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LIFESTYLE

LIFE IN TRAVEL

The life of a nomad is not about arriving anywhere, and for the Karrayyuu it is about accommodating nature instead of forcing nature to accommodate them. Pastoralists are known for seamlessly assimilating with nature, and the Karrayyuu are a testament to this fact. Acclimatizing to the harsh climate conditions and leading a life of livestock keeping, the Karrayyuu have a strong camaraderie with nature. The Karrayyuu live in Fentalle. Receiving no more than a fickle 400 to 700 mm of rainfall per year, Fentalle is an arid land scorched by the sun. Raising cattle,

sheep, goats, and camels, the Karrayyuu are pastoralists who depend on their livestock for survival. Due to the different forages their animals consume and the climatic unsuitability of their land, the Karrayyuu move seasonally to find grazing areas for their herds. The move follows the three ecological zones: Ganna (summer), Bona (winter), and Birra (spring). The Karrayyuu have divided their land according to the seasons and stay for three to four months in each area.





Camels are a way of life to the Karrayyu. Loaded with all the trinkets that make up home, a camel is led away into the sunset by a young Karrayyu woman



A Karrayyu village gathers at the departure point as the Godaansa - the nomadic practice of moving to better pasture for their cattle - is about to commence



The Godaansa is underway as Karrayyu villagers pack their belongings and move away with their camels in tow

GODAANSA

As resources become more and more sparse, the Karrayyu pack up and move to another place temporarily in search of sustenance for their massive livestock. This is known as Godaansa, meaning migration, and it is a very crucial part of their lifestyle. The Karrayyu carry out this process every three to four months, and because of this, it occupies a big place in the life of a Karrayyu. Godaansa is not just a necessary chore that must be carried out; for the Karrayyu, it is also an opportunity to celebrate. Wearing their best, flying the Oromo colors of black, red, and white, and walking their herds of animals, the

Karrayyu migration is a sight to behold.

Their homes, as well as all their household items, are designed for peak mobility. Their houses can be disassembled for transport, a process that sees the houses carefully and neatly packed before being placed on the backs of their camels for the journey. Once they have reached their new destination, they are efficiently reassembled to become home again. The camels carry more than just the houses themselves; they also carry luggage filled with household items. Despite the fact that this might seem like leaving home for



DUAL ORGANISATION

For the Oromo, everything needs to be balanced. For every Yin, there is a Yang. This is a major feature in Karrayyuu society. The existence of a moiety for every level of division is a testament to this fact. This deference to the notion of dual institutions also serves as a political check and balance in that it divides the political community into two opposing groups. The existence of the two Oromo ancient moieties (Borana and Barentu), the Karrayyuu lines of Baaso and Dullacha, the institutions of Gadaa and Siinqee, and even the insistence of members being united in marriage, continue the idea of duality.

others, for the nomadic Karrayyuu, this is not a sad affair at all. Usually, Xurumbaas (horns) are blown to mark the trip and celebrate it, and Godaansa is even referred to as the 'Godaansa Celebration'.

Once the Caravans and herds get to land with enough forage and a water source, the Karrayyuu reassemble their homes and form a village. This village will become their temporary settlement for the next few months until ecological conditions catch up with them and they have to move yet again.



A group of Karrayyuu men march to where the Baallii ceremony is to take place led by their Gadaa elders



Deliberations are underway as elders and statesmen of the Karrayyuu await the power handover



An elder Gadaa statesman poses in front of the temporary huts built for the Gadaa deliberations around the hand-over ceremony dressed in the Oromo colors of black, red, and white

GADAA

Acting as both a socio-political institution and an archive for the customs, principles, values, and beliefs that guide the life of an Oromo, Gadaa is a complex and unique system and an ancient Oromo institution. For the Oromo people, everything from art to philosophy to the calendar is based on this ancient and egalitarian system. Gadaa is the most important structure in the life of an Oromo, and for none is this truer than the Karrayyuu. While the adoption of other institutions and ways of life has diminished the influence of Gadaa among many of the Oromo groups, this is not the case for the Karrayyuu. The Karrayyuu observe Gadaa as strictly as they have done for centuries. Thus, many regard the Karrayyuu as the custodians of this ancient Oromo culture.

