CHAPTER 11

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The practice of inheritance in our society has been patriarchal and gender discriminatory in nature. Cultural and traditional practices continue to perpetuate the patrilineal mode of inheritance that excludes women from the inheritance right. Theoretical exploration has unravelled how male dominance through marriage and family systems has overthrown the property rights of women and established the patrilineal mode of inheritance. Feminists have perceived disinheritance of women as a problem of culture. Laws of inheritance governing different religious communities, namely, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi, have been framed in such a way so as to privilege men, bypassing women, barring a few matrilineal communities, where women could inherit property.

There have been concerted efforts to sustain and promote the patrilineal mode of inheritance among the Christians in Kerala through customary practices as well as by means of state legislations, such as the Travancore and Cochin Christian Succession Acts of 1916 and 1921 respectively, so that men could exercise the sole autonomy of succession to parental property. The Christian women’s right to succession of parental property was compensated with streedhan, the only wealth a woman obtains from her natal family in connection with marriage. However, streedhan could not be compared with the share of a man acquired through succession. The practice of streedhan has given way to dowry as a quick means to fulfil material greed.

The patrilineal mode of inheritance among the Christians took a beating, when the gender discriminatory State laws were categorically struck down by the Supreme Court in 1986, as a violation of Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, in the light of Mary Roy vs the State of Kerala, (1984) case, thereby extending the application of the Indian Succession Act, (1925) in Kerala. The law entitled the daughter an equal share in the intestate property of parents like that of the son, with retrospective effect from 1951. The judgement was a great boon for Christian women. Equal inheritance rights in intestate parental property marked a new beginning for Christian women in Kerala as far as their succession status was concerned. Dispelling the age old state laws and enforcing the Indian Succession Act
(1925) by the apex court in 1986 could be seen as a positive step towards gender equality. The heroic struggle of Ms. Mary Roy was a turning point in the legal and social settings of the history of Syrian Christian women, an epoch making event that evoked mixed reactions from different sections of society, particularly from the Christian community itself.

Nevertheless, the Act alone could not ensure equitable allocation of parental property, unless Christian women themselves realised the significance of the legislation and engaged themselves in a process that could bring about the desired change to ensure their due share in parental property. Did Christian women in Kerala respond to such a call? Studies conducted after the implementation of the Indian Succession Act (1925) in Kerala have highlighted the lack of awareness regarding equal inheritance rights and attitudinal differences, but could not substantiate the implications of the Act among Christian women. Paucity of research studies on inheritance rights of Christian women was another reason for the researcher to take up this study, which could contribute to the existing body of knowledge on inheritance rights of women.

The Research interest developed in this context has encouraged the researcher to undertake an empirical inquiry to unearth the implications of the legal changes relating to inheritance rights of Syrian Christian women who belong to the oldest Christian community in Kerala with dominant socio-cultural characteristics and greater ownership of landed property. The research aimed at understanding Syrian Christian women’s awareness, knowledge and attitude towards inheritance rights in the light of the Indian Succession Act (1925), and has focused on Syrian Christian women belonging to five principal Syrian Christian denominations, namely Orthodox, Jacobite, Syro-Malankara Catholics or (Reethu), Marthoma and Church of South India (CSI). The study also took into consideration the utilisation aspect of the Act, that is, Syrian Christian women who challenged patriarchal interests and invoked the law to procure their share through court of law.

In order to fulfill the research purpose, the objectives of the study on Syrian Christian women are to

* assess their awareness and knowledge on legal matters of inheritance rights as per the Indian Succession Act (1925)
• know attitudes towards equal inheritance rights, testamentary property rights and the practice of dowry
• identify the factors that influence their awareness, knowledge and attitudes on inheritance and allied issues
• understand experiences of those women who had invoked the legal provisions for inheritance rights
• suggest various measures for the effective implementation of the Indian Succession Act (1925).

Primary data that had a bearing on issues relating to inheritance rights and allied issues were collected through a field survey among the Syrian Christian women residing in Adichanalloor village and Kollam town of Kollam district in Kerala. Both these areas were purposively chosen due to the fair concentration of Syrian Christian women belonging to the five principal Syrian Christian denominations in these areas and because of the researcher’s familiarity with these two places. Two-stage stratified sampling technique was employed to select samples and using probability proportionate to size, a total of 300 married women were selected from five randomly selected Churches of Syrian Christian denominations. The Church Directories were used for sampling of women. Accordingly, 107 women (35.7%), from the Marthoma Church, 60 (20.0%) from the Orthodox Church, 58 (19.3%) from the Jacobite Church, 57 (19.0%) from the Church of South India and 18 (6.0%) from Reethu were covered by the survey.

