



## Women's Role in the Leadership Dynamics of Customs in Penglipuran Village

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Article Histori: Received: April 11, 2025; Revised: May 24, 2025; Accepted: June 30, 2025

### Keywords

Women;  
Indigenous Leadership;  
Penglipuran Village

### Abstract

This study analyzes the role of women in customary leadership in Penglipuran Village, Bali, which still adheres to a patrilineal kinship system. Although women do not have formal roles, they are still functionally involved, such as conveying aspirations through male representatives and participating in bendesa elections. Using a qualitative approach, this research involved interviews, observations, and desk research with indigenous villagers. The results showed that women's disengagement is more due to socio-cultural constructions than biological factors. The conclusion of this study is that gender equality in adat leadership is still hampered by cultural norms that favor men. The implications of this research emphasize the need for collective awareness, education, and dialogue to change traditional views and encourage policies that support gender equality in customary leadership in Bali.

### Kata Kunci

Perempuan;  
Kepemimpinan Adat;  
Desa Penglipuran

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis peran perempuan dalam kepemimpinan adat di Desa Penglipuran, Bali, yang masih menganut sistem kekerabatan patrilineal. Meskipun perempuan tidak memiliki peran formal, mereka tetap terlibat secara fungsional, seperti menyampaikan aspirasi melalui perwakilan laki-laki dan berpartisipasi dalam pemilihan bendesa. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan wawancara, observasi, dan studi kepustakaan dengan narasumber masyarakat asli desa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketidakterlibatan perempuan lebih disebabkan oleh konstruksi sosial-budaya daripada faktor biologis. Kesimpulan penelitian ini adalah kesetaraan gender dalam kepemimpinan adat masih terhambat oleh norma budaya yang mengutamakan laki-laki. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan perlunya kesadaran kolektif, pendidikan, dan dialog untuk mengubah pandangan tradisional serta mendorong kebijakan yang mendukung kesetaraan gender dalam kepemimpinan adat di Bali.

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### How to Cite (APA Style):

Khairunisa, H. L., Syifa, N., Febrianti, Z. A., Qurnia, H. A., Wicaksono., B. A., Achidsti, A. (2025). Women's Role in the Leadership Dynamics of Customs in Penglipuran Village. *Jurnal Hawa: Studi Pengarus Utamaan Gender dan Anak*, 7(1), 74-80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29300/hawapsga.v7i1.8514>



## INTRODUCTION

Leadership in indigenous communities in Indonesia displays unique characteristics deeply rooted in traditional values (Syahroni & Rofiq, 2025). One example is Penglipuran Traditional Village, which is known for firmly holding onto its traditions, including the patrilineal value system. However, this tradition often hinders the involvement of women in several strategic positions, especially in the traditional leadership structure. Women rarely or never hold formal positions in traditional leadership structures, such as in the banjar institution or village management.

The patrilineal value is quite substantial in Balinese culture, where the structure of society is often determined by the male lineage (Zainsyah et al., 2022). This value views men as dominant and marginalizes the role of women in the social structure, leading to gender discrimination (Rahmayanty et al., 2023). Penglipuran Village adopts the patrilineal principle, where the male position is considered higher than that of women, including in terms of influence (Nugaheni, 2021). If a family has only daughters, the eldest daughter's husband, after the marriage, takes the role of "ayah-ayah" (ayah), representing the family's interests in traditional affairs since only men can carry out these tasks. Therefore, the husband follows the wife's side to participate in traditional activities involving only men, as the patrilineal principle in Penglipuran always requires men to represent the family (Cahyani & Amelda, 2022).

In the traditional leadership structure, the village leader (*bendesa adat*) is assisted by two secretaries (*penyarikan*) and 12 other positions such as *Kancan Roras*, *Kelian Sekaa Gong*, *Kelian Sekaa Baris*, *Kelian Sekaa Teruna*, *Kelian Pecalang*, *Tourism Management*, and the *Village Credit Institution (LPD)* management (Libhi et al., 2016). These leadership positions are governed by customary law called *Awig-awig*. Leading positions such as *bendesa adat*, *Kancan Roras*, and *Kelian* are typically held by men. However, the *Awig-awig* law does not explicitly prohibit women from holding positions in the social structure. Rather, the tradition in Penglipuran Village prioritizes the role of women in domestic and religious matters.

