CHAPTER VI
INFERENCES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was carried out primarily to explore the reasons for a low rate of enrolment in higher education, especially in rural India, focusing upon the State of Punjab. While so much has been planned and implemented through various policies on higher education in India, there is a paucity of empirical studies on the specific problems faced by rural youth in accessing higher education. Further, the proportion of girls drops substantially at the higher levels of education. Even the National Knowledge Commission (2005) has laid strong emphasis upon the need to tackle the low enrolment rate of girls. The second reason for conducting this study was to check out if education brings about the desired change in the mind sets of our youth in terms of their attitude towards major social evils like dowry, female foeticide etc., in the context of Punjab. The ultimate aim of the study was to suggest policy recommendations on the basis of inferences, in order to improve the access of higher education to rural youth in general and girls in particular.

Since independence, various commissions and committees have been appointed by the Government of India with the purpose of bringing about radical but desired changes in the education system and all these have emphasized upon the important role played by education in the life of an individual as well as society at large. The present approach towards higher education in India is governed by the “National Policy on Education” of 1986 and Program of Action of 1992. The 1986 Policy and Action Plan of 1992 were based on the two land mark reports namely, the “University Education Commission” of 1948-49 (popularly known as Radhakrishnan Commission Report), and the “Education Commission” of 1964-66, (popularly known as Kothari Commission Report). These reports laid down the basic framework for the National policy concerning higher education in India. Radhakrishnan Commission on University Education (1948-49) highlighted that the most important and urgent reform needed in education was to transform it, to endeavor to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and
thereby to make it a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation, necessary for the realization of national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed as to increase productivity to achieve social and national integration, to accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values.

The National Policy on Higher Education of 1986 translated this vision of Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commissions in five goals for achieving higher education which include; greater access, equal access (or equity), quality and excellence, relevance and promotion of social values.

As education is the means for bringing about socioeconomic transformation in a society, various measures were taken to enhance the access of the marginalized sections of the society to education. Efforts were also made to improve the access to higher education among the women of India by setting up various educational institutes exclusively for them. Yet, in spite of all these efforts made by the Government to develop education sector, India continues to suffer from two serious drawbacks; the first is that literacy in rural India in comparison to the urban is relatively very low; secondly there is a huge gap between the literacy rates of both the genders. The situation gets worse, as it comes to education of rural girls. In 2001 more than half of the female population of rural areas was illiterate. Even the gap between the literacy rate of urban and rural girls was more than 26%. Here, the two extremes in literacy rate in India can be classified as the most advantaged urban male group with 86.42% literacy and the most disadvantaged group being the rural female with 46.58% literacy.

This gap can be attributed to many factors. As per 2001 Census, 72.2% of the population of India was living in rural areas but surprisingly, most of the educational facilities have been available in urban areas, where less than 30% of the Indian population resided. Although under Sarav Shiksha Abhiyan, Government has provided one school in the radius of 1 km of every village, yet when it came to higher education, rural people have no option but to look towards the cities.
Considering the male–female gap in the literacy rate, one major factor that stands out predominantly is the traditional mindset of the society conditioned by patriarchal values that attributes the role of homemaker to a woman who is expected to remain confined to domesticity and child rearing. The other factor that hinders the education of girls is the age old practice of sending a girl to the husband's place after marriage. Investment in a daughter's education is therefore looked upon as a liability. On the contrary, a son's education is perceived as an asset for securing a lucrative lob and supporting the parents especially in their old age. Moreover, there is a misconception among the rural people that educated girls will face problems in finding suitable and educated grooms.

Higher education in India thus confronts unprecedented challenges, the major challenges being gender as well as urban–rural disparity. These challenges are compounded with other problems like high rate of drop out among the marginalized sections of the population, rigid mindsets of the rural communities towards education and absence of equity in quality of education that is provided across the length and breadth of the country.

Punjab, one of the economically prosperous States of India, lags far behind in the educational sector, which for a long time has been besieged with multiple problems. The State has a long way to go in order to achieve the target set for the universalisation of elementary education. Punjab has yet to overcome the problem of low enrolment, irregular attendance and high drop out rate, particularly in rural areas. Single-teacher schools, two-teacher schools, schools without headmasters, buildings, drinking water, toilets, libraries, laboratorios, playgrounds and proper electricity connections are in abundant majority. Worse still, Science and Commerce streams of education at the intermediate level in rural schools have completely collapsed and academic output in general has remained extremely low, despite a mushrooming of institutions of higher education.