Necessary information was collected from the respondents by administering interview schedules which comprised both structured and open-ended questions. The interview schedule was prepared keeping in view the objectives stated and certain socioeconomic and demographic variables which were presumed to cast significant influence on the awareness of respondents and their knowledge and attitude towards inheritance rights. They were age, educational status, employment status, economic status, type of family, size of family, number and sex of children, number and sex of siblings, exposure to media and parental property.
Collected data were analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Bivariate and multivariate techniques were used for data analysis. Merging of respondents was performed based on common religious practices, beliefs and most importantly, on women’s status in the churches. Accordingly, denominations like Orthodox, Jacobite and Reethu were merged into one as Orthodox Syrian (45.3%), and Marthoma and CSI were merged into one as Reformed Syrian (54.7%). Denominations which were broadly categorised as Orthodox Syrian and Reformed Syrian were adopted as the controlled variable throughout the analysis, keeping in mind that there could be variations in awareness, knowledge and attitudes of Syrian Christian women belonging to these two denominations on inheritance rights and allied issues. Three case studies of Syrian Christian women who had availed the law and completed the Court proceedings were presented.

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Demographic factors taken into consideration were age, number and sex of children, number and sex of siblings and type of family. Mean age of the total respondents was found to be 44.1 years, Orthodox Syrian - 42.0 years and Reformed Syrian - 45.8 years. The age group 31-40 was the highest (28.7%), which indicated greater representation of women in the reproductive age group. Those respondents who were currently married constituted over 90.0 per cent, with not much variation across the denominations.

The mean number of male and female children for sampled women of both denominations was 1.07 and 1.04 respectively and the mean number of male and female children of Orthodox Syrians and Reformed Syrians was almost the same, that is, 1.07 and 1.08 among the Orthodox Syrians, while that of Reformed Syrians was 1.06 and 1.00. Respondents with two children, one son and one daughter constituted the highest percentage (32.7%). The mean number of brothers and sisters of both denominations was found to be 1.74 and 1.64. There were more Orthodox Syrians (16.2%) when compared to Reformed Syrians (13.4%) who had one brother and one sister.

Those who stayed in nuclear families were found to be highest (55.7%) without much difference among both denominations. Mean of number of family members in both denominations was found to be 4.1, which was almost similar (4.3) for women at the state level as per NFHS-3 data (IIPS 2006).
Social Characteristics

Education and exposure to media are the social factors taken into account for the study. With regard to educational status, respondents with education up to the secondary level were found to be the highest (38.3%). The level of education of Syrian Christian women seemed to be better in comparison with that of the female population of the State. In the category of secondary level of education, 47.8 per cent was from the Orthodox Syrians and 30.5 per cent from the Reformed Syrians. The Reformed Syrians had a comparatively higher level of collegiate education (36.6%) than the Orthodox Syrians (13.2%). Economic constraints, adverse family background and less access to educational facilities came in the way of pursuing higher studies, especially among Orthodox Syrians. Respondents of CSI, who belonged to a higher class and were residents of the town area, were a more privileged group and hence they had a better educational background than the others, especially when it came to collegiate education. Many of the respondents from both denominations had acquired vocational education, besides formal education.

Those who had occasional exposure to electronic media like television numbered more (66.7%) in the sample. A higher readership pattern of print media like newspapers, and socially and gender relevant magazines was reported (74.0%), and in this there was higher representation from Reformed Syrians (80.5%) than from Orthodox Syrians (66.2%).

Economic Characteristics

Employment and household income constituted economic factors. Work participation of the respondents showed a low status as almost three-fourths of them (70.3%) in the study were housewives. A higher percentage (81.6%) of housewives was from Orthodox Syrians than from Reformed Syrians (61.0%). There was higher participation among the Reformed Syrians (23.8%) in the service sector compared to (13.2%) that from Orthodox Syrians. This denotes a better employment status of Reformed Syrians, which was mainly on account of the higher rate of work participation of CSI women. It was also noted that a sizeable proportion of the respondents in service were in the teaching profession. The trend in the employment sector of this study goes to reinforce the fact that a good proportion of women were engaged in teaching which is considered a ‘feminine’ profession. The mean annual household income of both denominations was reported to be Rs. 98460.00. Those
who had income brackets of (Rs.50001-Rs.100000) were the highest (29.0%), with marginal difference among the denominations. An increasing representation among the Reformed Syrians with increase in family income was noticed.

Around 37.7% reportedly showed ignorance regarding parental property, of which there were more from Reformed Syrians (41.5%) compared to Orthodox Syrians (33.1%). Possession of minimal property (<= 50 cents) was reported by more respondents (29.0%), and in this greater representation was from the Orthodox Syrians (33.8%) than from the Reformed Syrians (25.0%).

**Empowerment Aspects**

*Education and Allied Issues*

Inquiries regarding the educational satisfaction of respondents have shown that women who were not satisfied with their education were comparatively higher (39.0%) irrespective of the denominations. Positive feedback with regard to parental support towards their education was found to be 49.0%, which was evident irrespective of denominations. A higher percentage however, were Reformed Syrians (54.9%) compared to Orthodox Syrians (41.9%). Though there were financial and familial problems which hindered the higher education of a considerable proportion of respondents belonging to both denominations, parental attitude was found to be positive towards girls’ education.

