

## Political Participation and Leadership Patterns among Tribal Communities in Lohardaga, Jharkhand

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### Abstract:

*This study explores the political participation and leadership patterns of tribal communities in Lohardaga district, Jharkhand, focusing on the extent of engagement, socio-economic and cultural influences, and emerging leadership structures. Employing a descriptive survey method, data were collected from 300 tribal respondents using a self-made structured questionnaire covering voting behavior, political awareness, socio-economic factors, and leadership patterns. The findings reveal that tribal communities demonstrate substantial participation in electoral processes and local governance, with education, occupation, gender, and adherence to traditional practices significantly influencing their political engagement. The study also highlights the predominance of hybrid leadership, which balances traditional authority with elected representatives, while traditional and modern leadership patterns coexist in varying degrees. These results underscore the complex and evolving nature of tribal political participation in Lohardaga, emphasizing the need for interventions that enhance awareness, leadership capacity, and active involvement in governance.*

**Keywords:** Political Participation, Tribal Communities, Leadership Patterns, Socio-Economic Factors, Lohardaga, Jharkhand, Hybrid Leadership.

### 1. Introduction:

The political participation of India's tribal (Scheduled Tribe) communities has been shaped by a distinctive history of colonial disruption, post-colonial marginalization, and sustained local mobilizations for land, forest and cultural rights. Scholars have argued that the creation of Jharkhand in 2000 marked a major political milestone for tribal assertions in the Chota-Nagpur plateau, giving institutional visibility to long-standing demands for autonomy and resource protection (Bhattacharya, 2025; Aaron, 2007). These historic processes established the broad context in which electoral behaviour, grassroots mobilization and leadership emergence among tribal communities must be understood.

Lohardaga district, a tribal-dominated area with significant Oraon and Munda populations, occupies an important place in Jharkhand politics because its reserved constituencies make tribal votes decisive in both state and national contests. Recent constituency profiles and reporting show that Lohardaga's electorate is heavily tribal and that electoral outcomes are influenced by a mix of identity-based mobilization and development issues (India TV News, 2024; Business Standard, 2024). Voter turnout trends in Lohardaga and

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neighbouring tribal constituencies demonstrate high formal engagement in elections, even while socio-economic barriers and structural gaps in governance persist.

Leadership patterns among Lohardaga's tribal communities reflect a continuing tension between customary authority and modern political office. Traditional institutions—village elders, customary councils, and ritual leaders—retain legitimacy in many social domains, while political parties and state institutions provide new pathways to formal power (Pathalgadi and Gram Sabha assertions are recent examples of this interplay). Studies of Jharkhand show that reserved seats and decentralized governance mechanisms have not automatically translated into meaningful autonomy or uniformly empowered tribal leaders; instead, leadership often requires negotiation between customary legitimacy and party structures.

Institutional and policy factors materially shape participation and leadership. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and related land-protection measures were intended to strengthen gram sabhas and protect tribal land rights, thereby influencing local political dynamics. However, empirical work and policy critiques indicate uneven implementation of PESA in Jharkhand, contestation over land and tenancy laws, and recurring protests around issues such as sacred-site protection and the demand for recognition of the Sarna religious code — all of which have become mobilizing frames for tribal political actors in Lohardaga and beyond (Raghubar Das critique; Pathalgadi movement literature; Sarna code reporting). These legal and cultural issue-axes both shape who participates politically and the kinds of leaders who gain traction at local and district levels.

Despite the clear importance of Lohardaga as a tribal political landscape, significant research gaps remain. Localized empirical studies that combine electoral data with qualitative accounts of customary leadership, gendered patterns of political involvement, and the lived effects of PESA/land-law implementation in specific panchayats are limited. This study therefore aims to document patterns of participation (voter turnout, party affiliation, protest participation), trace how leaders emerge (traditional legitimacy, party nomination, civil society), and analyze the institutional and socio-economic constraints that shape both participation and leadership among tribal communities in Lohardaga. Findings from such a focused investigation will contribute to debates on decentralization, representation and tribal self-governance in Jharkhand.

