CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The word 'participation' has become a part of the common vocabulary these days. Although its ideational genesis can be traced back to the days of the classical Athenian culture, conscious interest and ideological excursions into the social desirability of participation started only after the liberal awakening of the seventeenth century. However, the concept of participation gained much currency during the last sixties under the impetus of political demands notably from students and other social activists in the western world. In recent years, there seems to be a worldwide consensus on the desirability of considering the participatory approach as a vehicle for transforming the world society into a participant democratic culture.

The global concern for the desirability of mass participation in development has emerged as a result of the widening gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in the various segments of the society in different nations, small and large alike. It has been realized that unless the masses are involved in the decision making and implementation of the development projects, the fruits of development cannot be equitably distributed among the various sections of the society. It is in this sense that the UN has identified mass involvement in decision making,
implementation and benefit sharing of the development as the basic ingredients of participation.

Despite global concern for involving the masses in the development process, the modalities of mass participation strategies continue to be the issues of debate. While some emphasize the importance of elite participation, others put greater weight on the role of the masses. A third line of thinking which is midway between the extremes is gradually evolving. Thus, the concept of participation contains three basic elements - participants, their meaningful activities, and the environment of social, economic and political imperatives in which they operate.

The central theme underlying the participant democratic culture is the smooth power sharing among various constituents of the society, from the central government to the local forums of people. People's participation in development becomes more meaningful and suitable at the local level where people can be brought in directly in the realms of decision-making and implementation process and thereby ensuring an equitable sharing of benefits.

Education is a means as well as a component of development. Therefore, emphasis on good education is of vital value. A good education is that which reflects the aspirations and faith of the citizens. This is possible if education becomes the embodiment of collective effort which becomes more meaningful at the community level. People of the community participate in education
when they find opportunity to exercise control and authority in decision making, implementation and sharing of benefits of the educational development in the community. It will facilitate not only the expansion of educational facilities but also the reaping of the fruits of those facilities by the local people.

In Nepal, the history of local-state partnership in modern education is of very recent origin. Participatory practices started with the emergence of democratic set up in 1951 following which a mushroom growth in the number of institutions was observed in the educational scene. In order to systematize educational growth and orientate it to the overall national development, the National Education System Plan was implemented in 1971. The plan brought a basic change in the prevailing system of educational practices. As the plan was in operation, some problems of school management and involvement of local people started to shoot up and complaints concerning the lack of local initiative in the operation of educational institutions started being aired particularly by government officials and politicians.

However, such concerns have been based mostly on impressionistic observations. There is a dire paucity of empirical research studies with scientific rigour. Although a few available studies indicate that experience with the NESP has not been very pleasant, yet the studies relating to the village level participatory practices in the development of education are
completely lacking. Therefore, the need for research studies is seriously felt. At this juncture, the study of people's participation in education assumes significance.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to make an empirical study of people's participation in education in the village communities of Nepal. It was proposed to study the environment of participation, people's involvement in informal participatory activities in education and their perception of the local educational institutions, school enrolment in the community, monetary and labour donation practices for the implementation of educational facilities, participative forums and their working, villagers' involvement in participative forums, their desire for participation, perception of the participative forums and the relationship between socio-personal factors and participation in education in a comparative perspective.

The Design of the Study

The design of the study was basically non-experimental. However, it sought to examine the relationships between the socio-personal factors of the individual and his participatory activities in education. This was deemed desirable because the factors being related with the larger socio-politico-economic structure of the society could shed some light on the societal determinants of participatory behaviour in the educational enterprise.
The study was conducted in two village panchayat localities belonging to the Far Western Development Region of Nepal. The selection of the localities was made on the basis of their being exemplars in the development of education in their respective districts both in terms of the number of institutions and history of educational growth. The two localities belonged to two geographical regions – one in the Hill and the other in the Tarai. This provided an opportunity to make a comparative study of people’s participation in two different communities.

The selection of the respondents was based on a stratified random sampling which included only the heads of the families because basic unit of the villagers life in traditional societies is the family and important decisions are made mostly by the head of the family.

During the preliminary survey, a comprehensive list of the names of the heads of the families was prepared for all villages in each of the two panchayat localities. The names of female heads of families were deleted in view of the practical difficulties with such respondents. The final list was arranged in alphabetical order and every tenth name was selected randomly. Thus, the sample comprised about 10 per cent of the total households of which 80 belonged to the Hill and 70 to the Tarai locality. In addition to this, all of the school committee members were selected for the study. There were 22 school
committees members in each locality. Since 3 members in the Hill and 2 in the Tarai were included in the general sample, the total number of respondents in the Hill and Tarai locality were 99 and 90 respectively.