An assessment of the educational status of women of the locality has shown a low level, that is, up to the secondary level of education which matched with that of the respondents. However, among the Reformed Syrians, there was less percentage (69.5%) who shared this view compared to Orthodox Syrians (90.4%). A strong support for girls’ education was visible from both denominations as 90.3% of respondents wanted to give maximum education to girls. Preference for vocational courses was also noted mainly by those who were not economically sound.

*Views on Employment and Allied Issues*

A majority (27.3%) of women were found to be in the non-applicable category due to their unemployment status. However, among those who were in service, a higher percentage (35.4%), of Reformed Syrians were satisfied with their jobs as compared to Orthodox Syrians (17.6%). The greater work participation by CSI women of the Reformed Syrian group was an important contributory factor for the higher percentage of job satisfaction.
Among those who were working, 25.3 per cent received parental support, and a higher percentage (36.0%) was from Reformed Syrians as against 12.5 per cent of Orthodox Syrians. Women who received support from their husbands and in-laws towards their employment were found to be 23.0 per cent.

Among those who were employed, control over earnings was observed to be a joint feature (16.0%), both by respondents and husbands. In this matter, Reformed Syrians scored more (23.2%) than Orthodox Syrians (7.4%). Those who had independent control over their earnings constituted 14.3 per cent with marginal difference among denominations. Reformed Syrians fared better in this aspect, as they had greater control over their earnings for being in service, than the Orthodox Syrians. A majority of those women who had their right over their earnings stated quite emphatically that their spending was oriented towards family welfare.

Responses to a query whether women should have control over their earnings were found to be commendable, as 80.3 per cent supported the idea of women’s control over their earnings, irrespective of the denominational differences. Reformed Syrians had more representation (84.1%) than Orthodox Syrians (75.7%). Higher educational, employment, economic status and greater exposure to the print media seem to have contributed to a higher representation of Reformed Syrians. A similar gender positive approach was displayed by women of both denominations, with regard to their understanding of married women, career and family life. An overwhelming percentage (92.3%) were of the view that employed women were capable of managing both their jobs and family life, if the women had a positive attitude, confidence and support from family members, that is, husbands, in-laws, parents and children.

Women irrespective of their denominational affiliations, wanted to shed the culturally defined gender roles that household work was purely designated for women. An overwhelming proportion (97.7%) vehemently expressed their views for equal division of labour at home by both husband and wife. Respondents felt the need to level the gender gap in the employment sectors as gender division of labour has been quite blatant across many sectors, mainly in the areas of decision making. Realising the importance of this, majority of respondents (77.3%) believed in having gender parity in employment sectors in terms of job
recruitment, remuneration and other entitlements.

A considerable proportion (46.0%) of the respondents, believed that women could take up any profession, as they felt that the choice of profession depends on each one’s aptitude and will power and that there is nothing that can be called a ‘feminine’ profession. Teaching found favour among many of the respondents for the reason that it provided more flexible time and vacation for married women. Nursing found favour among quite a few because of the job opportunities it offered. Many Orthodox Syrian women, Marthoma of Reformed Syrians belonging to the lower economic groups preferred a job oriented course like nursing because of the demand it had.

**Decision Making Role**
The empowerment level of respondents across the denominations in decision making areas such as purchasing of household commodities, finance, children’s upbringing, education and marriage of children was reported to be high (84.3%). Absence of men at home, as they were working within and outside India, especially in the Middle Eastern countries, widowed, separated or divorced status of some of the respondents, were contributory factors for a high proportion women being actively involved in decision making. These findings were also indicative of the fact that the Syrian Christian women of the study were on par with a good proportion of currently married, educated, urban, women in nuclear families belonging to the Christian community in the State who took active part in the decision making areas of health care and household purchases (IIPS 2006).

**Perceptions on Girl Children, Reservation for Women and Priesthood for Women**
An overwhelming proportion (98.0%) of women from both denominations had a very strong gender favourable approach and they emphasised that girls were as good as boys. Talking about the reservation policy for women, 54.0 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that women should get reservation in every field, and this found much favour among Reformed Syrians (60.4%) compared to 46.3 per cent of the Orthodox Syrians. Though reservation for women in every field was the priority for both denominations, preference for reservation in the employment sector was expressed mostly by Orthodox Syrians (53.7%) compared to 39.6 percent of Reformed Syrians. This might be because of the low employment participation of the Orthodox Syrian women themselves coupled with the desire for their daughters to be economically independent.
Syrian Christian women had demonstrated a positive and feminist approach towards various women’s issues. However, when these women were posed with the question regarding priesthood for women, they showed a divergent view which was not very gender positive. Majority of the respondents (72.7%) categorically said that priesthood was a man’s profession and that women should not make an attempt to step into this area (Orthodox Syrians-79.4% and Reformed Syrians-67.1%). There was more support from the Reformed Syrians (CSI women) than from the Orthodox. More positive responses came from CSI women, and that was on account of the fact that CSI has a history of ordaining women as priests.