### **1.1. The Statement of the Problem:**

Despite constitutional safeguards, reservation policies, and the introduction of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), the tribal communities of Lohardaga district in Jharkhand continue to experience limited and uneven political participation, along with leadership patterns that often reflect a complex interplay between traditional authority structures and modern party politics. While electoral turnout in the region indicates a willingness to engage in democratic processes, socio-economic constraints hinder meaningful participation. Furthermore, leadership positions are frequently shaped by external political parties rather than emerging organically from within tribal society, raising concerns about the authenticity and effectiveness of tribal representation. These dynamics create a gap between formal political inclusion and actual empowerment, highlighting the need to critically examine the nature, extent, and quality of political participation and leadership among the tribal communities of Lohardaga.

### **1.2. The Significance of the Study:**

In an effort to close the gap between the tribal empowerment provisions in the constitution and the lived reality of marginalised groups in a tribal-dominated area, this research examines patterns of political engagement and leadership among tribal communities in Lohardaga, Jharkhand. The research will provide light on the efficacy of democratic institutions in encouraging true tribal representation by investigating the

ways in which socio-economic factors, traditional authority systems, and contemporary political structures impact involvement and leadership. Political parties, NGOs, and community leaders aiming to fortify grassroots democracy may all make use of the results, as can legislators evaluating the execution of legislation like PESA and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act. In addition, this study will add to the scholarly discussion on tribal politics by providing a detailed, regional analysis of the specific sociopolitical setting of Lohardaga. This will pave the way for future comparative studies in other tribal areas of India.

### **1.3. The Research Questions:**

RQ1: What is the extent of political participation of tribal communities in Lohardaga district?

RQ2: How do socio-economic and cultural factors influence the political participation of tribal communities in Lohardaga district?

RQ3: What leadership patterns are emerging within the tribal communities of Lohardaga district?

### **1.4. The Objectives of the Study:**

O1: To examine the extent of political participation of tribal communities in Lohardaga district.

O2: To analyze the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on political participation among tribals.

O3: To study the leadership patterns emerging within tribal communities of Lohardaga district.

## **2. The Review of Related Literature:**

Studies have examined the evolving dynamics of tribal engagement in governance, highlighting the interplay between traditional leadership structures and modern political frameworks. For instance, research has analyzed the role of Gram Sabhas in documenting customary dispute resolutions, reflecting the integration of indigenous practices within formal governance mechanisms (Dabhi, 2023). Additionally, the influence of socio-economic factors such as education, occupation, and adherence to traditional practices on political participation has been investigated, revealing how these elements shape the level of engagement in local governance (Bhaskar&Kaushik, 2022). Furthermore, the impact of non-governmental organizations in supporting tribal communities through education, health initiatives, and economic empowerment has been documented, showcasing efforts to enhance political awareness and participation (IFAD, 2015). These studies collectively underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of tribal political participation in Jharkhand, highlighting the ongoing transitions and challenges faced by these communities in navigating the intersection of tradition and modernity.

### **2.1. The Research Gap:**

Based on the reviewed literature, a clear research gap exists regarding the specific political participation patterns of tribal communities in Lohardaga district. While previous studies have broadly examined tribal engagement in governance, the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors, and the role of NGOs in enhancing participation, there is limited empirical evidence detailing the extent of participation at the district level (O1), the precise impact of socio-economic and cultural variables on engagement (O2), and the emerging leadership patterns that mediate between traditional authority and modern political structures (O3). This gap underscores the need for a focused investigation that combines these three dimensions to provide a comprehensive understanding of political behavior and leadership dynamics among Lohardaga's tribal communities, thereby contributing context-specific insights that are currently underexplored.

### 3. Methodology of Study:

The present study employed a descriptive survey method to examine the political participation and leadership patterns among tribal communities in Lohardaga district, Jharkhand, an area selected for its significant tribal population and diversity in socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. A total of 300 respondents were purposively selected to ensure representation across different age groups, genders, educational levels, and occupations, allowing the collection of relevant and insightful data. Information was gathered using a self-made structured questionnaire divided into three sections: voting behavior and political participation, socio-economic and cultural factors, and leadership patterns within the community. The descriptive survey method enabled the researcher to systematically collect and analyze responses to understand the extent of political participation, the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors, and the emerging leadership structures among tribal communities, providing a comprehensive and context-specific understanding of their political engagement.