This study focuses on the nurture theory, which assumes that differences between men and women are not only based on biological factors (nature) but are also significantly influenced by training, social norms, and interactions they experience. This perspective views the distinct roles and duties between men and women arising naturally due to biological differences, such as reproductive organs and other physical traits, determining their social roles (Silitonga et al., 2025).

Traditionally, women often have roles in domestic life and economic activities within rural areas (Sulistyawati et al., 2024). The patrilineal values upheld by Penglipuran Village can influence women's participation and roles in certain aspects. Therefore, this research aims to explore the position and role of women in the traditional leadership structure in Penglipuran Village. Additionally, the Penglipuran community still maintains the patrilineal norm that supports male dominance in power and decision-making, while women are regarded as primarily involved in traditional and family matters. Thus, this study seeks to delve deeper into why women do not hold a position in the leadership structure of Penglipuran Village.

Several previous studies discuss the role of women in leadership dynamics that are relevant to this research topic. Research by Januariawan & Nadra (2022) reveals that customary law in the village has a high level of validity and effectiveness, supported by the community's awareness of adhering to the customary rules in place, even though they may not be fully aware of national legislation on environmental issues and the significant role of women in the leadership dynamics of the village. Another study by Wira et al. (202) explains that although there are customary norms and patriarchal culture in Bali that tend to show gender inequality and limit women's roles, the facts on the ground indicate that women still play an important role in strengthening traditional villages. Women's participation in various aspects of customary and community life demonstrates efforts and opportunities to achieve gender equality (Malihah et al., 2024), highlighting the importance of

regulations and government support to strengthen the role of women in the development process of traditional villages in Bali.

This study examines the role of women in the traditional leadership structure of Penglipuran Village, Bali, which still follows the patrilineal kinship system. Although women do not hold formal positions in traditional leadership, they remain involved in the village's social dynamics, albeit in a functional rather than structural role. Using a qualitative approach that includes interviews, field observations, and a literature review, this study reveals that women participate in democratic processes, such as the election of the bends, and can voice their aspirations through male representatives from their families.

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of why women do not hold a position in the leadership structure of Penglipuran Village. Additionally, this research seeks to investigate how women's roles manifest in the leadership dynamics of Penglipuran Village despite not having a formal position in its leadership structure.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the role of women in the dynamics of traditional leadership in Penglipuran Village, Bali. The research was conducted directly to understand better women's roles in a leadership structure that is still tied to the patrilineal kinship system. The primary data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews with key informants, field observations, and literature reviews to support the findings from primary data.

The study was carried out in 2025. The research subjects consist of two native community members of Penglipuran Village, Nyoman Suadnya and Dwi Aksara. They were chosen because of their extensive knowledge of the social system and traditions in Penglipuran Village, as well as their experiences in everyday life related to the traditional leadership structure. They play an important role in providing insights into social practices and leadership dynamics in a society still adhering to a patrilineal kinship system. This study focuses on analyzing the role of women in the leadership dynamics in Penglipuran Village, Bali. The research was conducted by visiting Penglipuran Village in Kubu Village, Bangli District, Bangli Regency, Bali Province.

Data was collected through direct interviews with the two native community members of Penglipuran Village, Nyoman Suadnya and Dwi Aksara. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and categorized for analysis. The interview recordings are documentation to ensure data accuracy and can be reviewed if any errors occur. The data obtained includes direct data from interviews, field observations, and documentation. Additional secondary data was gathered from literature studies, articles, online media, and other sources to support the primary data.