Gadaa guides the life of a Karrayyuu from the moment they are born until their last breath. Gadaa contains the rules and regulations for everything from societal structures to marriage, and even clothing and hairstyles for every member.

SHANAN GADAA: THE GADAA QUINTET



An assembly of the Gadaa of the Karrayyuu proceeds with members of the Gadaa quintet present

Under the Gadaa system, the Karrayyuu are sorted into five groups (akin to political parties) called *Tuuta*. The five *Tuuta* are jointly known as Shanan Gadaa. These are:

1. **Dirmajjii / Ilma Sabbaqa**
2. **Melba / Ilma Nuqusaa**
3. **Michillee / Ilma Maraa / Dilboo**
4. **Duuloo / Ilma Darra**
5. **Roobalee / Ilma Moggisaa**

It can be seen that each *Tuuta* has a second name; this is the name of the first person to ever lead the *Tuuta*. You see, according to the Karrayyuu oral tradition, Gadaa was gifted to the Oromo people by Abbaa Gadaa (the Father of Gadaa). Abbaa Gadaa gathered all Oromos and organized them into five groups called *Tuuta*. He then made a *Bokku* (scepter) for each of them and relayed the ways in which they must transfer power from one to another. The outgoing Gadaa calls the incoming Gadaa by their second name, which is the name of their first leader. Ilma Sabbaqa was the first person to be given the *Bokku* for *Tuuta Dirmajjii*; Ilma Nuqusaa was the first person to hold the *Bokku* for *Tuuta Melba*; and so on and so forth.

As the oral story goes, when Abbaa Gadaa first created the *Tuuta*, he did not label them as older or younger. A while after they were organized as such, he called them all to gather. He then climbed a mountain and declared that it was time to choose the eldest and assign *Angafummaa* - eldership. As he stood upon the mountain, he informed them that whoever reached the mountain top with his *Bokku* in hand would be declared *Angafa*. All the *Tuuta* rushed towards him, and Ilma Moggisaa arrived first, but he had dropped his *Bokku*, so he had to turn back while the others ascended. The next person to reach the mountain top was Ilma Sabbaqa, so Dirmajjii became *Angafa*. Ilma Nuqusa was next, and after that, Ilma Maraa, Ilma Daraaraa, and Ilma Moggisaa arrived, respectively.

A person is born into a *Tuuta* and belongs to the same *Tuuta* as his or her father before them. The moment a Karrayyuu is born or adopted, he or she already belongs to a *Tuuta*. Belonging to a *Tuuta* is an unconditional state, and there is no circumstance that can lead to one being expelled from his or her *Tuuta*. Every eight years, each *Tuuta* shoulders social, political, economic, and religious authority. One generation, or forty years, makes a full cycle.



HIRIYA: AGE-SETS

Within one *Tuuta* there are six age-sets (grades). They are:

- Grade 1: Ijoolle (infants)**
- Grade 2: Dabballe (children)**
- Grade 3: Caasaa (youth)**
- Grade 4: Goobiyyo/Ruboo (adults)**
- Grade 5: Doriiyyoo (officials in function)**
- Grade 6: Luuba (elders)**
- Grade 7: Gadamojiii (seniors)**

Doriiyyoo is the ruling Gadaa class. The tenure spent in the Doriiyyoo class is the period in which an age group exercises leadership. During this time, the Ruboo class will be preparing itself to take over leadership once the Dorii move on to the Luuba grade. These Gadaa classes co-exist, one as a leader group and the other in preparation for the initiation into leadership. When the Dorii group is six years into its leadership, two years before it moves on to become Luuba, there is a partial transfer of power. The group that takes on this partial leadership power is then referred to as Goobiyyo. The Goobiyyo spend their

time preparing for when they will eventually hold full leadership power by organizing meetings, discussing issues that are affecting the community, and developing policies and strategies. When the two years are up, the Goobiyyoo become fully initiated and take power as Doriiyyoo. At the same time, the Ijoolle become Dabballe, the Dabballe become Caasaa, the Caasaa become Ruboo, and the former Doriiyyoos become Luuba. They all move through the stages in this seamless flow.

