CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
Participatory development is a recurring theme in the contemporary development debates and a critical concern in the planning and conceptualisation of socio-economic programmes in the Third World. In the preceding chapters, an attempt has been made to analyse the evolution and dynamics of participatory development within a political economy framework against the backdrop of the shift in the paradigm of development strategy from Keynesianism to neoliberalism. Though projected as a "radical alternative" to the mainstream growth path, participatory development has always been an adjunct of the dominant economic philosophy, particularly since Keynesianism had come to stay. Known in various synonyms such as "community involvement," "people's participation," "grassroots initiative," "empowerment," "local or micro level planning", "decentralised development," etc., the concept has been in vogue in relation to development from very early times. However, no serious attempt has been made to explore the theoretical and strategic links between participatory development and the mainstream growth trajectory in a historical perspective. This study, thus, becomes relevant in its specific conceptualisation on the paradigm of participatory development in the context of the transition in international political
economy from Keynesianism (welfare capitalism) to neoliberalism (monetarism).

The study begins by attempting to focus on some genuine initiatives and perspectives which had been relevant to the discourse on participatory development during the welfare era. At first, the Gandhian vision of development, which sought a reorientation of the village communities so as to ensure the participation of direct producers in social life, was identified as an outstanding contribution from the Third World. Of particular significance is Gandhi’s critique and well-articulated alternative to the Western model of ‘industrialism’ in which the emphasis was on the local village community. In fact, the Gandhian thinking, including the concept of swadeshi had been a political alternative, which was very much noted for its anti-colonial undercurrents. Gandhi was perhaps the first national leader who posed the problem of an alternative to the Western model of development. However, as the study puts across, the emerging neoliberal discourse on participatory development, which often deploys Gandhi into the center-stage of discussion, seems to underscore only the romantic and revivalist traditions associated with the name of Gandhi, thereby disregarding the anti-colonial content of Gandhian political economy. However, the neo-Gandhian version, which interprets Gandhi in an unhistorical and dogmatic fashion, has
become useful for neoliberal agencies in their new-found interest in the local communities and opposition to state-led development.

A similar trend is seen in the mediation of Paulo Freire too in the discourse on participatory development. Freire had developed his praxis or methods of "action and reflection" as critical instruments of people's struggle in the specific historical and cultural contexts of Latin America. He was against the populist use of his methodologies elsewhere. However, the neoliberal agencies, which have popularised participatory development, have often invoked Freirean conscientisation methods for refining their methodologies such as PRA. As argued in this study, neoliberal institutions frequently deploy Freire (as in the case of Gandhi), co-opting and distorting his ideas for giving legitimacy to their global participatory experiments.

Looking at from a historical perspective, participatory development has been an essential ingredient in the development thinking that evolved parallel to the decolonisation, which set in following the Second World War. Some form of community involvement and people's participation was indispensable for mobilising the support of local people and for ensuring the sustainability of projects, which were established as part of the state-led national development strategy put forward by Keynesianism. As acknowledged by the UN,
the participatory efforts attempted during this period were consistent with the legitimising requirements of the welfare state, rather than being an instrument of social change. Though the declared objective of the UN-sponsored bottom-up initiatives had been the achievement of a better correspondence between human needs, on the one hand, and social polices, on the other, the United States involvement often created systematic blockade in the path of such initiatives. As manifested through the various community development projects sponsored by US donor agencies such as Ford Foundation and USAID, the agenda was to use these participatory initiatives as a containment policy to halt the advance of communism or radical alternatives. The Community Development Project (CDP) in India initiated by the Ford Foundation and USAID could be good examples. Originating in the cold war imperatives of US global interests, as pointed out by the Ford Foundation itself, the CDP was part of a broader global capitalist search for a non-communist path of Third World development. Obviously, one of the outcomes of CDP and similar other foreign sponsored participatory experiments has been the replication in the Third World of the ideas and organisational techniques developed in the Western social research institutions.

Notwithstanding these aspects, the state provision of social services had been an inalienable component of the development agenda during
the welfare era. As such, the erstwhile institutional participatory
efforts were intended to supplement the developmental activities of
the welfare state. This is manifested in the unified approach to
development conceived by the UN Development Decades, which
visualised economic development and social advancement as two
sides of the same coin. Thus, the mainstream development theories
did not encourage the separation between the sphere of development
from that of welfare. This approach was also discernible in the “Basic
Needs Programme” proposed by the World Bank towards the end of
the Keynesian era.