Participation of respondents in women’s programmes/organisations was observed to be 40.7 per cent. Among those who were involved with the women’s programme, a higher representation was from Orthodox Syrians (55.1%), while it was 28 percent from Reformed Syrians. The higher percentage of Orthodox Syrians was as a result of their association with the kudumbashree initiative at the village level, where women are empowered to become agents of change through the poverty alleviation programme. Micro credit is one of the strategies adopted to empower women of kudumbashree. This programme, in the long run is expected to make these women financially self-reliant and also contribute to the higher rate of women’s participation in microcredit. According to the NFHS-3 (2006), only 8 per cent of women have ever used microcredit programmes in the State of Kerala.

Among the CSI women from the Reformed Syrians, the respondents’ association with YWCA (Young Women Christian Association) empowered them in a different way, by helping them organise and participate in different awareness programmes, discussions on women’s rights and by undertaking voluntary services for the welfare of women and other marginalised groups. There were a few projects run by YWCA for the welfare of women and children. Some of the respondents more than being just members of the congregation were actively engaged in Church activities. This included holding positions such as presidents, vice presidents, secretaries and treasurers of ladies groups in churches, committee members and leaders of ladies prayer groups, Sunday school teachers, choir leaders, centre secretary of the churches, diocesan secretaries, representatives at the church council. Even though male dominance in decision making bodies was a distinct feature in every church, the gender positive and inclusive approach of the Reformed Syrian churches has provided some space
for these women to be part of decision making bodies which was not so in Orthodox Syrian churches.

**Legal Awareness and Knowledge on Indian Succession Act (1925)**

Respondents of both denominations were found to be quite aware of the legal change in inheritance rights of Christians in Kerala, as a large proportion of respondents (86.7%) of them replied positively towards the query, and among them Reformed Syrians were slightly more (90.2%) than the Orthodox Syrians (82.4%). While revisiting the findings based on previous studies, the study conducted by Chandy (1995) in Kerala had shown a low level of awareness among the respondents regarding implementation of the Indian Succession Act (1925) for Christians. So the awareness level of Syrian Christian women of the study regarding the change of law on inheritance right was definitely appreciable. However, the respondents were not aware of the name of the Act or the exact year the Act was enforced in Kerala irrespective of denominational affiliations. A sizeable proportion (67.3%) of respondents also had a fair knowledge that the equal inheritance right was applicable to the intestate property of parents; of these a higher percentage (67.1%) was from the Reformed Syrians compared to the Orthodox Syrians (59.6%). A large proportion (86.3%) of women respondents, irrespective of denominations knew that a daughter’s share was equal to that of the son in parental property. Higher education, economic background and exposure to media perhaps, contributed to the Reformed Syrians being more informed.

Respondents of both denominations, nearly 93.7 percent were found to be lacking in knowledge about the Retrospective Effect of the Act that enabled Syrian Christian women to claim an equal share in the intestate property of parents from 1951 onwards. Thus, majority of women from the older generation lost out on claiming their share out of ignorance.

**Attitudes towards Inheritance Rights and other Allied Issues**

A sizeable proportion of respondents (60.0%) showed a favourable attitude towards women’s equal right to property. Orthodox Syrians were on the higher side with 67.6 per cent and Reformed Syrians comprised 53.7 per cent. There were underlying factors that prompted many of the respondents to take a less favourable stand on inheritance rights (40.0%). One major factor was the practice of dowry. Respondents felt that women should claim their share only under certain circumstances, such as, if women were deprived of getting any wealth from their parents during marriage, or if they were given very little wealth
compared to the vast parental assets, or whether brothers had committed injustice or cheated the sisters, or women were deserted by their husbands, separated or divorced and were having a financial crisis.

The idea of parents writing a Will that included daughters as heirs (testamentary property) was perceived differently. A high proportion (70.0%) supported the view. Support was evident more from the Reformed Syrians (79.3%) than from the Orthodox Syrians (58.8%). There were various reasons that made the respondents feel positive towards a gender inclusive Will. Assertion for one's share through Will was an important input provided by the respondents of the study and such a strong positive outlook to possess property in this manner by women has not been cited in any of the earlier studies.

The media seemed to have played an important role, as majority of the women (71.3%) got to know primarily through newspapers, and also through television and other social magazines. Association with kudumbashree and YWCA was found to have been useful to improve their awareness on legal aspects of inheritance.

**Perceptions and Assessments of Inheritance and Dowry**

Regarding the transaction of wealth in connection with marriage, a higher preference opted (48.0%) for a share in intestate property, 20.0 percent preferred dowry and 32.0 per cent preferred wealth in any form. A clear mandate for a share in intestate property came from the Reformed Syrians (62.2%) as compared to 30.9 per cent from Orthodox Syrians. This indicated that it was the Reformed Syrian group that realized the importance of property ownership and the security that it provided more than the Orthodox Syrians. This attitude also reflected a more positive perception on empowerment of women by Reformed Syrians. Respondents who preferred dowry had the apprehension that since a share in the property was hard to come by, it was better to accept dowry.