When a Doriiyyoo becomes Luuba, they resign from all leadership roles permanently. At this point, they have gone through all of the Gadaa stages and finished the forty-year cycle. When, after eight years, the current Dorii becomes Luuba, the Luuba move on to their Gadamojiii stage. Gadamojiiis function as advisers and peacemakers. They give guidance to the groups that are currently moving through this forty-year cycle. Every eight years, power moves from one age grade to another and from one *Tuuta* to another. This



Deliberations are underway as cohorts of Gadaa leaders listen on awaiting the moment of the Baallii ceremony. The Oromo colors of black, red, and white are accompanied by the Odaa tree-shaped hairdo of Karrayyu men

movement of power from Tuuta to Tuuta ensures that power is never wholly in the hands of one Tuuta. All this works to make certain that power doesn't fall into the wrong hands and that there always exists a strong system of checks and balances.

There is, however, an age discrepancy to be found in these sets. This discrepancy occurs because it is not his age but rather the position of his father that determines a male Karrayyu's position in the Gadaa system. A son never occupies a leadership position as long as his father is still in active service. This positioning is in accordance with generation sets rather than age sets. A son is always classified into the system exactly five grades after his father. This means that a son joins the lowest grade exactly forty years after his father; that is, when his father has completed the cycle. A man and all of his brothers are in the same party, regardless of the differences in their ages, and they move through the hierarchy of grades together.



A young man stands next to an elder statesman of the Karrayyu signifying the relationship where seniors offer advice to those in power according to the Gadaa system



Bokku sticks are held high as the Karrayyu follow Gadaa elders to the Baallii ceremony

ABBAA BOKKU

The two most prominent roles in the Gadaa for the Karrayyu are Abbaa Bokku and Qaallu. Qaallu is a religious and spiritual leader whose position is inherited from father to son. The role of Abbaa Bokku, literally translated as father of Bokku, is a very important one and can be considered as a position combining the roles of Abbaa Gadaa and Qaallu. This position is also one that is inherited and passed down through generations, from father to eldest son.

Abbaa Bokku's special position only comes into play during the Ruboo stage; before that, he is regarded the same as all other members of the community. When his *Tuuta* enters the Ruboo stage, he initially starts acting like a

Qaallu. At this moment, Warra Jilaa and Qaallu put *Qumbi* (incense) in his mouth, in an act that is seen as a marking point for the start of his leadership, and he is expected to adhere to food taboos from this point onward. This food taboo is similar to the one a full Qaallu observes; all this is done in preparation for the time his *Tuuta* moves up to the Dorii stage and he holds the Bokku. When his Dorii grade transfers power and moves to the Luuba grade, he passes the Bokku to the next Dorii leader. In the course of this transition, the Qaallu play a role in the peaceful transition of power from one *Tuuta* to the next by performing blessings for both the incoming and outgoing groups.



BOKKU

Made from *Ejersa* (olive tree), the Bokku is a scepter essential to Gadaa and the rituals carried out within it. Bokku is cut and prepared with immense care once the full handover ceremony is complete and is given to the new Abbaa Bokku, along with all the new responsibilities his *Tuuta* has assumed.



The Abba Bokku of the Karrayyu marches with the eponymous stick and dressed in the significant colors of red and green

KARRAYYU

A whole village called Gabaalaa complete with cattle pens and beautiful traditional huts is built to accommodate the Karrayyu Gadaa party of the incoming cohort of leaders



GABAALAA

When one Dorii finishes their eight years and the Goobiyoo move up to become the next Dorii, the entire families and herds of all male members of the *Tuuta* who hold an official position move to a newly prepared and temporary village known as '*Biyya Gabaalaa*'.