However, as the study points out, the stagflation in the global
economy in the 1970s called for fundamental rethinking in the West,
which eventually led to the abandonment of welfare state. It further
warranted a transformation in development strategy itself. This
transition has taken place from the realm of Keynesian welfare agenda
to the paradigm of participatory development resulting in a rollback of
the state from the sphere of social welfare. The ideology of social
partnership or compromise between capital and labour which
prevailed under Keynesianism has become non-viable and redundant
in the overall context of the emerging economic crisis and the relative
weakness of the radical and working class movements at a global
level. In the changed scenario, it was quite easy for the New Right,
which characterised the profligacy of public spending as the root cause of the crisis, to argue for a withdrawal of the paternalistic state from social services. Thus, relegating the social development visions envisaged in the Second UN Development Decade, neoliberal institutions began to re-orient the concept of participatory development as an ‘alternative’ to the now defunct welfare state.

Evidently, when Thatcherism and Reaganomics were revitalised in the Third World through globalisation, participatory development also became a corollary of it. The term participatory development, while enhanced the prestige of NGOs and NSMs in society, also led to the gradual demise of the idea of state-led national development in the mainstream growth strategy. The rapid growth of NGOs in recent years and their growing clout in national and international affairs parallel the intensification of neoliberal globalisation. As a manifestation of this, since the 1980s, neoliberal agencies such as the World Bank, USAID and OECD have begun to channel funds for social welfare and development projects through NGOs and other civil society organisations bypassing the organs of the state. Having been acclaimed as the crucial civil society actors in the globalised world, the NGOs are found to be better equipped to carry out this participatory agenda. In accordance with the “country programming” approach, as against the earlier “project” approach, pursued by the
World Bank in its funding, the neoliberal conceptualisation on participatory development has also undergone expansion from the micro terrain of participation in individual projects to the macro terrain of widespread citizen participation at the national level.

The rollback of the welfare state and the conceptual shift in participatory development are also linked to a perceived transformation of capitalism - from industrial/Fordist to post-industrial/post-Fordist. It has been argued that post-Fordist developments in technology and the consequent changes in the organisation of work, including a flexible division of labour, have brought forward increased reliance on non-state actors and renewed emphasis on citizen participation in the regulation of social life. Flexible specialisation and weakening of the collective bargaining power of labour have led to a fragmentation of the collectivised and universalised welfare provision. Thus, post-Fordism acting as the organisational basis of neoliberal political economy has facilitated a dialectical relation between globalisation of the economy, on the one hand, and localisation and fragmentation of welfare, on the other.

The rise of NGO-led participatory development and the collapse of the idea of state-led national development are also linked with the evolution of the concept of post-development characterised by a high degree of pessimism in matters pertaining to the whole project of
development. Originating as a variant of the postmodern or poststructuralist critique of development and exemplifying an agnosticism and loss of faith in the central paradigms of development, post-development also seems to be embracing notions of participatory development.

All these developments can be seen as inseparably linked with the new concerns in social theory and the emerging ideological and cultural trends in society. Obviously, postmodernism and its extensions in social theory - which deny the primacy of political economy - emphasising culture would form the theoretical basis of this transformation. Postmodern or post-Marxist insistence on 'difference' and 'fragmentation,' and disillusionment with state solutions to social welfare and economic development have contributed much in posing participatory development as a "radical alternative." In other words, the conceptualisation of participatory development is facilitated by the postmodern distrust of meta-narratives and the consequent orientation to cultural identity and local diversity. Postmodernism and post-Marxism support a new discourse on welfare which is based on small-scale and grassroots efforts. This has become very much acceptable to the neoliberals and neoconservatives, as it would fragment opposition and divide sites of resistance against global capital. Being a philosophical stream which
holds the biggest appeal for fragmented, decentralised and flexible ideology, postmodernism no longer places the state at the center of social policymaking and delivery. Logically, it was easy for the participatory discourse thus evolved to overlook the centrality of class divisions and collectivised welfare provision by the state.

As argued in the study, the integral link between participatory development and postmodernism becomes all the more significant in the context of the attempt to interpret the latter as the 'midwife' of an alternative paradigm to the defunct welfare state. Of particular significance here is the tendency to envisage new forms of action with a cultural and local orientation as participatory development. The "new politics" based on culturally constructed identities espoused by NGOs and NSMs arguing for a replacement of the traditional class-based statist politics and action is an instance. Rooted in the Foucaultian rethinking of the state and conceptualisation of micropolitics, this new trend seeks to characterise the whole epistemological foundations of Enlightenment and Modernity as obstacles to participatory politics. The consequent rhetoric on 'grassroots' and obsession with the 'particular' and 'local' have prompted neoliberalism to use the postmodern discourse for conceiving and formulating a fragmented and consumerised social policy replacing the universality of state provision of social services.
Through a deconstruction of the Left-Right polarity in the political sphere, postmodernism also envisions the neutralisation of the entire political spectrum. This has opened up new avenues for participatory development or people’s participation which may be devoid of any meaningful political content. And this has also led to the strange spectacle of both the Left and the Right becoming adherents of participatory development.