Under such circumstances, many of the rural parents opt to send their wards to the cities seeking better educational opportunities for them. As nothing substantial has been done to improve the infrastructure in villages for
the education, the urban-rural divide continues to increase. The universities in 
Punjab, the main centers of higher education tend to cater mainly to the well 
heeled students from urban areas, who are financially and educationally 
better equipped to secure admissions in better selling courses. Once again it 
is the rural student who remains unemployable due to financial constraints 
and ineffective education.

Review of literature on higher education has over and again underlined 
the significance of higher education in the development of a nation and 
society, but unfortunately it has shown the huge rural-urban and gender 
disparities which exist in higher education in India as well as in Punjab, which 
has been a major impediment in the process of the nation’s development. An 
exhaustive review of the existing literature generated through empirical 
investigations in the area of higher education thus brought out the following 
major issues to be investigated.

1. Poor quality of higher education in terms of skill formation and 
employability among the youth;

2. Inequalities in terms of access to higher education on the basis of rural-
urban population, gender, caste and class;

3. Impediments to higher education resulting into a higher rate of drop out 
at higher education level; especially among children of farming 
community, more among girls; thus leading to a poor development of 
human resource in the rural areas.

These issues confronting higher education are extremely pertinent to the 
State of Punjab in view of the recent statistics indicating its deteriorating 
performance on socio-economic indices. The rural youth of Punjab being out 
of the catchment area of higher education has been increasingly pulled 
towards intoxication of all kinds, posing a grave challenge to policy makers 
and educationists.

Objectives and Methodology

The present study was conducted to address some of the important issues 
and objectives so as to look into the characteristics of rural youth going in for
higher education in Punjab and the major problems faced by them (pertaining to higher education) at home, at the institution and in society as well as the coping mechanisms used by them. The study was also directed at exploring the role of higher education in determining the career aspirations of rural youth in Punjab and their perceptions about the social issues confronting the State, viz. drug addiction, dowry, casteism, gender relations etc. An effort was also made in the present study to identify the special problems faced by rural girls in accessing higher education and then sustaining it. At the same time, the role of parents, teachers and villagers concerning the utility of higher education, for boys and girls was also assessed.

In the light of the objectives laid down, the present study was conducted by obtaining a sampling frame consisting of all the students coming from rural areas enrolled in T.D.C Part II and Part III in two colleges i.e. Baring Union Christian College, Batala and R.R. Bawa D.A.V College, Batala by including all the three streams i.e. Arts, Commerce and Science. Stratified Random Sampling was used to select boys and girls among students. In all, a sample of 180 students was selected of which 90 were boys and 90 girls by using random sampling. While collecting data, both qualitative as well as quantitative methods, were employed. Apart from the Interview Schedule, method of Group Discussion and case study were also conducted for arriving at conclusions and inferences. A sub-sample of parents, teachers, Sarpanches and Panchayat members was also interviewed to elicit information pertaining to relevant issues under study.

Findings and Inferences

The study has been organized in six chapters. The First Chapter ‘Formulation of the Research Problem and Method of Study’ presented various theoretical frameworks on education apart from a brief historical development of education in India with special reference to higher education. The challenges before higher education in India as well as in the State of Punjab were discussed in the same chapter, in which rural-urban and gender disparities in education were highlighted. After going through the review of literature, the need and objectives of the study apart from the methodology adopted were also discussed in the first chapter.
The Second Chapter ‘Rural Youth in Higher Education in Punjab: A Profile’ has focused upon the role played by factors such as socio-economic status, family background, academic achievements, etc., of the students acquiring higher education in Punjab by presenting and analyzing data relating to student respondents’ profile. The profile revealed the importance given to education by family members and the economic problems coming in the way of education of rural youth. An effort was made to understand the perceptions of parents and elders in the villages about the significance of higher education both for boys and girls. The Chapter was addressed to questions such as: Is access to higher education open to all the groups or is it dependent on status and class? Are educated parents more aware about the importance of education than uneducated parents? To what extent are the uneducated parents keen to see their children educated and how does gender make a difference in accessing higher education in the rural set-up?

