gada principles are the basic elements that help to prevent power from the falling into the hands of despots, so that it promotes good governance in the political life the people.

1.4 Judicial Independence

The enforcement of the folk laws is coincident with the practices of the modern law in different aspects. For instance, the mechanism of suspect investigation takes place abruptly; the traditional judges consider different circumstances during enforcement.

Accordingly, the Oromo people have their own different mechanisms exercised traditional conflict resolution institutions. Dejene (2002), Haberland (1963) and Muradu and Gebreyesus (2009) confirm that there are three major conflict resolution systems in the Oromo people: Jarsa Biyya, Qallu and Shane. The above major conflict resolution systems also practical in the Macca Oromo too. The aforementioned institutions have their own mechanisms and roles in the pragmatic development of contemporary society. The forwarding sections explore some of the traditional institutions.

1.5 Rule of Law

According to the Gada laws, every citizen or any membership of that society is equality treated before the law. The focuses of the Gada principles are not to punish or govern man (nor rule of man) but exercise the rule of law as per set forth in the evolved constitution.

This is confirmed by Zelaalem (2012) that where the Gada leaders commit serious offences they will be punished and can eventually be uprooted from the office. This is a clear indication of genuine rule of law as opposed to rule of men. That is to say, for instance, if an Abba Gada or Abba Bokku commits an offence he immediately sucked by the general assembly and another Abba Gada will be democratically elected and replaced from the member of the active party.

1.6 Fixed Office Term

Interview data made clear that in the Gada government system there are five Gada parties. However, the name of the five Gada parties can be different from one Oromo moieties to other moieties.

Different existing literature and ethnographic data uncovered the fact that an Abba Gada or an Abba Bokku as well as one Gada party from which the Abba Gada or Abba Bokku elected stays in office only for eight years. After a solid eight years, another party takes power. That means the democratic power transfer system of Gada parties performed democratically without bullet and bloodshed. Thus, doing so is one of the fundamental ethical Gada principles helps to promote good governance among the political life of the people.

Summing up, the role of the ethical principles of the Oromo Gada institution secures political stability among the neighbouring national, nationality, and people as well as create linkage between the society and the current regional and national government organs of our country.

As soon as an office term is over, absolute democratic election (without ballot and bullet) is also another important value in this regard.

1.7 Separation of Religion and State

In the practical life of our country, among the basic principles of the EFDR constitutions, art. 11, sub article 1 declares separation of religion and state and sub article 2 declares there shall be no state religion (EFDR, Con, 1995, p. 80).

However, the practical experience of our life uncovers that in the current Ethiopian government system, religion and state are interwoven; not separated. That means government interferes in the role and practices of religious institutions. More over the Oromo religion leaders are much neglected. Thus, art 11 of the EFDR constitution is only paper value.

However, when we come to the Oromo political system Abba Gada and Abba Bokku never intervene in the power of Abba Muda or Abba Malka or Qallu, Ayyana or Ayyaantuu. They exercise their duty and religious power without and intervention. This uncovers the fact that, the Oromo socio, economic and political life is lead and governed by Safu Waqa (God)

In general, the ethical principles of the Oromo Gada give due attention to exercise fundamental principles of evolved Gada democratic constitution equal to the basic principles of the modern democratic constitution of the land.

1.8 Participatory

Gada institution strengthens the participation of the entire local community in the enactment of law through calling general assembly four years before the power transfer of Balli (Fille, 2015). Accordingly, the writer explains that

- All the pre, active and post Gada members are participated throughout their live in political, economic and social issues,
- Even though some literature describes as the Oromo Gada institution does not participate women both in the enactment and enforcement of Law as well as, other rituals of Gada, without the participation women Gada institution cannot be meaningful;

- Participate in managing conflict resolution through mediation, in making and declaring inclusive and transparent laws;
- Institutionalizing public participation in local development. Eg. in conservation and reforestation of natural resources .

5.2 The Role of the Basic Principles of the Oromo Gada Institution in Promoting Good Governance

Although the importance of indigenous knowledge overtones the formal one, it is imperative to give more emphasis to incorporate the basic valuable principles of an indigenous knowledge into the formal law of the land.

In brief, implementing the basic principles of indigenous knowledge of the Oromo people called Gada Principles play great role in promoting good governance to the Ethiopian people in general and to the Oromo in particular. The research data uncovered that the role of the basic principles of the Oromo Gada institution in promoting good governance can be described in its social, economic, political and normative functions.