To the query, whether dowry should be done away with or not, majority of the respondents (71.7%) opted for the voluntary practice of dowry where there should not be any demand or expectation from the groom’s side. Respondents (89.3%) felt that the practice has been imposing a heavy burden on girls’ families, especially now when the dowry amount has escalated among the Syrian Christian community. This is indicative of the fact that not only patriarchal interests but economic liberalisation and globalisation seem to be turning marriages into a money market among the Syrian Christians. Gulati (1993) has highlighted
how the inflow of money from the Middle East has influenced growing consumerism among Hindu and Muslim communities in Kerala and pushed dowry demands to meet material greed. The findings of this study support that, irrespective of the communities, dowry is ruling the roost in Kerala.

**Economic Transactions in connection with Marriages and other Related Issues**

It was explicit that almost three-fourths (73.7%) of the respondents received dowry in the form of movable wealth like cash or gold at the time of marriage, with very slim differences across the denominations. Almost the same percentage (11.3%) of respondents of both denominations got a share as their wealth in connection with marriage. This brings out the strong prevalence of the patrilineal mode of property transaction among the Syrian Christians. The findings also illustrated various inter and intra familial negotiations and adjustments carried out in marriage settlements in terms of economic transactions.

Those who received both dowry and a share in the property got some amount of money, gold and a portion of landed property. A few respondents raised their dowry by working outside Kerala or in the Middle Eastern countries. Those respondents who had inter-caste marriages did not receive any wealth from their parents. It was also revealed that, in some cases, transaction of wealth had not taken place at all except for a verbal settlement that either dowry or a share in the family property would be given in due course of time. There were only very few cases of broken marriages on account of dowry reported from the field and those women were getting support from their parents and siblings.

It was observed that, a higher proportion (27.3%) felt that they received less wealth compared to the value of equal share in intestate property. Those who received more compared to the value of equal share in parental property comprised 17.0 per cent, with a slight increase among Orthodox Syrians (22.8%) than among Reformed Syrians (12.2%). One could infer that irrespective of denominations, whether they belonged to a higher or lower socioeconomic class, the wealth given to women was less compared to that given to men. The study revealed that regarding the attitude of respondents towards proposing a claim for a share in the intestate property, just one percent was interested in share and the rest 95 per cent of them were in the category of non-applicable due to a host of personal, familial or legal grounds. Any kind of coercion from the husbands or in-laws for a share in both the denominations was not reported except in one case.
To sum it up, Syrian Christian women’s choice of preference with regard to inheritance right was definitely inclined towards the promotion of effective inheritance rights to women as co-sharers with men through a testamentary Will rather than contest their inheritance right in intestate property. This definitely could be viewed as a powerful means directed towards deconstructing ‘culture’ among the Syrian Christians and an effective strategy to oust dowry in its present form. The findings of the study has enabled the researcher to understand why Syrian Christian women have remained in a passive mode which Ms. Mary Roy herself had described as ‘non-challengers’, by not coming forward to take up the issue of inheritance right.

Determinants of Knowledge and Attitudes towards Inheritance Rights
Socio-Demographic and Economic Determinants and Knowledge on Intestate Property
Among the demographic factors, age showed a highly positive association with respondents’ knowledge on intestate property such that older women (51+ years) showed higher knowledge regarding intestate property compared to women in younger age groups. The association between the two variables was found to be statistically significant (at 0.01 level) among the Reformed Syrians (0.05 level), to prove the hypothesis that there exists a positive relationship between the age of the respondents and their level of knowledge regarding intestate property which could be differentially noticeable among the Reformed Syrian women and among Orthodox Syrian women. The findings suggested the need for women in the younger age group (<=30 yrs) to improve their knowledge regarding intestate property. Respondents irrespective of the number of sons, had fair knowledge regarding intestate property, though the knowledge tends to be better among those women with more number of sons (2+). Irrespective of the number of daughters, total respondents had fair knowledge on intestate property, but the trend among the Reformed Syrian women was that with increasing number of daughters, (2+) their knowledge showed a decline, while among the Orthodox Syrian women, it was curvilinear indicating that Orthodox Syrian women having no female child need to improve their knowledge on intestate property.

There was a close association between the number of brothers and knowledge on intestate property, that is, with increasing number of brothers (3+), a decreasing trend in the level of knowledge on intestate property was noticed among total respondents, and also
among the two denominations. Women with more number of brothers were found to be less knowledgeable regarding intestate property, which was differentially observed (sig. at 0.05 level) among the Orthodox Syrians. The respondents on the whole, irrespective of the number of sisters had a fair knowledge on intestate property, though the knowledge level tended to be higher among the Reformed Syrian women with more number of sisters (3+). Those who were staying both in nuclear and joint families were found to be knowledgeable about intestate property; nevertheless, residents of joint families had a higher level of knowledge, perhaps because of more communication, better knowledge sharing and dialogue among the members of the household.