It was found on the basis of the analysis of the primary data that accessibility of higher education was not equal for all as most of the students from rural areas had to move to cities to acquire higher education. As far as the awareness about the role of education was concerned; rural inhabitants were found to be very well aware of its significance. They were conscious of the importance of education especially for the girls and they tried their best to give proper facilities to them. The major problem emphasized by most of them was lack of finances for supporting and sustaining higher education in urban colleges. Most of the rural parents could not afford the expensive education provided in private colleges located in the cities far away. A section of parents also felt apprehensive in sending their daughters to cities for fear of safety in daily commuting. But in cases where girls got a chance to go in for higher education in city colleges, their performance was found to be better than that of boys as they had a constant fear of being pulled out of college and married off, if they failed to perform well.

It was also observed that parents refrained from permitting their daughters from participating in non-academic activities which required leaving the protected walls of home and college. Their concern primarily centered round the safety and security of the girls. So, from the analysis of the Chapter,
it became clear that it was not just rural-urban disparities, but gender disparities too, which posed a challenge weakening the very foundations of the society and needed redressal.

Third Chapter ‘Rural Youth in Higher Education: Problems and Coping Mechanisms’ focused on problems confronting rural students as they come to cities to attain higher education. In this Chapter an attempt was made to specify the problems faced by rural students and to identify coping mechanisms used by them in handling problems existing at home, college and on the way. An attempt was also made to find out gender specific variations in problems relating to higher education.

It was found that the students from rural areas had to face financial, infrastructural, social and cultural problems while getting higher education. Poor infrastructure in rural schools was the major deterrent in academic performance of the rural students when they joined city colleges. Insufficient bus service and attitude of the drivers/conductors and passengers were also identified as hurdles for the rural students especially girls. In events of eve-teasing or molestation in the buses, the response of co-passengers was reported as unsympathetic and indifferent towards girls, while middle aged men were identified as the worst eve-teasers.

It was also reported by the student respondents that a section of teachers in city colleges made unsavory remarks on the rural background of the students in the class ridiculing and putting them in humiliating situations. However, majority of the teachers were found to be helpful when students approached them with their academic and personal problems. In many ways rural students especially girls felt more comfortable sharing their problems with teachers rather than their parents for fear of being misunderstood and withdrawn from the college.

In spite of all the troubles faced by these young students and their parents, most of them were undaunted in their determination to pursue higher education and secure good results too. In most of the cases the students in order to overcome education related obstacles, adopted various kinds of
coping mechanisms in order to adjust in highly adverse and inimical situations. These coping mechanisms included giving tuitions to earn extra money to pay for their own education, learning English language to overcome communication barriers and adjust in the city environment and seeking help from their teachers at the times of crisis. Girls reported to be confronting greater problems and facing discrimination when it came to infrastructural facilities provided by parents. The attitude of the villagers regarding girls' education in general was encouraging, yet, when the issue of voicing dissent against discriminatory practices on the part of girls and their involvement in decision making arose, education was blamed for making them 'outspoken' and 'bold'.

While attempting to identify the role of higher education in determining the career aspirations of rural youth in Punjab, it was found that the rural society had undergone a change and developed a heightened awareness about the value of education. It was felt in general that education played a positive role in the life of an individual as it raised the social status of the families, whose children were able to get educated. In the case of rural youth, education was perceived as a gateway to a better standard of life in the city. It was generally felt that education helped in the fulfillment of career aspirations and refinement of sensibilities and worldly wisdom of the youth in general and rural youth in particular.