The data analysis technique used was qualitative data analysis, starting with data collection to gather and record information relevant to the research problem. Then, data reduction was performed by selecting, simplifying, and modifying the interview data. The reduced data were analyzed using the theory applied in this study. Subsequently, data presentation was made by reporting the findings of the data and information. The final stage involves drawing conclusions and verifying by comparing the statements of the research subjects with the meaning contained in the relevant basic concepts related to the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

Based on research on the role of women in leadership in Penglipuran Village, Bali, it was explained that women do not hold leadership positions in Penglipuran Village, and there has never been a woman in such a role. In addition to the position of village leader, women also do not hold positions in other leadership structures, either in the prajuru Desa Adat or prajuru Ulu Apad. This is because Bali adheres

to the Purusha and prana customary laws, which are still in effect today. Purusha means that men are the heirs, while pradana refers to women whose role is not that of an heir, thus preventing women from holding leadership positions in the village. As one informant explained:

"There has never been a woman who held the position. In Bali, we have Purusha, meaning that the heir is male. It is different from Minangkabau, where women are the heirs. In Java, men and women are the same. In Balinese tradition, a woman cannot become the village leader because the heir is male. This still holds today. So, in Penglipuran Village, Purusha is recognized, where men are the heirs, and pradana is for women, who cannot inherit (Informant, 2025)."

In addition to being heirs, men can hold leadership roles because they are responsible for each family's compound. In Penglipuran Village, each family selects one man to represent the family based on his readiness to take on significant responsibilities in the village. These representatives become part of the village's community representation body, called "perwakilan keluarga" (family representatives). Other male family members who are not chosen as family representatives become part of the "robangan" (support or executor group), such as the *seka gong* (gamelan players). Married men can join *seka baris* (dance group), *seka pecalang* (customary security unit), or *peratengan* (groups that assist in customary ceremonies or social activities in the village). As one informant mentioned:

"It is not possible for a woman to be the bendesa here. The logic is that the bendesa will definitely not be a woman. I can say this because the man is responsible for the compound. Each household has one representative. The family decides who is appointed to be the bendesa representative, based on who is ready because it is a big responsibility in the village. The rest are part of the robangan. So, *seka gong*, if they are married, they can be part of *seka baris*, *seka pecalang*, and can also join *peratengan* (Informant, 2025)."

The process of selecting the village leader or bendesa begins with a deliberation to determine the candidate chosen from the family representatives based on who is considered most suitable to lead the village. After the candidate for bendesa is agreed upon, a vote is held to elect the leader. This village leadership election, which emphasizes deliberation and community participation, reflects the democratic process within the traditional leadership structure in Penglipuran Village. The election of the bendesa is not based on lineage or unilateral decisions but is conducted through community consensus, considering the moral and social capabilities of the prospective leader. The elected bendesa will hold authority in customary matters, including leading and overseeing the execution of traditional ceremonies in Penglipuran Village. Family representatives are intermediaries between the bendesa's decisions and the family's actions, ensuring comprehensive communication from the village leadership structure to the community. As one informant explained:

"If it is the village leader first, they are chosen by the household representatives. They deliberate on who is the most suitable. The choice is made through voting. They have authority in customary matters; if there is a customary ceremony, they are in charge, and the community follows. For example, when a ceremony is held, once the higher-ups decide it, they will inform the family when the customary ceremony takes place (Informant, 2025)."

Women can hold leadership roles within the PKK organization in the village, where all members are women. This is managed by the sub-district office known as Kelurahan Kubu. Although women do not hold formal leadership positions in the village, they can still express their opinions and desires regarding the village structure and system through their male family representatives, who bring their views to the village forum. As one informant stated:

"There is PKK. The organization here is PKK, which is under the sub-district office. Here, it is known as Penglipuran Village, while the sub-district office is known as Kelurahan Kubu (Informant, 2025)."

The informant continued:

"But women can still express their desires to a man to be conveyed to the forum (Informant, 2025)."

Therefore, in the leadership structure of Penglipuran Village, women do not hold formal positions due to customary laws that designate men as the heirs and those responsible for the family or compound. Despite this, women still play a role in the dynamics of village leadership, such as expressing their opinions or aspirations for the village institution through male family representatives and participating in the election of village leaders through voting. This shows that women remain functionally involved, even though not structurally.