Education and knowledge of respondents on intestate property was observed to be positive such that those who were in HSC and college had (sig. at. 0.1%) higher knowledge regarding intestate property compared to the Orthodox Syrians. However, the association between the variables did not show a significant effect on knowledge of intestate property among the women of the two denominations. Those with HSC and collegiate education had better knowledge especially among the Reformed Syrians, and this might be due to higher exposure to other sources of information along with their education. Collegiate education did not seem to have influenced Orthodox Syrian women’s knowledge on intestate property in a great way. Both electronic and print media had a positive influence on respondents’ knowledge on intestate property, in the sense that, women who had regular or occasional exposure to television and newspapers and magazines were knowledgeable regarding intestate property.

Income and knowledge of respondents on intestate showed a positive trend; with increasing income, higher knowledge on intestate property was evident more so among the Reformed Syrians (Rs. 50000-100000 and Rs.200001+). This might be because, the Reformed Syrian could afford to have better access to sources of information, higher rate of participation in women’s programmes and seminars compared to Orthodox Syrian women who were in the lower economic strata. Respondents irrespective of employment status showed fair knowledge on intestate property.

**Socio-Demographic and Economic Determinants and Attitudes towards Intestate Property**

The overall trend in relation with Syrian Christian women’s age and attitudes towards equal share was found to be negative irrespective of denominations, in the sense that, higher the
age, lesser the favourable attitude towards equal share in intestate property. Women in the older age group (51+ years) especially among the Reformed Syrians were less favourable towards equal inheritance rights and women in the age groups 31-40 and <=30 showed higher preference for equal share in intestate property, especially by the Orthodox Syrians. This indicates the traditional and patriarchal outlook of older women more so among the Reformed Syrians, and greater desire among younger women to have access as well as control over the property. The findings suggest the need to change the traditional mind set of older women for a cultural shift in the patrilineal mode of succession especially among the Reformed Syrians. The higher economic class of Reformed Syrians were less favourable towards equal inheritance share.

Women with more sons (2+), had shown less preference for equal distribution of intestate property among children and the trend was relatively more among the Orthodox Syrians, suggesting greater patriarchal influence and the need to create a gender positive approach towards inheritance rights among them. However, the attitude was different among the respondents having daughters, where with increasing number of daughters (2+), their preference for equal share also showed an upward trend. The attitude however was only confirming the traditional practice of daughters inheriting property in the absence of sons. Women with more number of brothers (3+), showed higher preference for equal share, and that was more so among Reformed Syrian women. Orthodox Syrian women were not so positive, but their attitude took a curvilinear form. The hypothesis that that there exists a positive relationship between the number of brothers of respondents and attitudes towards equal inheritance rights proved to be statistically significant (0.05 level) and also differentially noticeable among the women of two denominations (sig. at 0.05 level), for Reformed Syrians. As far as the number of sisters was concerned, the trend was gender positive among both denominations. Joint families were found to have a positive influence in promoting the attitude towards equal share among the Syrian Christian women regarding equal inheritance rights which was observed to be relatively high among the Orthodox Syrians. More healthy communication, discussions and dialogues relating to equitable distribution of property in joint families compared to nuclear families might have contributed to their positive approach.
It was expected that higher education among the respondents could cast a strong positive effect on them regarding equal inheritance rights, but the findings show a different trend. Greater preference for equal share in the intestate property was shown by those women with a lower level of education, while collegiate women were least in favour of equal shares. This was uniformly observed among both denominations, and it was found to be highly significant among both denominations (Reformed Syrians at 0.001 level and Orthodox Syrians at 0.01 level).

The attitude of collegiate educated women, especially Reformed Syrians reflected their rational and pragmatic thinking towards the issue of equal inheritance rights, and this stemmed from their circumstances or personal experiences rather than from gender ideology. The practice of dowry has been the prime reason and a host of associated factors were cited to have a deterring effect on educated women from taking a strong positive stand for equal inheritance share. It implies that educated women could play a leading role in changing the cultural practice of dowry. The influence of the electronic and print media, that is, the television, newspapers and magazines on a regular or occasional manner was positive and it created a favourable attitude towards inheritance and it was more so among the Orthodox Syrians.

A high income (Rs. 200001+) had a negative effect on the respondents. They showed less preference for an equal share among both denominations and the association was found to be highly significant (at 0.001) among total respondents and Orthodox Syrians. Unemployment status had an influence on the respondents for an equal share, especially among the Orthodox Syrians. The association was found to be significant at 0.01 level among the total respondents and at 0.05 level among the Reformed Syrian respondents.

**Determinants of Attitude towards Testamentary Property Rights**

The findings have shown that with advancing age among the respondents, their attitudes towards inheritance rights in testamentary property were observed to be declining, indicating a higher preference among the younger age group (<=30 yrs), to become heirs to parental property through Will. The trend suggests the need to create a more gender positive approach towards access as well as control of productive resources like land, especially among middle aged Orthodox Syrian women. The attitudes of those women with male children (2+), had a negative influence on their outlook towards daughters becoming heirs.
through Will, and it was more prominent among Orthodox Syrian women. The respondents continued to exhibit a positive approach for inheritance among girls when there were only girls in families, and such an attitude was more so among Orthodox Syrians than among Reformed Syrians.