Getting rid of agricultural work with the help of education or going abroad to earn money was on the priority list of several male students, while for female students education meant enhancement of status in society. It also spelt economic independence and better marital prospects as most of the girls had seen their mothers suffer at home due to lack of education. The data analyzed in this Chapter gave clear indication that educated girls from rural areas were developing a greater level of confidence and a problem solving attitude, which equipped them to help their friends, family members and the uneducated village people at times of crisis. Education had therefore helped in making girls an asset not only to their immediate families, but also to their surroundings.
In the **Fourth Chapter** ‘Rural Youth’s Perspective on Social Issues’, an effort was made to understand the way the rural youth interpreted the social issues after attaining higher education. The Chapter focused on gleaning the views of respondents about their career, role of education and their views on current social issues like female foeticide, gender bias, women empowerment, honour killing, drug abuse, caste system, dowry etc. It also explored how far education had helped in bringing about a change in the traditional mindset of the society and the extent to which rural youth had been empowered to revolt against draconic and barbaric social customs acting as catalysts for positive changes in society.

Regarding the perceptions of rural youth receiving higher education about social issues confronting the state of Punjab, our findings have revealed the double standards followed by the majority of the student respondents towards social evils like dowry, female foeticide, casteism and honour killings. They openly condemned these practices but at the same time they justified them in ‘certain cases’. When it came to the matter of giving and accepting dowry, while some student respondents vehemently opposed the practice, a good number (both boys and girls) could not find sufficient reasons to reject the practice citing the plea that if the parents could afford to give ‘gifts’ to their daughters at the time of marriage, there was nothing wrong in it.

As far as the barbaric practice of honour killings is concerned, majority of the respondents condemned it calling it an evil, but there were 18.9% female respondents and 7.8% of male respondents, who justified it in ‘some exceptional cases’. This pointed to the fact that the practice of honour killing had some form of social sanction in the rural set up, even among the youth, where caste consciousness still controlled the psyche.

A similar ambivalence was also noticed in the respondents’ views concerning female foeticide and gender related issues. Outwardly, it was being condemned, but deep down there was an element of a covert complicity as details and identity of those who were involved in these heinous practices were being consciously concealed. 46.1% of respondents admitted having
come across incidents of female foeticide in their village, but no further details relating to this issue were divulged. Another aspect that came to light by a careful reading of the data was the assertion of pride taken by people belonging to higher castes. These people took great pride in flaunting their superiority over others while people belonging to lower caste preferred to conceal their caste identity. Theoretically caste based discrimination may have become history, but considering the over-all situation, especially the behavioural patterns and attitudes of the upper castes, particularly the youth, caste system is still being practised in several pockets of the rural society.

As far as the problem of drug abuse is concerned, respondents seemed fully conscious of the social stigma attached to this issue. Therefore a majority of them out of sheer prudence denied having had any involvement in such activities, though they confessed familiarity and closeness to certain drug abusers. Regarding the question of male dominance particularly in relationships, 57.2% student respondents were against it. Interestingly, 41% of male and 25.6% of female respondents justified male dominance in some way or the other. Further, 11.2% of male and 2.2% of female respondents were strongly convinced that man was a born master and should dominate in his relationship with a woman. It was gathered from the responses that girls were expected to be submissive in all matters, especially those relating to marriage.

This underlined the ambivalent attitude of the villagers towards the education of girls, for whom acquiring higher education was fraught with hurdles at every step. The most dangerous hurdle that came to light was the rigid traditional mindset of the society, which curbed the right of a girl child to enjoy the freedom in different arenas as her male counter part. While boys enjoyed unbridled freedom and could get away with anything, girls did not even have the right to speak in public and raise their voice against atrocities, which were constantly being perpetuated against them. It was found in the present study that wherever girls voiced dissent and stood up against the traditional societal mores, parents blamed education for corrupting their minds.
In identifying the special problems faced by rural girls in reaching higher education and then sustaining it, data revealed that the gender issue was prominent and required a deeper understanding, as girls admitted to be facing more problems in their struggle to attain higher education as compared to boys. Whether it was liberty at home, or opportunities outside home, patriarchal values continued to govern the attitude of the members of family. Though parents displayed willingness to send their girls from villages to cities to attain higher education, yet, stringent conditions were imposed upon them at every step. If a family was financially weak, unable to afford higher education for all the children, the preference was always for the education of the male child, while the girls were kept back at home. Hence accessing and sustaining education in colleges was found to be a test of patience and fortitude for the rural girls. They not only had to fight the battle for education along with their male counterparts but also had to struggle against the traditional mindset of the society. Those girls, who through sheer grit and determination managed to sustain their education fighting against all odds, were still expected to be servile and submissive in all the matters, even those relating to their own life.