5.2.1 Promote Social Good Governance

One of the basic social functions of the implementation of Gada principles is to solve conflict of homicide (Dejene, 2002 in peaceful means so that it helps to reduce social conflict among the society (Ayalew, 2007 & Gemechu, 2005). The below historical evidence marks that we believe that here is a strong case for acknowledging the value of certain customary institution and the rights of people to make use of them in legally recognized ways. Customary dispute resolution systems can contribute through partnership and collaboration with the formal system in providing culturally acceptable and meaningful justice. (Pankhurst & Getachew, 2008)

According to Pankhurst and Getachew, recognizing valuable parts of indigenous

knowledge helps to maintain sustainable peace and coexistence among Ethiopian community if properly explored, acknowledged and incorporated into the formal law of the country.

Muradu and Gebreyesus (2009) also describe, Gada principles among the Oromo people maintains sustainable peace and security, promote inter-ethnic dispute resolution including the Oromo traditions of group or individual adoption, fostering moggasa ‘naming,’ patronage and harma hodha ‘breast sucking’ that remains an important element of maintaining peace in interethnic relations. Ayalew (2002:38) also adds that “Guddifacha ‘adoption’ is connected to the emergency of family and property; the need for continuity of family line and heir to property evolved in the people.

5.2.2 Promote Good Normative (Ethical) Governance

Respecting the rule of Waqa is thus practicing good norms such as respecting elders, developing norms, avoiding dependency, upholding esteem, promoting good spirit and faithfulness, creating responsible persons, respecting international and national or regional law, respecting the natural right of human beings and other animals as well.

Likewise, the importance of the implementing Gada principles in its normative and ethical function Bartels (1983) explains, Safu is a moral category based on the notions of distance and respect for all things. This means, Safu plays important role in shaping and governing human mind for pragmatic principles and faithfulness hence respecting Safu means respecting oneself, establishing moral standards, knowledge and identity.

5.2.3 Promote Political Good Governance

In its political function, folk law helps to create awareness as to how every citizen has to have the right to participate in the cases of its own representative election; the right to observer its own liberty (Mohammad, 1994)

and the right to handle and administer its own property (Kuwee 1997).

The implementation of basic Gada principles also helps to solve intra and inter conflict, maintains security, promotes good governances, develops the concept of equality and helps to respect human rights protocols and conventions ratified at national and international levels (ibid). The political and legal components of the Gada provides leadership, rules and procedures that serve the folk law among the Oromo people and safeguards their liberty against authoritarian rulers.

Furthermore, Bichaka (1996) explains that “the political and legal components of Gada provides for the Oromo, the respect for basic rights and liberties including freedom of speech, the right to own private and collective properties and the liberty to debate”. Similarly, the Gada political culture can serve as a useful resource for the creation and consolidation of a democratic system to create and promote good governance among the people (Lamu, 1994).

In a similar case, the Oromo indigenous practice helps to exercise democratic and natural rights and implement regulations through elected officials (Dirribii, 2009), because the system is based on the rule of law; and opposed to despotic and authoritarian rule.

5.2.4 Promote Economic Good Governance

Another most important function of the basic Gada principles of the Oromo is to promote and maintain economic good governance among the people. In brief, employing the valuable parts of the Oromo Gada principle as it has been described in the above, to be an Abba Gada or Abba Bokku, having sufficient economy/property is one of the basic principles. This is more explained that sufficient economy is to protect bribe that helps to promote good governance among the society.

Likewise, employing the basic Gada principles of the Oromo in its economic function is to reduce cost and time involved in resolving disputes (Giday, 2000 & Muradu & Gebreyesus, 2009). That means, employing the basic Gada principles in the day to day activities of the society helps to minimize court fees, litigant fees, filing fees and reduces spending longer time in pre, while and post litigations.

6. Conclusion

The basic Gada principles are endogenous and indigenous wisdom of the Oromo where the sacrament, cosmology and ontology of the Oromo are portraying through material and oral anthologies. Concisely, the role of basic Gada principles is very significant in the day-to-day activities of the Oromo.

The research data have shown that Gada principles can be seen at institutional and individual levels. Gada principles at institutional levels help to create social integrity and promote good governance at institutional or societal levels. Gada principles are guidelines that are characterized by objectivity, eternal and universal. In its objectivity, it is no one can derogate and repeal; in its eternity Gada principles live forever; as well as in its universality Gada principles are applicable in every society

Gada principles are values that can be seen at individual institutional level focused on controlling political and social wrongs and normative issues among the society that help to protect and maintain general deterrence.

In sum, the basic Gada principles play significant role in promoting social, political, normative and economic good governance among the society. To this effect, local governments and regional states should take into account local contexts, local cultures and worldview to make the folk law decision more commensurable and to provide more recognition into the modern legal principles.

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