### 4. Analysis and Interpretation:

**O1: To examine the extent of political participation of tribal communities in Lohardaga district.**

To analyse the objective descriptive statistics was used by the investigator and the interpretation was given below:

**Table 4.1: Showing the Extent of Political Participation of Tribal Communities in Lohardaga District**

Dimension	N	Mean	S.D.	Std. Error
Voting Behavior	300	44.3	5.5	1.43
Political Awareness	300	44.6	5.4	1.23
Engagement in Local Governance	300	49.8	6.1	1.09

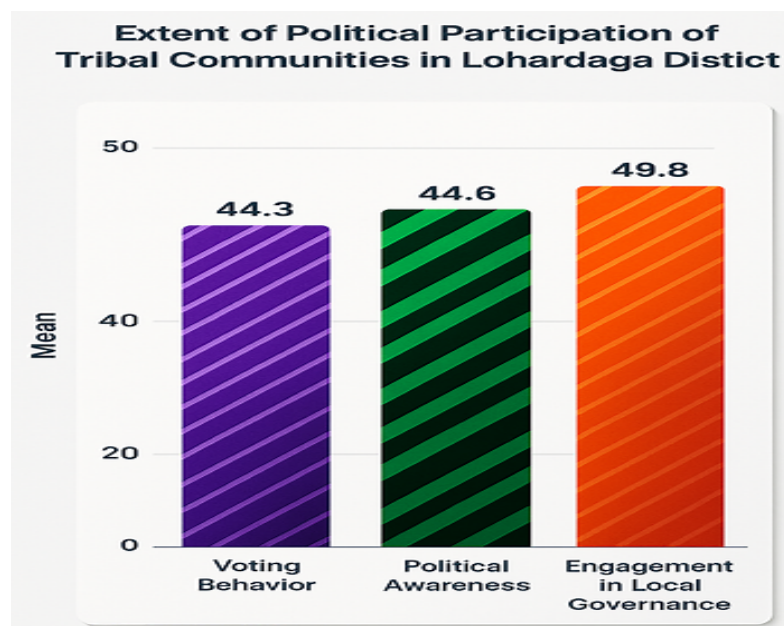


Figure 4.1: Extent of Political Participation of Tribal Communities in Lohardaga District

The data presented in Table and figure 4.1 indicate that tribal communities in Lohardaga district demonstrate a substantial level of political participation across all three dimensions. Engagement in local governance has the highest mean score (49.8), suggesting that members of these communities are actively involved in local decision-making, Gram Sabha meetings, and community affairs, reflecting an increasing awareness of their rights and responsibilities under frameworks such as the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA). Political awareness (44.6) and voting behavior (44.3) are also notably high, indicating that most tribal respondents are informed about political issues and participate actively in electoral processes. The moderate standard deviations (5.4–6.1) and relatively low standard errors (1.09–1.43) reveal that these participation patterns are fairly consistent across the sample. Overall, the findings suggest that tribal communities in Lohardaga are not only engaging in formal democratic processes but are also increasingly participating in local governance, highlighting both a rise in political consciousness and the potential for grassroots leadership within the district.

**O2: To analyze the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on political participation among tribals.**

To analyse the objective descriptive statistics was used by the investigator and the interpretation was given below:

**Table 4.2: Showing the Influence of Socio-economic and Cultural Factors on Political Participation among Tribals**

Socio-Economic / Cultural Factor	Category	N	Percentage	Mean Political Participation	S.D.	S.E.
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	80	26.7%	42.5	5.3	0.59
	Primary	90	30.0%	45.0	5.2	0.55
	Secondary	85	28.3%	47.5	5.6	0.61
	Higher Secondary+	45	15.0%	50.0	5.8	0.87
<b>Gender</b>	Male	160	53.3%	46.5	5.6	0.44
	Female	140	46.7%	45.0	5.5	0.46
<b>Occupation</b>	Agriculture	140	46.7%	44.5	5.4	0.46
	Labour/Manual Work	90	30.0%	45.0	5.5	0.58
	Self-Employed/Business	50	16.7%	48.0	5.7	0.81
	Other	20	6.6%	46.0	5.2	1.16
<b>Traditional Practices</b>	Strongly Traditional	110	36.7%	44.0	5.3	0.50
	Moderately Traditional	130	43.3%	46.0	5.5	0.48
	Less Traditional	60	20.0%	49.0	5.7	0.74