The data in the present Chapter also revealed that education had to some extent sensitized girls about the injustice and patriarchal values prevailing within the orthodox Indian families. Wherever female members were ill treated at the hands of the male members, the educated girls had the courage to resist male affront by voicing their dissent and standing by the victimized party. Though their dissent was often perceived as rebellion and defiance by the elders, yet they were found to show assertiveness and resist gender insensitivity.

The Fifth Chapter on ‘Gender and Higher Education’ dealt with gender dimension underlying education in the light of different theoretical perspectives as these issues had raised their head time and again in almost all the observations previously discussed with reference to the education of rural youth. This Chapter explored the same issue through the application of different feminist theories. A detailed review of the feminist movement and its changing contours were also discussed in this Chapter. Different challenges and hurdles in the way of education of girls also figured prominently during the
analysis of the data in this Chapter. Some cases of molestation of girls within the premises of schools and colleges came out as grave hurdles in the way of girls going in for higher education.

Still, the larger picture that emerged on the basis of the observations was that the attitude of villagers and close relatives, regarding education in general and of girls in particular was quite encouraging since educated people were held in high esteem. Surprisingly, marriage of girls continued to remain a priority for majority of the parents. One of the major aims of supporting a girl’s education was to find a good marriage partner for her. The female respondents too agreed that education would help them in finding good husbands. Most of the female respondents considered urban residence, size of family and physical appearance as their criterion for mate selection. The boys on the other hand gave greater importance to financial status of the girl’s family apart from her physical appearance and work.

The last chapter on ‘Inferences and Policy Recommendations’ provides summing up of all the issues discussed in the previous five chapters.

Findings of the present study substantiate some of the observations already made by National Knowledge Commission (2005), which was set up by Government of India to promote excellence in the education system to meet the educational challenges of the 21st century. The Commission in its final report submitted in March, 2009, observed that school-leavers who are not adequately trained in English as a language are always at a disadvantage in the world of higher education and they find it exceedingly difficult to compete for a place in our premier educational institutions. The Commission also pointed wide disparities in access to school education between states, rural and urban areas, gender as well as different economic classes. Issues of quality, teacher training, school infrastructure and curriculum were also highlighted in the report.

National Knowledge Commission also mentioned that serious measures are required to ensure greater enrolment and retention of girl students. It remarked that high drop out rate of girls especially from Class V onwards is a matter of great concern. One major reason given by the Commission for low rate of enrolment of girls in education is the sheer lack of
secondary schools nearby, as parents are reluctant to send girls to travel long distances to school. It reported that social conditioning and other constraints also play a role (National Knowledge Commission: 56).

These observations are sufficiently substantiated by the findings of the present study, for instance, the study has highlighted rural-urban and gender disparities in education and has concluded that educational opportunities are not equal for all communities and groups. The study found that poor infrastructure in the rural school and English Language were the major deterrents in the academic performance of the rural students when they joined city colleges. The study also highlighted that girls faced more problems in their attempt to attain higher education as many parents who are willing to educate their daughters are discouraged by the absence of school within the surrounding area and it is not considered safe to send girls to another village to study. So the present study has also pointed out towards an important role played by traditional mindset and cultural factors.

**Suggestions and Policy Recommendations**

In the light of the various challenges confronting the rural youth in their efforts to acquire higher education, one major challenge that has emerged in the present study relates to the questions of quality and equity. Rural–urban and gender disparities in higher education have come up as significant issue in relation to the accessibility of higher education, especially in case of rural girls. It was further observed that though higher education has raised the confidence level of girls to stand up for their rights and for the rights of other women, yet when it came to an outright rejection of detrimental social practices like dowry, female foeticide, honour killing etc., higher education had hardly been successful in transforming the culturally indoctrinated minds which have been conditioned on traditional lines. However, the silver lining to the bleak picture was a small group of respondents, who unequivocally condemned these practices, which they strongly felt had become obsolete and were a gross violation of human rights.