The number of brothers also acted as a negative factor for gender inclusive distribution of property, since having more brothers (3+) tends to make the respondents less inclined towards a daughter inclusive parental Will, except in the case of Reformed Syrian women. This might be due to their realization of the importance of ownership of property in one’s name, and availability of a huge parental property. There was a significant association (at 0.05 level) between the variables among the Orthodox Syrians, to prove that when there were more number of brothers, the respondents were less favourable towards the testamentary rights of women, and that was differentially noticed among the women of two denominations. The relationship between number of sisters and attitude towards testamentary inheritance right showed a positive trend which was akin to the practice of inheritance when there were only daughters in the families, but it was not so among the Reformed Syrians. Nuclear or joint families had contributed in a positive way to develop a gender inclusive approach towards parental property, nonetheless, nuclear Reformed Syrian families displayed a greater outlook and that might be due to their higher education and interaction with the outside world in addition to having intra-household information gathered on inheritance rights.

Higher education especially college education, was found to have a greater influence for testamentary property rights of women, specifically so, among the Reformed Syrian. The association was found to be highly significant (at 0.001 level) among the total respondents. The association proved that education and attitudes of respondents towards testamentary inheritance rights were positively related, such that, women with higher education were more favourable towards testamentary rights and it was uniformly noticeable among the women belonging to two Syrian Christian denominations. Education seems to have enabled the respondents to perceive the significance of property ownership as an important agent of empowerment of women, channelized through parental Will. However, besides college education, the Orthodox Syrian women need to enhance their
approach towards testamentary rights through higher exposure like women’s programmes, seminars on rights of women.

Exposure to media, such as television was found to have contributed to develop gender positive attitudes towards inheritance rights among the respondents and significant contribution was made by the print media like newspapers and magazines. The association was found to be highly significant (at 0.001 level) among the Reformed Syrians. The exposure to print media and attitude towards testamentary rights were closely related, such that, Syrian Christian women who had higher exposure to newspapers and other gender related magazines exhibited greater preference for testamentary rights and that was differentially observed among the women of two denominations.

Income and attitude towards testamentary inheritance rights was found to be having a positive association specially so, among the Reformed Syrian. Respondents having higher income, were more favourable towards testamentary inheritance rights and it was proved significant. Employment status observed to exert greater preference for testamentary inheritance rights particularly among the Reformed Syrians, while for Orthodox Syrians, the desire was relatively higher among unemployed women. Economic security through possession of parental property might be the reason for such an outlook. The association between the variables was found to be significant (0.05) among the Reformed Syrians.

**Multiple Determinants of Knowledge and Attitudes towards Inheritance Rights**

In an attempt to understand how the knowledge and attitude of Syrian Christian women towards inheritance rights were influenced by various socioeconomic and demographic factors, logistic regression analysis was carried out. Variables like age and education were found to have significant association with respondents’ knowledge on intestate property, when denominations tested together. Women in the age group 51+ years, showed highest knowledge in both denominations compared to those in the <=30 age group, which means that older the age, higher the knowledge regarding intestate property. With regard to education, women at all the three levels secondary, higher secondary and collegiate were found to be knowledgeable compared to women with only primary level education. Orthodox Syrians with higher secondary and secondary educational qualifications and
Reformed Syrians with higher secondary and collegiate level education had more knowledge regarding intestate property. This means that higher education has imparted greater knowledge among Reformed Syrians.

Women with a household income Rs.100001-Rs.200000 showed less knowledge when denomination tested together, but did not show any significant effect among each denomination. Number of sons was found to have a significant effect on Orthodox Syrians, when denominations were treated separately, in the sense that, those who had no sons were less knowledgeable compared to those who had one son regarding intestate property. Type of family and exposure to print media, have shown significant association among the Reformed Syrians’ knowledge of intestate property. Those who were staying in joint families were more knowledgeable compared to those who were in nuclear families. Among the Reformed Syrians, those who read newspapers and magazines occasionally were more knowledgeable compared to those who read regularly.

Variables such as age and education were found to have a significant effect on respondents’ attitudes, when denominations were tested combined and also tested separately for Reformed Syrians. Increase in non-favourable attitudes towards equal division of intestate property equally among children increased with increase in age (51+years) among both denominations taken together, and among Reformed Syrians, but the age factor was not found to be significant among the Orthodox Syrians when taken separately.

With regard to education, those who had collegiate level of education, were found to be less favourable towards equal inheritance rights, when tested combined and also among the Reformed Syrians when tested separately, but education was not found to have significant effect among Orthodox Syrians. So higher education among the Reformed Syrians, has significantly influenced them to be less favourable towards equal inheritance rights in intestate property.