Movement for the transfer ceremony takes place according to the time of year and the appearance of the moon, usually taking place after Dukkana - dark. This move happens after the fourth or sixth day of the moon's appearance, although the specific day can only be decided with the agreement of the Gabaalaa elders. On that fourth or sixth day, after the moon has appeared, preparations such as the construction of *Galma* (ritual houses) and fences for the cattle take place. Then, for one *Addeessa* (one moon), the *Gabaalaa* stays at

the ceremonial site. This is timed to take place between the crescent and full moon, while the sky is shining, in the hope that the Gadaa year will be bright. After the disappearance of the moon, they return home, and the new group has taken power.

One must be married to take a position in the *Gabaalaa*, a fact that serves to indicate the significance of marriage in the Karrayyu social system. Before the move to the *Gabaalaa*, everyone gathers for a meeting to decide who will move to the *Gabaalaa* after the exchange of power; this meeting is referred to as *Tarree*. The *Gabaalaa* village only lasts for the time that the Gadaa is exercised. When the eight years of power come to an end, members leave the communal settlement and return to their previous homes.



SIINQEE AND THE WOMEN OF GADAA

Siinqee is an institution in the Gadaa system specifically designed to protect the rights of women and give them power in the proceedings of the Gadaa. The Karrayyuu believe that, like all things, a strong balance must be maintained between the power men hold and the power women hold. It is believed that unless this balance can be struck, the collapse of society is imminent. Because of this, the Oromo have created two equally important and interdependent domains for the sexes. This balance of domains is considered the precondition for keeping the peace and promoting *Safuu*. Thus, this female-oriented institution holds great importance in Karrayyuu society.

Siinqee is a stick known as *Ulee*, which symbolizes a socially sanctioned set of rights exercised by women. It is an emblem of the respect held for women. Given to a woman on her wedding day by her mother, the *Ulee* will serve to safeguard her rights during her marital life. Haadha Siinqee, or Mother of Siinqee, is by default the wife of the Abbaa Bokku, the elected power holder, and she is

in charge of protecting women's rights in the Gadaa system.

At all Gadaa ceremonies, women hold the *Siinqee* stick as a sign of peace. During the Gadaa power transfer ceremonies, the newly elected Gadaa officials pass under diagonally raised *Siinqees* to receive blessings from the *Siinqee* women. The *Siinqee* is also believed to have religious significance, and disrespecting a woman holding a *Siinqee* is considered akin to disrespecting the god of fertility and prosperity. As such, *Siinqee* is a powerful tool for brokering peace and is one of the main methods of peaceful conflict resolution.

All Karrayyuu women play a major role in the Gadaa proceedings at certain times. For instance, during the Gadaa transfer ceremony, the wife of the Abbaa Bokku, the Haadha Siinqee, must be present, and unless the eldest sister of the Abbaa Bokku is present during the prayer ceremony that is held the night prior to the day of the transfer, the ceremony cannot take place. It is she alone who can



A beautiful Karrayyu woman of the Siinqee order stands adorned in her traditional outfit and the slim eponymous stick that symbolizes membership in this powerful order of women

begin the songs. The eldest daughter of each family then continues the singing, after which it moves on to the younger ones.

The women still maintain a strong relationship with their original *Tuuta* even after they have moved away for their new marital home. When their *Tuuta* comes into power, the women return to their parent's or brother's home and take part in the celebrations. Here, the women will sing to celebrate their brothers' change of status. As a rule, no handover ceremony can take place unless all the women are in attendance. Because one woman refusing to participate means the ceremony can't take place, the men from all the *Tuutas* buy their daughters and sisters various gifts, including new clothes and footwear, to inspire their participation. If a woman is not happy with the gifts she has received, she can refuse to enter the site of the celebration. This will in turn prompt the men to buy her more gifts as they plead with her to go and take part in the celebration.

THE ODAA NABE

For centuries, the Oromo people have gathered under one tree to decree laws, set out rules, and enact justice. The tree under which they gather is the evergreen ficus sycamore tree known as the Odaa. There are six Odaas in Oromia, each representing a subdivision of Gadaa. They are known as: Odaa Nabe, Odaa Bultum, Odaa Garres, Odaa Roba, Odaa Bisil, and Odaa Mookoodi. Shrouded in legends, Odaa Nabe is located at the heart of Tulama land. This is the Odaa to which the Karrayyuu travel.