After a careful analysis of the entire data, it may be inferred that these challenges confronting higher education need to be carefully deliberated upon
and addressed, in order to rectify the gaps that continue to plague the higher education system especially in rural Punjab. In this regard the following suggestions and policy recommendations can be taken into account. These suggestions are being presented in four categories:

(a) Handling Rural-Urban Disparity

Rural-urban disparity stands out as the most disturbing challenge to higher education. Therefore, there is an urgent need to bring rural schools at par with the urban schools in an effort to bridge the gap. The National Knowledge Commission has also emphasized that a vibrant, good quality and universally accessible government school system is the basic foundation upon which the schooling system in the country must rest (National Knowledge Commission: 43). To make education more vibrant and qualitatively meaningful, school buildings in rural areas need to be made presentable and well equipped with computers and science laboratories, libraries, toilets, clean drinking water, sports grounds etc.

English being a global language has become one of the most important social skills now-a-days. Since the rural students lag far behind in this area due to the late exposure to the language and lack of infra structure to teach English, a sense of inferiority and inadequacy haunts the rural students, when they step out of the confines of their rural set-up. So, it is recommended that English teachers in rural areas must be trained to teach English as a language and not merely as a fact based subject. More importantly, educational institutions in rural areas must be provided with technological resources and good material on English language in order to balance the gap between rural and urban teaching.

National Knowledge Commission has also recognized the important role of English language as a critical determinant of access to, and opportunities for a better life and an important avenue for employment and upward mobility. (National Knowledge Commission: 45). Our findings therefore support this observation and calls for immediate measures in this regard.
(b) Overcoming Educational, Financial, Institutional and Social Barriers

Accessibility being another major challenge for rural youth going in for higher education, more Government colleges need to be established in rural areas offering professional and add-on courses alongside traditional ones. Education provided in these rural colleges should be contextualized and made relevant to the needs of the rural society so as to enhance the enrolment ratio of rural youth in higher education. More rural campuses on the pattern of Punjabi University's rural campus need to be replicated, where rural students have an access to good quality of education at the university level also.

To bridge the physical distances and make commuting easier and less time consuming for the students, transport services must be enhanced as the present study highlighted that bus services were very poor and inadequate. The few buses that plied on the fixed routes were over crowded and the behaviour of the staff was invariably found to be rude and demeaning. In order to overcome these problems more buses need to be provided by Government to villages making it easier and safe especially for girls to commute to colleges. This should be done keeping in mind the timing of the schools and colleges.

Financial constraints have been found to be another important hindrance for the rural population in pursuing higher education. This can be tackled jointly by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, which could share responsibilities to educate hardworking and diligent students desirous of furthering their educational qualifications, but incapable of financing their studies. National Knowledge Commission has also noted that large segments of our population just do not have access to higher education due to financial constraints. Hence, the Commission recommended a well-funded and extensive National Scholarship Scheme targeting economically underprivileged students and students from historically and socially disadvantaged groups, particularly students from rural and backward areas (National Knowledge Commission: 65, 77).

During discussions with the student respondents, another impediment that was brought to light was the environment of the city college, which
sometimes proves to be quite inimical for students coming from village backgrounds. It is recommended that teachers and administration of the college must adopt a sympathetic and accommodating approach towards rural students. At the same time special counseling cells need to be established for students who find difficulty in adjusting to the new environment of the college. If teachers are found to be indulging in discriminatory acts, strict action should be initiated against them, so that rural students do not lose confidence, forced to drop out of higher education. At the institutional level, special lectures and seminars on personality development and soft skills should be organized periodically, so that rural students are able to rid themselves of inhibitions and complexes, when they interact with urban students and teachers.

(c) Reducing Gender Disparity

Sustaining the level of higher education for the rural youth especially girls emerged as another serious concern. So long as higher education remains out of reach of rural girls and so long as education remains on low priority for girls, especially in rural Punjab, the whole agenda of women’s empowerment is likely to fall flat. On the basis of our findings, it is suggested that there is an urgent need to create an environment in rural Punjab that is safe and conducive to the education of girls. Therefore special policies and incentives need to be floated by the government to check the problem of high drop-out rate. At the same time, special efforts shall have to be made to enhance the enrolment of girls in higher education.