Data Collection

In the preliminary phase, an informal survey of the concerned localities was made in order to identify the main areas of participation that would constitute the core of the study. Following the survey, a study of relevant documents comprising mainly publications of the government and related agencies was made. In the light of the observation and study, an interview schedule was developed for the collection of relevant information. The schedule was first tried out on a small sample comprising people from both localities and the selection of the final form was made on the basis of the preliminary analysis. The final interview schedule had two forms one each for the general people and the members of the school committees.

The interview schedule was administered by the researcher himself in face-to-face contact sessions and responses were recorded verbatim. While interviewing, the emphasis was on making the respondent feel free and relaxed. The interviews were conducted individually with each respondent in his own mother tongue. The interviews were conducted during January-June 1982.

During field survey, almost all the school and panchayat
meetings and functions were attended and observations of the proceedings were made for supplementary information. A comprehensive study of the relevant available records of the schools and panchayats was made in order to seek information regarding institutional participation in education.

Analysis of the Data

The processing and tabulation of the data was made manually by the researcher himself. An electronic calculator was used for statistical calculations. Extensive use of Chi-square tests of significance was made to seek associations between the relevant variables. The rank-difference correlation test was also used on quite a few occasions.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Environment and Historical Perspective of Participation

The Nepalese society has been undergoing rapid change during the last few decades in several aspects. Its economy is heavily dominated by agriculture. The physical structure of the country has significant effects on the socio-economic and political life of the people. Nepal has emerged from the clutches of the feudal Ranas in 1951 and has been under the partyless panchayat system under the direct leadership of the king since 1960. There has been a heterogeneity of languages and cultures. The social stratification was sought to be modified through the
enactment of new civil code which was symbolic of the gradual incursion of socio-economic classes in a casts dominated society. However, the educational sector has been slowly emerging in the country. In 1980, there were a total of 10130 primary, 4296 secondary and 88 higher educational institutions with enrolments of 1057912, 512434 and 38490 students at each level of education. Education has become the largest organization in the country.

In Nepal, educational affairs of the community has been matters of public interest in the early days. The ancient educational institutions slowly disappeared and pace of educational development remained obstructed partly by the geopolitical position of the country and partly by the neglect and opposition of the rulers until the liberal awakening in the middle of the twentieth century when Nepal entered the age of modernization. It was only after the advent of democracy that conscious and committed efforts for popular education started to take place at local level. People of the community started to establish educational institutions and manage them according to the local conditions. The new government, realizing the popular enthusiasm, adopted a liberal policy of recognizing and extending cooperation both in terms of possible financial and technical support. The number of educational institutions and enrolments grew tremendously in the years following the advent of democracy in 1951. The political and social activists were the main sources of inspiration in the infusion of popular enthusiasm.
With the introduction of the panchayat system, a ban was imposed on political and social organizations. Although several campaigns were launched in the beginning in order to infuse enthusiasm and morale among the people, later developments in the country showed that public initiative at the local level had considerably diminished. Rules and regulations remained changing and a state of confusion and uncertainty continued to prevail. However, most educational institutions remained to be managed by the local people although government maintained the policy of partial assistance to local institutions.

A committed effort towards educational modernization in the country appeared in the form of the National Education System Plan at the start of the seventies. The plan was implemented in order to end the confusion and uncertainty prevailing throughout the preceding decade. However, in a hurry to implement the plan, the government could not pay adequate attention to the prevailing local practices in the area of public initiative and participation. It gave a general impression to the people that the government had nationalized the system of education in the country. The NESP had many brighter aspects as well. The number of educational institutions and enrolments have considerably increased after the implementation of the NESP. However, the greatest charge labelled against the NESP was that it had rendered the system highly centralized. It had minimized the role of the local level institutions in the development of education in the community.
The 1979's nationwide unrest had again turned the course of educational management in the country. The local school bodies were given more autonomy and control. However, its implications are yet to be seen.

**The Village Setting**

The village setting selected for the study comprised two panchayat localities - Sidheshwar Village Panchayat in the hills area and Sripur Village Panchayat in the plains of the Terai in the Far Western Development Region of Nepal.