The Assemblies (*Caffee*) that take place here do so in adherence to the three institutional pillars that dictate the life of the Karrayyuu: *Heera*, *Nagaa*, and *Safuu*. Passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions, these three are inviolable.



The Bullukkoo cloth adorns the men of the Karrayyuu as they deliberate the Gadaa power transfer into the sunset

THE THREE CORNERSTONES

Heera (Law)

For the Karrayyuu *Heera* is their original law, and it cannot be altered or modified. *Heera* governs the conduct of a Karrayyuu from the cradle to the grave. The Karrayyuu strictly follow *Heera* even today. There is *Heera* for everyday things as well as for major societal processes. There is a *Heera* for how marriage is to be carried out and the amount of bride-wealth to be paid to the bride's family. There is *Heera* concerning the relationship between men and women, *Heera* for naming new-born children, *Heera* for adoption, *Heera* for ransom, and so on and so forth.



A group of Karrayyuu men deliberate during the proceedings of the Baallii ceremony with the ubiquitous acacia trees in the background=

Nagaa (Peace)

A deeply rooted belief in *Nagaa* is found among all the Oromo children. For a Karrayyuu man, virility, bravery, and war skills are attributes thought of as very desirable, and defending their communities is an honorable deed; however, internal *Nagaa* (Peace) is non-negotiable. According to Oromo belief, *Nagaa* is the most essential thing for human and cosmic order.

For the Karrayyuu, all communal gatherings are a chance to express and fortify their unity. Gosa meetings, Gadaa assemblies (*caffees*), celebrations, and rituals are all conducted in the spirit of unity. *Nagaa* is said to be the key to unification and is mentioned in every communal gathering.

Expressed in everything from everyday greetings to prayers and blessings, *Nagaa* is a necessary condition for fertility, life, and the general well-being of society. Degressive behaviors are admonished on the ground of breaking *Nagaa* Karrayyuu, for without peace, only torment and despair are left.

Safuu (Ethics)

The third pillar of the Karrayyuu community is *Safuu* (Ethics). *Safuu* is the compass used for differentiating between good and bad, right and wrong. In order to maintain peace, the Karrayyuu are encouraged to maintain respect and balance. *Safuu* is rooted in the notion of distance and respect between all things. *Safuu* is a map to point a person towards the right path, a path for a life best lived, a life with a sense of order, and a life that doesn't encroach upon the rights of others.

The Karrayyuu believe that everything has a natural place in the cosmic and social order. This belief is incorporated into *Safuu*. *Safuu* exists to guide all to keep this place. The natural place of each thing is considered to be specified by a specific 'ayyaana' that each thing has received from Waaqa.

To live and act in accordance with the laws that the ancestors of today's people have kept for generations, as well as the natural laws of Waaqa, is what is meant by having *Safuu*. *Safuu* exalts both rights and duties.



A man looks on as the Karrayyu gather for the Baallii ceremony

MOGGAASA

Anyone can become a part of the Karrayyu people if they wish to. This is accomplished through a process called Moggaasa. Moggaasa is a type of adoption, and there are several procedures to be carried out for it to be done. The first step is for the person to find and consult an elder of a gosa, after which the elder calls a meeting with all the members of his gosa. At this meeting, the person who is to be adopted has to say, “Father, I am a person with no father to look after me; I have no brother to pick me up from the ground when I fall, so I want to become your child, and I want you to be my father. I want all your brothers to be my brothers, and all your relatives to be my relatives, and your wife to be my mother.”

The father-to-be then tells the members of his gosa about the background of this newcomer, after which the Abbaa Bokku and Qaallu are invited to bless this person and explain the *heera* (laws) of the Karrayyu. In their presence, all the laws of the community are relayed to the newly adopted person. They then advise the gosa to look after their new member, saying, “If you see him doing wrong, correct him; if he is to become lost, search for him; if he kills someone, give ransom.” After that, *argaa* (a gift) will be given to the new member, as is done for new-born babies. This newly adopted person will be announced to be the youngest son of the elder who has adopted him, regardless of his age. On that day, the father gives his new son camels, goats, and cattle, because that’s the way of life of the Karrayyu. The relatives and gosa members also give as much as they are able to.