These observations have been made even by the National Knowledge Commission, which has recommended special incentives for girls in secondary education to increase the rate of enrolment of girls in education. This included girls-only schools especially in particular areas, an enhanced scholarship scheme especially for girls, with particular emphasis on girls from socially deprived groups and separate and functional toilets for girls in all schools, with access to water especially in rural areas (National Knowledge Commission: 56).

In spite of several awareness programmes and regular campaigns that have been conducted highlighting the importance of educating the girl child,
the mindset of the rural society still continues to act as an impediment. This study has revealed the double standards and hypocritical attitudes adopted by the village elders towards the education of girls. While village people encouraged their daughters to go in for higher education, yet marriage ranked as their top priority and they were always ready to force their girls to discontinue their studies whenever they came across a good marriage proposal for them, especially an NRI groom. To bring about a change in the thinking of the rural parents and elders, it is recommended that counseling cells must be established in every villages to enlighten and raise the level of awareness towards education and economic independence of girls, so that they do not have to face undue harassment, exploitation and discrimination in their later lives.

Another set back that impedes a rural girl’s education is the physical and mental trauma she has to face when she has to leave the confines of her home to pursue her education. Many female respondents in the present study reported frequent incidents of eve-teasing, which they had to encounter while traveling in the public transport. This problem can not be tackled single handedly because it has been observed that culprits usually manage to escape with some mild form of punishment. If this menace is confronted collectively by students through regular sensitization and empowerment campaigns organized by educational institutions, then there is a hope that things would gradually improve and young generation could become agents of positive social transformation.

(d) Employing Higher Education as an Agency of Social Change in Rural Punjab

While exploring the role of education with reference to current social issues like female foeticide, gender bias, women empowerment, honour killing, drug abuse, caste system, dowry etc., it was found that education has not helped much in changing the traditional mindset of the society or in empowering them to revolt openly against draconic social customs and act as agents of positive change in society.
One of the reasons behind this unbending and rigid attitude of the village people regarding current social issues is the keenness observed among the student respondents to settle down in the cities after completing their education. Since education is a powerful tool of social transformation, there is an urgent need to attract educated rural youth back to their native villages, so that they become powerful catalysts of social change. This issue as a whole needs careful deliberation and there is a need to identify the factors responsible for the under-development of the rural areas. So long as rural areas remain the poor cousins of cities, this brain drain from villages is going to play havoc with the villages. Attractive employment opportunities in the rural sector can also act as sufficient motivators to the educated rural youth to come back and contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of their villages.

It is also recommended that special educational policy aimed at raising sensitivity among youth towards the prevalent social issues should be implemented for rural students and the same should be audited annually. The handicaps of the policy need to be rectified periodically and necessary modifications should be made from time to time. This will bring to light the grey areas in the rural higher education system. A well planned road map is required for the development of science and technology in the rural sector to fuel the engine of all-round growth. The basic approach towards higher education in rural areas, as a whole should be looked upon from a new perspective, keeping in mind the various challenges faced by the rural youth in their pursuance of higher education and the difficult situations in which their parents support them.

**Theoretical Contribution of the Study**

While discussing the theoretical framework of the study in the first chapter, it was argued that the findings and inferences would be analysed and an attempt shall be made to see as to which of the different perspectives best explains the situation under study.

At the outset, findings in this study have underlined the enormous role played by culture, mores and mind set operating at the grassroots, transmitted
through generations, in which not only parents but even teachers act as an important agency. Findings substantiate the fact that education can not be regarded as an independent variable by itself, expected to bring about social transformation. It itself is highly influenced by the cultural values and conventional mind sets of people. The content of education has little meaning if the agents, i.e. teachers continue to display an opposite value system. Therefore our findings do not support the Conflict Approach according to which education is a tool in the hands of the ruling class, to legitimize its own hegemony. This approach gives no substantial role to culture as an independent force with a potential to make education redundant, where in reality, culture continues to play a determining role in the life of youth even within education.

The study also does not substantiate the Functional perspective according to which education helps in placing adequate individuals in adequate positions and roles. Instead, as our findings reveal, education system in Punjab gives a clear edge to the urban students and also the males, even within the rural areas. Also, access to quality education, especially in rural Punjab is a matter of financial capability rather than merit.