The two village localities differed in their casts and cultural composition, economic wellbeing, exposure and native-migrant populations. The Hill locality was culturally homogenous comprised by almost equal distribution of the three native casts groups - Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Harijans. It was relatively closed from outside world and had a greater share of small farmers with a bare subsistence level of agricultural production. The Terai, on the other hand, was economically well-off with a large proportion of large farmers having comparatively greater exposure to some modern amenities of life, and had a culturally heterogenous population with varying ethnic background and nativity.

There were some common features also. Being a part of a larger traditional society predominantly based on agricultural
economy, both localities presented a similar mode of life and
distribution of education level, role position and age groupings
in the population. Moreover, both localities were similar
regarding the development of educational facilities and the
availability of other general welfare services within their
respective panchayat areas.

Informal Participation

People's informal participation in education was considered
to involve three basic informal activities. They were school
visits, talking about the school affairs in the community and
interaction with the relevant school authorities. The extent
of participation was studied by taking into account the frequency
of involvement in each of these activities. Finally the frequen-
cies were combined in order to provide a summed picture of
informal participation. An attempt was also made to examine
informal participation in relation to people's perception of
the local school programme. The major findings were as follows.

People's involvement in the three forms of informal
activities in education was found to be moderate and almost
similar in both localities. However, participation in each of
these categories varied significantly with respect to the socio-
personal characteristics of the people. The overall picture of
informal participation showed that general level of participation
was not very intensive although it was not negligible. The level
of participation was found to be significantly associated with the sociopersonal characteristics viz. education level, role position and landholding of the respondents. Thus, informal participation in education was functionally dependent upon the socio-economic background of the people. Participation appeared to be largely determined by caste status particularly in the Hill locality. The participation of the lower castes was virtually negligible which indicated that they were completely alienated from the local school programmes. This state-of-affairs was to a large extent determined by the social structure of the community.

In general, people's perception of the local school was not much favourable. Majority of them were either dissatisfied with or ignorant and indifferent towards the instructional effectiveness and services rendered by the school to the community. The level of participation significantly varied with the perception of the school programmes. The indifferent and ignorant people had very low level of participation.

School Enrolment

Participation in education was also considered in relation to children's school enrolment from the family. Proporionately large number of families were found not to send their children to school. Even then, the school enrolment had a large male preponderance. The socio-economic background of the parents was
discovered as the most significant determinant of school enrolment. Illiterate, landless and lower caste parents had a very low school enrolment from their families. However, the two localities significantly differed not only in the extent of enrolment but also in the nature of enrolment. The Terai locality was superior in both respects.

Most parents perceived the schooling of their children as a means for the betterment of life. However, the perception of the betterment of life appeared to differ. In the Hill, most of the people perceived schooling as a means of learning wisdom, smartness and consciousness. On the other hand, the Terai people perceived schooling mostly in terms of acquiring the practical vocational skills. Thus, the environmental factors appeared to shape the perceptions of schooling. It was found that the performance of the local school programme did not meet with the parental expectations of schooling. Parental reasons for non-enrolment were mostly related with economic condition of the family. Despite the availability of educational facilities in the community since long, very few families had benefitted from the local school programme. The school enrolment of children from the family was also found significantly associated with the previous schooling experience by any member in the family.

An increasing trend of school enrolment was discerned in both localities. Although girls enrolment was still very low,
yet the trend indicated a sharp rise in recent years. The growth rate in school enrolment was, however, greater at the secondary level. This indicated a greater rate of retention and inflow into the secondary stream. But participation in terms of school enrolment was, by and large, greater in the Tarai locality.

Donation of Money and Labour

Donations of money and labour for the implementation of the school facilities were found to have been organized at different times. However, systematically built-in schemes for raising donations to bolster the school programmes were virtually non-existent. Although donation campaigns had been frequently organized by local activists but they were mostly motivated to meet eventualities. The trend of fund-raising campaigns showed that there was an appreciable decline in local support during the preliminary stage of the MEER's implementation. A rise in local support in terms of fund-collection campaign was discerned during the later stage. In all the school areas within each panchayat locality the fund-collection campaigns were in progress during 1980-81. However, monetary donations were found to associate most significantly with the size of landholding although some differences was also noticeable with education level. In this respect, both localities were more or less similar.

The greatest contribution of the local people to the implementation of educational facilities was in terms of labour
donation. It was found that donation of labour was made irrespective of social and economic differentials in the community. Even the landless and illiterate people had equally participated in labour donation campaign although most of them had not benefitted from the school facilities.