The move away from collective action and redistributitional politics represented by the erstwhile welfare state has other implications too. These relate to the recent conceptualisation and categorisation based on indigenous cultures and micro communities evolved by post-Marxists, postmodernists and post-development theorists of various persuasions. The discourse on Subaltern Studies or postcolonial studies is a variant of this trend. It is noted for its emphasis on structurally split polity, culturally diversified society and multiple histories as opposed to the so-called monistic and unitary character of society, polity, history and culture belonging to conventional analysis. Its orientation towards the ‘other,’ the ‘particular’ and the ‘local’ has also offered theoretical inputs to the conceptualisation of participatory development.

The emerging discourse on civil society and social capital as associated concepts of participatory development is also of crucial
significance. The World Bank, which has become a major advocate of civil society today, has characterised it as an ally of the market. Under neoliberalism, as the state is being rolled back and redefined in the Third World, the civil society composed of the private sector, NGOs and other grassroots actors is called upon to shoulder those functions formerly undertaken by the welfare state. Based as it has been on a neo-Gramscian interpretation, which disregards the dialectical and continuous relation between state and civil society, the discussion on civil society also takes place in the terrain of culture. Posing the civil society as the site of “radical and plural democratic struggles” against the “coercion and repression” by the state, neoliberalism gives the former a pivotal role in the discussion concerning an alternative based on voluntary and participatory initiatives. This glorification of civil society is also paralleled by the mystification associated with the concept of social capital, originally developed by neoliberal agencies and Western intellectuals and experts. Accordingly, one of the reasons for the economic backwardness in the Third World, as advanced by them, has been the lack of adequate social capital. Conversely, people’s participation in civil society, it has been argued, would generate the requisite social capital for development. While presenting social capital as the key concept in the strategy of development, the World Bank and other neoliberal agencies tend to ignore the questions pertaining to wider political economy such as the power and class
structure in society, global operations of capital, etc. Thus, the commitment to building up civil society and social capital is a part of the neoliberal policy of state's withdrawal from spheres of social development and welfare.

The new-found interest in religion as a source of social capital, which gets legitimacy through neoliberal institutions for mobilising, conscientising and organising people for participatory development is also a significant aspect taken up in the study. Similarly, the resuscitation of Third World cultures and traditions, including the idealisation of the past, should be viewed against the backdrop of the cultural imperatives of the neoliberal political economy project. In devising a people's alternative, neoliberalism seeks to revivify folklore traditions and religion-oriented local knowledge. As the study indicates, anthropology, on account of its inherent scope in drawing upon people's knowledge at the grassroots, has apparently become a legitimate tool in the methodology of participatory development. Here, the emerging concerns of social theory, including the current emphasis on the study of small segments of society rather than looking at the larger system as a totality, reinforce cultural dimensions of participatory development.

Thus, the operationalisation of the concept of participatory development in the current scenario finds expression through a wide
spectrum of socio-economic projects and programmes sustained by neoliberal institutions. The study of a cross-section of such participatory experiments run by NGOs, self-help groups, people's movements under different names and other civil society actors indicates that they deploy the techniques, tools and methodologies evolved by neoliberal institutions. The survey of the participatory initiatives in Afro-Asian–Latin American countries amply illustrates this fact.

As elucidated in the study, these participatory initiatives at different Third World sites draw resources - both financial and intellectual - from First World sources, including agencies and institutions that foster neoliberal strategies of development. The PPC of Kerala, which has often been held in high esteem as the most 'radical' and even unique among the various participatory experiments, is not an exception. A major part of the analysis in Chapter IV has been devoted to illustrating the crucial neoliberal links of the PPC. Evidently, the PPC played a significant role in indirectly strengthening neoliberal development strategies in Kerala, which aimed at rolling back the state from the provision of essential social services. It is on account of this that a vast spectrum of right-wing political forces in Kerala including the UDF also favours the Left-led PPC. An interesting case could be that of the World Bank-sponsored DPEP, which has
been an integral part of PPC under the LDF rule. Strikingly, this participatory project in primary education was mainly confined to the public sector educational institutions composed of government and government-aided schools, which provided education to the vast majority of the children in their mother tongue. The entire English medium education catering to the elite was totally excluded from DPEP. Following efforts to make primary education “child-centered, people-centric and participatory,” a massive exodus of students was recorded from DPEP schools in the public sector to English medium private schools. This led to a swelling in the number of what the World Bank calls “uneconomic” schools, on the one hand, and a manifold expansion in the number of self-financing elite-oriented private schools, on the other. As a consequence, thousands of primary school teachers were also put on the verge of retrenchment from government services. In a nutshell, this participatory education programme only facilitated the neoliberal policy of downsizing the state as well as commercialisation of primary education.