MARRIAGE: FUUDHA FI HEERUMAA

Fuudhaa fi heeruma (marriage) is one of the most important life goals a Karrayyuu must complete in the Karrayyuu society and is seen as one of the greatest achievements a male and female member of the Karrayyuu society can have. As marriage is a necessity for any Karrayyuu to fully participate in the ritualistic and religious aspects of life, there are strict rules (*heera*) concerning marriage. Forming a marriage signals a change of status.

Until he marries, a young man spends most of his time outside the home, accompanying cattle or camels. Upon marriage, he settles down to domestic life within the homestead. He becomes a full member of society through his wife and is involved in the political affairs of the community. An Oromo man does not have the right to form an independent household until he has a wife. After his marriage, he will be known as *Abba Warra*, meaning 'father of the household'. The transformation is marked by the acquisition of a personal marriage stick.

A young Karrayyuu girl is shown to be unmarried by her outfit which features beautiful beadwork



DHIBAAYYUU AND SIINQEE: THE MARRIAGE STICKS



An Oromo man can only form an independent household after he has been married. When he gets married, his title will become *Abba Warraa* (Father of the house). In recognition of this transition, the newly married man is designated a marriage stick known as *dhibaayyuu*. Made from a tree called Leedi, the *dhibaayyuu* serves as a symbol of masculinity and the man's position as *Abbaa Warraa*.

Likewise, a marriage stick is given to his female counterpart on her wedding day to mark her passing from girlhood to womanhood. This marriage stick is known as a *siinqee* and is used to symbolize feminine power. Her title after her nuptials will become *Haadha Warraa* (Mother of the House). *Siinqee* is made from a tree called *Harooreessa*, and there is a specific reason it was chosen. *Harooreessa* (a type of *Grewia* tree) has lots and lots of branches; because of this, it is chosen to signal fertility and wish the bride many children.

Other than the times when they are taken out to be used during rituals and celebrations, a wife's *siinqee* and her husband's *dhibaayyuu* are both kept near the fireplace where she cooks, during which time they are buttered and then blackened with smoke. These sticks are very important during *Gadaa* ceremonies and rituals. After her marriage, when a woman leaves her husband's house for any occasion, she takes her *siinqee* with her. This signals her status as a married woman and puts off unwanted attention. If a woman has left her house without her *siinqee*, this indicates that a tragedy has befallen her. The tragedy could be a problem in the household or a death in the family, and she leaves her *siinqee* behind to communicate to the other women in the community about her unhappy leave.



A young Karrayyu man carries the goat to be slaughtered to mark the power transfer as is the custom

BRIDEWEALTH

Before a marriage takes place, the bride-wealth that has been determined by *heera* must be paid. The groom's father pays a bride-wealth of six cattle (*jahan jabbii qaraxaa* - the six bulls for the tax). Even if it means relying on the contributions of other members of the gosa, this payment is obligatory if the boy is to be married. As such, the cattle serve to create strong alliances between members. Bride-wealth indicates the definitiveness of the marriage and is considered the sign and seal of the relationship.

RAKO

Following the marriage, a young bull must be slaughtered; this is called *rako*. *Rako* is extremely important in the celebrations and cannot be done with any other animal; it must be a young bull. This is all done according to *heera*, and the slaughtering of this animal signals that this woman has joined the Karrayyu society as a wife. It also holds a romantic notion, as the husband can then say to his wife, "You are very special, as you did not come for free but by cattle." Knowing the importance of cattle to the Karrayyu community, this is an important declaration. A gift, called *Argaa*, is given to the new bride on the day of her wedding by the groom's family.

A cow that was received through bride-wealth is oftentimes named after the bride as an aide-mémoire of sorts. If the cow then manages to birth lots of calves and increase the wealth of the family, the marriage is seen as one of great success, and the family is truly united and peaceful.



Cattle are the Karrayyus' most important possession and are used as gifts to mark important occasions such as marriage