Formal Participation

Formal participation in education was considered both in relation to the working of participative institutions and opportunities for participation.

It was found that the general participative forums were in the form of school functions and general meetings and they were only nominal forums of participation. The activities in these forums were only ritual and did not provide any opportunity for meaningful participation.

There existed only two statutory participative institutions in the form of school committee and village panchayat. The village panchayat members had representation in the school committees. The educational regulations provided two types of members in the school committee, namely, nominated and ex-officio.

The analysis of the working of the school committees and panchayats showed that most frequent issues of their concern were related with the raising of financial and labour resources for the construction of school plant. However, the period-wise
comparison revealed that not only the decision making power of the committee but also the size of local representation had considerably reduced after the implementation of the NESP. A sizable proportion of the decisions was related with either seeking permission or putting demand for supplying adequate number of teachers and funds for the operation of schools. The matters relating to improving instructional environment and relations with the local community were found to have been never discussed. The role of panchayat as a supporting institution in the development of education in the community was found evolving in the Tarai locality only.

People's involvement in participatory forums was very low. Very few people attended school meetings or functions. Even then, the involvement significantly varied with the social and economic factors. The illiterate and poor people neither attended any functions nor meetings. The masses were completely detached from institutional participation. About 3 to 4 per cent of the total households had membership in the school committee. The educational institutions had no programme to involve the local people in the development of education in the community. Institutions like parent-teacher association, school-community club were non-existent. Although the committee members could be regarded as well-off with respect to the general condition of
life in their respective communities, their involvement in committee affairs was mostly confined to attending meetings only.

People's preferences regarding the nature of membership were largely in favour of elected membership although most of them had no desire for acquiring membership nor participating in decision making at the school committee level.

Most people of the village communities considered the school committees as moderately effective in the management of their respective schools. However, the role of the panchayat as an effective institution in the development of education in the community appeared to be appreciated in the Terai locality only. The people in the Hill locality considered the panchayat utterly ineffective.

CONCLUSION

This study has focussed on an investigation of people's participation in the development of education in the village communities of Nepal. The analysis has centred around the three ingredients of participation viz., involvement in decision making, implementation and sharing of benefits of the development of educational facilities in the community. Being a study of two selected village localities, the results may not have a wider
applicability but they present, at least, some glimpses of the contemporary participatory practices in the development of education in the country.

So far as the decision making is concerned, the results show that the structure of the participatory initiatives do not provide any meaningful opportunity for broad participation. There is an information gap between the participative institutions and the common man. The participation base is very narrow. People at large have no opportunity to express their views through formalized forums of participation. The institutional forums have only assisting roles in the mobilization of local resources in the form of donations of money as well as labour. They do not have any mandatory powers in the management of local schools. It can be said that such experimentation in the field of education has contributed to the state of confusion and uncertainty and hindered the institutionalization of local participatory practices. In this connection, the factor of political change turned out to be a dominant one.

The existing school programmes seem to be suited to the needs of the economically well-off people. The poor and illiterate people have been deprived of the opportunity to take advantage of the educational facilities in the community. The existing educational institutions have no alternative programmes to suit the local conditions. The poor people
cannot afford to spare their children from domestic work. Thus, participation in the sharing of benefits is largely conditioned by the socio-economic structure of the society. The significant association between the socio-personal factors like education level, role position and landholding substantiates this conclusion. In fact, the existing social system tends to perpetuate this relationship. Unless the people in the lower strata do not find opportunity in the sharing of benefits, they cannot participate meaningfully in the educational enterprise. The school programme has to devise suitable alternative structures to reach to the door of the destitute.

Most extensive participation of the local people is in the implementation of the educational facilities in the community. Even the landless and poor people have equally participated in the donation campaigns, especially labour donation, irrespective of the opportunities of taking advantage from the local educational facilities.

Involvement of the local people in the decision making and implementation of educational facilities in the community presents a more or less similar picture in both cases. However, the greater involvement in the Tarai shows that Tarai's people have comparatively benefitted by the educational facilities. But this seems to be more related with the economic condition of the people than with the structure of the educational programmes.
Thus, the results indicate a picture of a traditional society where education is playing the traditional role of perpetuating the existing structures and values. If education has to be a harbinger of development in the country, the existing educational policies and programmes should be structured in such a way that they provide the meaningful opportunity for mass involvement not only in implementation but also in decision making and thereby providing the opportunity for the sharing of benefits of the educational development in the community.