As documented in this study, the declared objective of participatory development was to use PPC for imparting a people’s dimension to the Kerala component of the Ninth Plan. However, since the central objective of the Ninth Plan had been “to deepen, broaden and accelerate” the second generation of neoliberal globalisation all over
India, this prognosis itself proved to be illusory. Perceptibly, the Ninth Plan could move only along the neoliberal direction whose basic parameters and broad guidelines were laid down by the Union Government. In brief, this disregard of the macro-level realities is a further reflection of fundamental shortcomings of the PPC. Truly, several adherents of the Kerala PPC are apparent critics of the World Bank discourse on participatory development. John Harriss' criticism, for instance, is on account of the World Bank's drive towards depoliticisation or move away from contestational politics to the acceptance of an apolitical civil society. Ironically, this criticism is applicable to PPC too. It may be noted that the renowned “Kerala model” was the outcome of long struggles waged by political forces, trade unions, land reform movement and other class and mass organisations. This model has become redundant under neoliberal conditions. More importantly, the PPC sought to strengthen participatory actions by civil society actors composed of NGOs, voluntary agencies, NHGs, SHGs, etc. It also attempted to build up an apolitical consensus that eventually benefited the neoliberal agencies.

It may be noted that one of the first steps taken by the UDF government that came to power in 2001 was to rename the PPC as Kerala Development Programme (KDP), keeping the participatory structures built up under the LDF rule intact. Participation being an “apolitical construct,” the UDF faced hardly any ideological or political
opposition in using it to mobilise the required resources and legitimacy for the large-scale privatisation programmes and BOT (Build, Operate and Transfer) schemes in social sectors envisaged by it. As a continuation of the PPC and integrally linked with the KDP, several projects sponsored and funded by neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank are currently in operation in Kerala. These projects are mostly seen in the management of common property resources such as forests and water and in schemes relating to health and sanitation. Probably, a best example is that of the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) designed by the World Bank. Though the PFM speaks eloquently of the involvement of the tribal people through vana samrakshana sanities (forest protection committees) in the preservation of forests and use of forest resources, it has, in effect, served vested interests more in the commercial exploitation of forests than the tribals who are ultimately evicted from their habitat.

The Rural Water and Sanitation Scheme (RWSS) constituted in accordance with the "country assistance program" of the World Bank has a similar experience, though with its own specificities. The declared objective of this participatory scheme is to entrust the beneficiary communities or user groups with the entire task of achieving sanitation and health through the self-provision of drinking water. The RWSS envisages the full recovery of the cost of this project
from the community itself based on a system of user-financing or self-financing. This scheme draws the required expertise and advice from the Water and Sanitation Programme—South Asia (WSP-SA), a consultant NGO, which is engaged in a global campaign against state intervention in water supply. There is widespread apprehension in the state that the ultimate objective of this participatory water project is to undermine Kerala Water Authority, the public sector agency in charge of water supply. This came in the background of the KDP seeking the help of WSP-SA to encourage the participation of private parties to undertake drinking water projects on a BOT basis.

With the advent of the UDF government - together with the involvement of the ADB in the affairs of Kerala, through its "Modernising Government Programme" - all these participatory initiatives including the KDP have become the essential components of neoliberalism. Extending Technical Assistance (TA) to participatory development so as to realise its full benefits in the process of liberalisation and privatisation has been a major item in ADB's "Technical Assistance Programme for 2002-04." Thus, the Kerala experience provides scope for further studies on the operationalisation of participatory development in the Third World.

Obviously, one of the immediate objectives of participatory development promoted by neoliberal agencies, as it has been under
way in many Third World countries, is to pass on the entire cost of running projects and socio-economic programmes to the shoulders of people themselves. Thus, some form of “people’s participation” or “community involvement” has become an inalienable component of the user-financing and cost-recovery schemes in the social and infrastructure sectors sponsored by neoliberal agencies at the global level. As the study illustrates, a broad consensus has also emerged among various sections of the political spectrum in the Third World regarding these participatory initiatives and programmes. However, on account of their inherent neoliberal cross-undercurrents, genuine people’s participation has been lacking in such experiments.

The present study does not seek to downgrade the importance of genuine people’s participation as a potent political force. However, as opposed to the mainstream discourse and conceptualisation of participatory development, any meaningful participation should be exemplified in the real prospect of exercising political power by people themselves keeping in perspective both the macro and micro level realities. This may be ensured through widespread political mobilisation of the people, a mobilisation firmly ingrained in the persistent struggle against the apolitical experiments promoted and sustained by neoliberal agencies in their constant pursuit of manipulating participatory development as a substitute for social
transformation. This problem becomes all the more significant in the era of globalisation when neoliberalism holds sway across the world. Hence, the current development scenario calls for conceptual clarity and deeper theoretical insights into the realm of participation.