## Discussion

Balinese society, including the community of Penglipuran Village, still adheres to the patrilineal kinship system, where lineage is traced through the male side, and men are the heirs. At the same time, women are not entitled to inherit. The patrilineal kinship system in Balinese adat relates to material inheritance and non-material inheritance, such as responsibilities and obligations (Wedanti et al., 2023). The responsibilities and obligations refer to tasks that align with an individual's nature and role in society, which in Hinduism is called *swadharma*. As the descendants, men continue the *swadharma* of their parents, allowing them to be chosen as heirs.

The nurture theory explains that the absence of women in the leadership structure of Penglipuran Village is the result of a long-standing social and cultural construction in Bali. The majority of Balinese people follow Hinduism. The norms and rules are based on the Balinese cultural ideology, which is influenced by Hindu teachings (Wiasti in Widayani & Hartati, 2014). The concepts of *purusha* and *pradana* differentiate men and women in Balinese society. *Purusha* refers to everything related to men, and *pradana* refers to everything related to women (Wijaya and Dewi, 2023). This concept has led the Penglipuran community to adopt a patriarchal culture (Wiasti in Widayani & Hartati, 2014). The community of Penglipuran Village also follows a patrilineal kinship system, where men, as heirs, can represent the family or *karang*. In every household, one man is chosen to take on the significant responsibility of being a family representative in the adat village, while women, not being heirs, do not have the same opportunity. As a result, women have not held positions in the leadership structure of the adat village (Priyatna, 2016).

The development of adat villages will be hindered without active participation from women. Traditions and cultural preservation in adat villages cannot be upheld solely by the contributions of men (Wijaya and Dewi, 2023). Women's roles remain important in the adat village (Manembu, 2018). It has been explained that customary law regulates women not having formal positions in the leadership structure of Penglipuran Village. However, this does not entirely exclude women from the leadership dynamics. Women can still voice their views and aspirations to the village forum or decision-making body through male family representatives (Widjaya et al., 2016).

Additionally, women are still involved in the democratic aspects of village governance, such as participating in the election of village leaders or bendesa by casting their votes. This shows that women continue to play a functional role in the leadership dynamics of Penglipuran Village. Women's involvement remains crucial in influencing policy and village development while preserving traditions and culture (Sonia & Sarwoprasodjo, 2020).

Using the nurture theory, it can be analyzed that women's lack of involvement in the leadership structure of Penglipuran Village results from social and cultural construction, where the adat law has been passed down through generations, establishing men as heirs and rightful village leaders, not women. This is not due to biological factors or women's inability to lead but because of the social culture embraced by Penglipuran Village. The continued role of women in the leadership dynamics, albeit limited, is a result of their socialization since childhood with cultural values that have been accepted, allowing them to play roles deemed appropriate and by adat norms and laws.

## CONCLUSION

The village's customary leadership structure is still heavily influenced by the patrilineal kinship system, which places men as heirs and the primary bearers of responsibility in customary matters. The values of *purusha* and *pradana*, which form the basis of Balinese customary law, indirectly limit women from holding strategic positions in formal leadership, such as the bendesa adat or village prajuru. This is not based on women's inability but rather the result of a deeply ingrained social and cultural construction passed down through generations.

Nevertheless, women still play a functional role in the village leadership dynamics. They can voice their aspirations through male family representatives and participate in democratic processes like the election of the bendesa through voting mechanisms. Women are also active in organizations such as the PKK (Family Welfare Program), which operates under the subdistrict structure, not the adat village structure. This shows that while women's roles have not been structurally recognized in customary leadership, they still contribute socially to decision-making and cultural preservation in the village.

Through the lens of nurture theory, it can be understood that the lack of women's involvement in leadership is not solely due to biological factors but rather the result of the norms and social values shaped within a patriarchal cultural environment. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the role of women in the adat village require not only structural change but also a transformation in the collective consciousness of society regarding the importance of equality and inclusiveness in the local leadership system.

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