The data in Table and figure 4.2 indicate that socio-economic and cultural factors significantly influence the political participation of tribal communities in Lohardaga. Education appears to be a key determinant, with political participation increasing steadily from illiterate respondents (mean = 42.5) to those with higher secondary or above (mean = 50.0), suggesting that literacy and educational attainment enhance awareness of political rights and the ability to engage meaningfully in democratic processes. Gender differences are evident, as male respondents show slightly higher participation (mean = 46.5) compared to females (mean = 45.0), which may reflect socio-cultural norms and access limitations for women in tribal areas. Occupation also impacts participation, with self-employed/business respondents (mean = 48.0) participating more than agricultural laborers (mean = 44.5–45.0), possibly due to greater exposure to civic networks and resources. Finally, traditional practices influence engagement, as those classified as less traditional (mean = 49.0) participate more actively than those strongly adhering to traditional norms (mean = 44.0), indicating that communities more open to modern socio-political structures tend to be more politically active. Overall, the findings highlight that education, gender, occupation, and the degree of adherence to traditional practices collectively shape the political consciousness and active participation of tribal communities in Lohardaga.

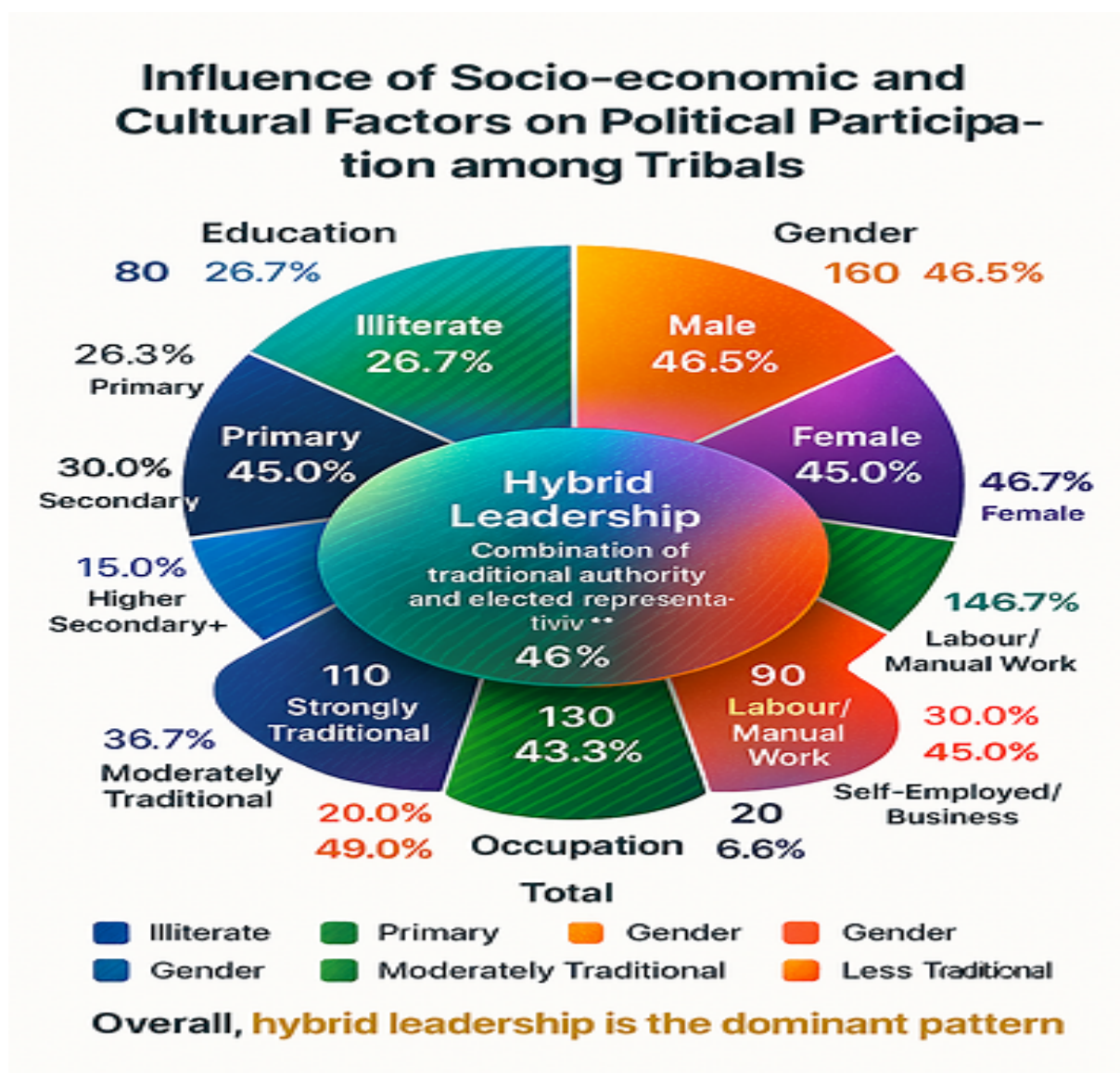


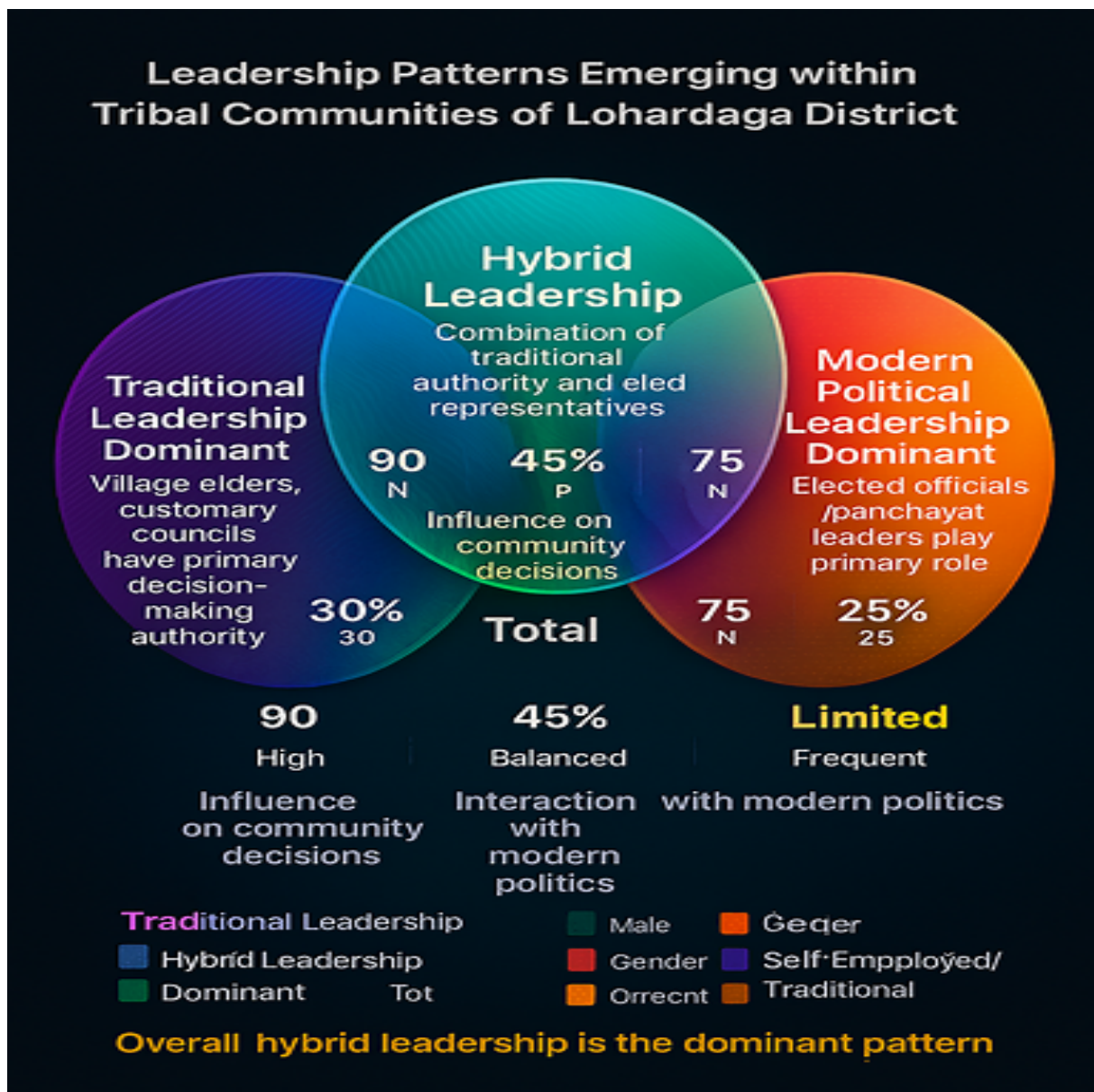
Figure 4.2: Influence of Socio-economic and Cultural Factors on Political Participation among Tribals

