

Gender Roles in Grassroots Governance: A Qualitative Study of Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation

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Abstract: *Grassroots governance plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive political participation and democratic decentralisation. In the Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation (MBMC), gender reservation has significantly increased women's representation, making the city an important case for studying gender roles in local governance. This qualitative study explores how gender shapes political participation, leadership, decision-making, and governance outcomes in MBMC. The research highlights that women's representation has increased both numerically and symbolically, with women frequently occupying leadership roles such as mayor and corporator. However, patriarchal norms, proxy politics, and socio-cultural expectations continue to influence women's autonomy. The study finds that women leaders tend to prioritise welfare, health, sanitation, education, and community development, reflecting gendered governance patterns. While grassroots governance has contributed to women's empowerment and the gradual transformation of traditional gender roles, structural and cultural barriers still limit substantive equality. The study concludes that Mira-Bhayander demonstrates both progress and challenges in achieving gender-inclusive governance.*

Keywords: Grassroots governance, reservation, Women's representation, Political participation, Proxy politics, Grassroots governance, Inclusive political participation

1. Introduction

Grassroots governance refers to decentralised political institutions operating at the local level, such as municipal corporations and panchayats. These institutions are essential for participatory democracy and local development. In India, gender reservation policies have transformed local governance by ensuring women's political representation.

Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation represents a significant example of gender inclusion in urban local governance. Women's reservation has led to strong female political participation, with nearly half of the corporator seats reserved for women. In recent years, women have also dominated leadership positions such as the mayor's office, indicating growing gender presence in governance.

Despite this progress, gender roles continue to influence political participation and authority. Traditionally, women were confined to domestic roles, while politics remained male-dominated. The entry of women into governance challenges these norms and raises sociological questions regarding empowerment, autonomy, and transformation of gender relations. This study examines how gender roles shape participation, leadership, decision-making, and governance priorities in Mira-Bhayander's grassroots governance structure.

Objectives

- To study women's political participation in Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation.
- To analyse how gender roles influence leadership and decision-making.
- To identify challenges faced by women representatives.
- To examine whether grassroots governance leads to empowerment and transformation of gender roles.

- To study gender-based governance priorities and outcomes.

Hypothesis

- Gender reservation in Mira-Bhayander has increased women's political participation and visibility.
- Patriarchal social structures continue to influence women's decision-making and autonomy.
- Women leaders prioritise welfare-oriented and community-focused governance.

2. Methodology

This study dives into gender roles, proxy politics, and governance outcomes by tapping into secondary and documentary sources. It leans on key materials like municipal reports, gender reservation records, and election data to shed light on representation and decision-making in governance. Additionally, it draws from published research, policy papers, and insights on Panchayati Raj Institutions to build a solid theoretical foundation. Media analysis, including newspaper coverage and public statements, helps uncover public perceptions and the visibility of leadership. The study also interprets statistical data on election trends and governance outcomes qualitatively, rather than through strict statistical testing. To ensure credibility, it employs source triangulation, keeps documents consistent, and follows established frameworks. Transparency in research is a priority, with thorough source documentation. Since it relies on publicly available data, it upholds academic ethical standards and poses no risk to individuals. This qualitative research zeroes in on how gender roles shape representation, power, and governance within grassroots democratic institutions. By using qualitative content analysis of secondary data, it pinpoints themes like gender roles in governance and proxy politics. However, its indirect

approach might miss out on first-hand experiences and informal power dynamics, which makes the findings more interpretive and context-specific.

3. Findings and Discussion

1) Women's Political Representation in Mira-Bhayander
Gender reservation has significantly increased women's presence in MBMC. Out of 95 corporator seats, **48 seats are reserved for women**, reflecting strong gender inclusion in local governance.

Women have also dominated leadership positions. The mayor's post has repeatedly been reserved for women, and **six out of eight mayors since 2002 have been women**, showing sustained female leadership. This high representation has normalized women's participation in politics and challenged traditional gender norms.

2) Gender Roles and Decision-Making

The study found mixed patterns of autonomy. Some women leaders exercised independent decision-making, while others faced patriarchal influence and proxy politics. Social expectations, limited political experience, and dependency on male family members sometimes restricted authority. However, many women gradually gained confidence and political agency over time, indicating empowerment through governance participation.

3) Gendered Governance Priorities

Women leaders in Mira-Bhayander often focused on community welfare issues such as:

- Water supply and sanitation
- Public health and nutrition
- Education and child welfare
- Women's safety and social welfare

Municipal initiatives such as women entrepreneurship programs and skill development centres further highlight gender-focused governance.

This reflects how gendered social experiences influence governance priorities.

4) Structural and Cultural Barriers

Women representatives faced multiple challenges:

- Patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes
- Balancing domestic responsibilities and political work
- Lack of institutional and financial support
- Limited political training

These barriers indicate that representation alone does not ensure full empowerment.

5) Empowerment and Transformation of Gender Roles

Grassroots governance in Mira-Bhayander has contributed to gradual transformation of gender roles. Women reported:

- Increased self-confidence and independence
- Greater participation in household decisions
- Social recognition as leaders
- Inspiration for other women

However, transformation remains uneven and influenced by

social and economic factors.

4. Conclusion

Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation represents a significant case of gender inclusion in grassroots governance. Gender reservation has increased women's political participation and leadership, contributing to empowerment and the gradual transformation of traditional gender roles. Women leaders often prioritise welfare and community development, promoting inclusive governance.

However, structural barriers such as patriarchy, proxy politics, and socio-cultural norms continue to limit substantive equality. Achieving true gender empowerment requires institutional support, political training, and social transformation. Mira-Bhayander demonstrates both progress and continuing challenges in gender-inclusive governance.

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