The study indicates that while cultural norms and mind set are extremely important both in terms of access to education as well as inequality, especially in rural Punjab, culture is not merely created at micro level interactional situations, it also has huge power dimensions. The social reality is not merely an outcome of interactional processes at grassroots, but it is greatly determined and sustained through patriarchy extending to the organizational level apart from an ideological bias in favour of urban and western life styles, independent of the grassroots reality.

Further, the radical viewpoint of Illich asking for deschooling society too appears to be an extreme in the light of the findings which indicate that education per se is not the culprit. No education system by itself can bring about a revolutionary change in a desired direction as long as the conventional cultural mind set and norms continue to persist in the centre of democratic, secular and egalitarian value system.
The findings and observations of the present study therefore bring out the most pertinent role played by cultural factors usually overriding the impact of higher education too. The study substantiates this observation on the basis of the explanation of rural-urban and male-female disparities in higher education in terms of an over-arching role of cultural practices dominating within the colleges, within homes and at public places. Teachers, parents, students, bus drivers, conductors etc. are all perpetrators of the cultural legacy that gives primacy to urban life style, western cultural norms/life style, consumerism and patriarchy.

Policy Implications of the Study

The present study is an attempt to examine the problems coming in the way of rural youth going in for higher education. The findings of this study are expected to be of great use to the Government in general and the Department of Rural Development (Ministry of Rural Development) in particular to review the problems of the rural society especially the rural youth. It will help Government to understand why in spite of all the efforts to increase the literacy rate of the rural population particularly the rural girls, the situation is getting worse. These findings put a big question mark on the present policy of higher education, which does not give equal opportunities to all aspiring for higher education in India. Further, it attempts to examine the need to open higher educational institutions in rural areas providing infrastructural and other facilities to rural youth, helping them to acquire quality higher education. Thus the study provides guidelines in this respect to the policymakers for the future.

Conclusion

In spite of India’s planned development for more than 65 years, one area which has suffered severely is the higher education sector. As National Knowledge Commission (2005) has reported that there is, in fact, a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep. It is not yet discernible simply because there are pockets of excellence, an enormous reservoir of talented young people and an intense competition in the admissions process. And, in some important spheres, we continue to reap the benefits of what was sown in higher education 50 years ago by the founding fathers of the
Republic. The reality is that we have miles to go. The proportion of our population, in the age group 18-24, that enters the world of higher education is only around 7 per cent. Large segments of our population just do not have access to higher education. What is more, the quality of higher education leaves much to be desired.

Disparities in education have been highlighted in different studies conducted by researchers and intellectuals, which have been held responsible for the deteriorating position of education in India. The same disparities have also been targeted by the statistics recorded in Census of India. So, there is need to develop a meaningful and comprehensive framework that would address the multidimensionality of differences that have refused to disappear.

The present study aimed at understanding the experiences of rural youth, both boys and girls in accessing higher education. It was reflected from the analysis of the data that rural youth face a lot of problems in acquiring higher education. These problems are not only confined to their college campuses, but also travel with them in the over crowded buses and within their homes. The present study has also highlighted that education fails to bring about a desired change in the mind sets of rural youth due to an overriding role of cultural factors often acting as impediments. As far as the role of teachers in higher education as powerful catalysts of change is concerned, the present study threw up some startling revelations. In both the colleges included in the sample, it was observed that most of the teachers who hailed from rural background were culturally attuned to accept stereotypical patterns of life and were not willing to shed narrow parochialism. It was evident that though education has increased their upward mobility and consequently their employability, yet, it had not been very successful in eradicating traditional patriarchal values, which had for generations been ingrained in their psyche.

To sum up, therefore, the persisting handicaps of rural education shall have to be handled not only by higher education, its syllabi and content, but it has to be tackled at the level of practical skills, attitude displayed by teachers and role models. The state of Punjab faces a huge crisis in the shape of
female foeticide, drug abuse, dowry etc. As shown in this study, our rural youth continues to have an ambiguous attitude towards these issues because of an absence of any meaningful discussions, workshops and sensitization. Instead, higher education is acting as independent of these issues. Therefore, special focus needs to be placed on higher education for rural youth in time with reference to the special problems faced by them.