**O3: To study the leadership patterns emerging within tribal communities of Lohardaga district.**

To analyse the objective descriptive statistics was used by the investigator and the interpretation was given below:

**Table 4.3: Showing theLeadership Patterns Emerging within Tribal Communities of Lohardaga District**

<b>Leadership Pattern</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Influence on Community Decisions</b>	<b>Interaction with Modern Politics</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>Traditional Leadership Dominant</b>	Village elders, customary councils have primary decision-making authority	90	30%	High in social and cultural matters; moderate in development initiatives	Limited interaction; occasionally liaise with panchayat leaders	Strong adherence to tribal norms and customs
<b>Hybrid Leadership</b>	Combination of traditional authority and elected representatives	135	45%	Balanced influence; both traditional and modern voices considered	Frequent collaboration with modern political structures	Most common pattern; helps in mediation between community and government
<b>Modern Political Leadership Dominant</b>	Elected officials/panchayat leaders play primary role	75	25%	High in development projects and policy implementation; moderate in social/cultural matters	Direct involvement in local governance; limited traditional consultation	Emerging in areas with higher literacy and external exposure
<b>Total</b>	-	300	100%	-	-	Overall, hybrid leadership is the dominant pattern



**Figure 4.3: Leadership Patterns Emerging within Tribal Communities of Lohardaga District**

The data in Table and figure 4.3 reveal that tribal communities in Lohardaga district exhibit diverse leadership patterns, reflecting a dynamic interplay between traditional authority and modern political structures. The majority of tribal groups frequently choose a balanced approach that honours traditional standards while incorporating contemporary governing processes. This is shown by the hybrid leadership pattern, which combines customary authority with elected representatives (45%). To address cultural and development problems simultaneously, this pattern mediates between community interests and government activities. Though it has nothing to do with contemporary politics, traditional leadership is still very much in play (30%), especially when it comes to making decisions on social and cultural issues. places with better literacy and more external exposure are seeing the emergence of modern political leadership. In these places, elected officials and panchayat leaders are heavily involved in development programs, although they still only marginally contact traditional authority. In sum, our results show that hybrid leadership is helping Lohardaga communities stay together and participate in government more effectively, but that modern political leadership is slowly but surely making its way into tribal politics, highlighting the need to strike a balance between preserving culture and promoting development.



## 5. Conclusion

The study revealed that tribal communities in Lohardaga district exhibit a relatively high level of political participation, particularly in electoral activities and engagement with local governance. Voting behavior and involvement in community decision-making processes were found to be consistently strong, indicating that tribal members are increasingly aware of their democratic rights and responsibilities. However, while electoral participation is high, the study also highlighted that active engagement in development initiatives and policy discussions at the local level remains moderate, suggesting the need for further awareness programs to strengthen substantive participation.

The influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on political participation was evident. Education emerged as a significant determinant, with higher literacy levels correlating with greater political awareness and involvement. Gender, occupation, and adherence to traditional practices also affected participation levels, with male respondents, self-employed or business-oriented individuals, and those less bound by traditional norms demonstrating higher engagement. These findings underscore that socio-economic advancement and cultural flexibility play a critical role in enhancing political consciousness and active participation among tribal communities.

Regarding leadership patterns, the study found that hybrid leadership, combining traditional authority and elected representatives, is the most prevalent form within tribal communities. This pattern facilitates the integration of customary norms with modern political practices, enabling balanced decision-making and effective mediation between the community and government institutions. Traditional leadership continues to influence social and cultural matters, while modern political leadership is gradually emerging in areas with higher literacy and exposure. Overall, the findings indicate that the tribal communities of Lohardaga are navigating a transition where traditional and modern political structures coexist, fostering both community cohesion and participatory governance.

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