Number of sisters were found to have significantly less non-favourable attitude towards equal inheritance in the sense that, those who had two sisters were less non-favourable towards equal inheritance rights when denominations were taken together and separately for Orthodox Syrians but not for Reformed Syrians. This indicated that those with two sisters were more favourable for equal inheritance rights than those with one, especially among the Orthodox Syrians.
When tested separately, the Orthodox Syrian women showed increase in non-favourable attitude towards division of intestate property equally among children with increase in household income (Rs.100001-200000 and Rs. 200001 and above), while Reformed Syrian women showed a decreasing trend in a non-favourable attitude among those whose household income ranging from Rs. 100001 - Rs.200000. So among the Orthodox Syrians, economically well to do families would not prefer to have division of property equally among children, but it was contrary among the Reformed Syrians. Among Reformed Syrian, non-favourable attitude towards equal share decreased with three or more brothers. This indicated that among the Reformed Syrians, women with more brothers would like to have division of property equally among both sons and daughters.

With regard to the attitude of respondents towards writing a Will including daughters as heirs in the parental property (testamentary property right), variables such as education and exposure to print media were found to have significant effect when denominations were treated together and when treated separately for Reformed Syrians. Those who had collegiate and higher secondary level of education, were more favourable towards including daughters as heirs in the Will when denominations were taken together and taken independently for Reformed Syrians but not for Orthodox Syrians. Those who read newspapers and magazines occasionally were less favourable towards a daughter inclusive Will, but such an association was not observed among Orthodox Syrians. This means that, higher the education and greater the exposure to newspapers and magazines, higher the favourable attitude towards a daughter inclusive Will, especially among the Reformed Syrians.

Variables such as household income and number of brothers were found to have significant effect when denominations were treated combined, and treated separately for Orthodox Syrians with a household income of Rs.50001-Rs. 200000 when treated combined and those with Rs.50001-Rs.100000 among the Orthodox Syrians, and those with no brothers, when treated combined and separately for Orthodox Syrians were found to be more favourable towards parents writing a Will including daughters as heirs to the parental property. This indicates that, women in the middle income and those with no brothers preferred including daughters as heirs to the property especially among the Orthodox Syrians.

Orthodox Syrian women in the age group of 31-40 were less favourable to include
daughters as heirs in parental property in the Will. The age factor did not show any effect on Reformed Syrians. Those who had two or more male children among Orthodox Syrians were less favourable to the testamentary property right. The number of sons did not show any significant effect on Reformed Syrians. Orthodox Syrian women who had no sisters were more favourable towards parents, writing a Will including daughters as heirs. Variables which showed significant effect on respondents’ attitudes towards a daughter inclusive will only for Reformed Syrians were a number of female children. Women who had no daughters were less favourable towards a daughter inclusive Will.

**Experiences of Women who availed the Indian Succession Act (1925) for their Equal Share in the Intestate Property of the Parents**

Three case studies of Syrian Christian women who had invoked the Indian Succession Act (1925), in order to take possession of their equal share in the intestate property were presented. Owing to the non-availability of any Syrian Christian woman who had taken legal measures to obtain an equal share, among the samples taken for the study, the researcher had to seek the help of lawyers practising at City Civil Court located at Kollam town, for the selection of cases for the study. Three cases which had underwent Court proceedings and the same available with the lawyers constituted for the study. Out of three cases, two had completed the Court trials, and judgements were passed in favour of petitioners i.e., the women, while one case was settled out of Court, when the trial was half way by mutual consent.

Regarding the socio-demographic and economic profile of these women, one was a senior citizen and a widow, while the other two in their mid-fifties, staying with their respective families. Case one had primary education, case two was higher secondary educated and case three was a graduate. Two of the women were from lower- middle class families and belonged to Syrian Catholic and Orthodox Syrian Churches, while one was from an upper class family of CSI denomination. While analysing the background of the three cases, it was evident that these women had invoked the Indian Succession Act (1925), because they were humiliated, cheated and there was a breach of trust. The grounds for availing of the Act, was quite similar across the cases, as all three cases had moved the court to not to establish their inheritance rights at the outset itself, rather all of them were driven to invoke the law by their own brothers. These women were still not able to reconcile
themselves to the fact that their own brothers could treat them in an obnoxious manner, and above all what pained them most was sibling relations coming to an impasse.
RECOMMENDATIONS

In the preceding chapters, the researcher had attempted to examine and analyse, how the awareness, knowledge and attitudes of Syrian Christian women towards inheritance rights were influenced by various external agents and the extent of such influence. Even though, the study has focused on Syrian Christian women to understand their perceptions on equal inheritance rights and testamentary property rights, the recommendations based on the study propose to empower women to improve their level of knowledge and attitude on inheritance rights. The following recommendations may be useful for carrying out further research in the area of women’s inheritance rights.

1. The methodology used in the study, the survey design, and the sampling procedure involving two stage stratified random sampling, based on Church data, has been an innovative methodological approach. Though the case study approach had its limitations, the few cases that were analysed through a qualitative manner to get an indepth understanding of the utilisation aspect of inheritance law, could enlighten the objectives of the study. This work, therefore, involving both quantitative and the qualitative approaches, has made an attempt to cover the entire process, that is, the awareness, knowledge, attitudes and utilisation of the Indian Succession Act (1925), among Syrian Christian women which could strengthen the purpose of the study. The research work could therefore, be regarded as a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the area of inheritance rights of women. At the same time, issues focused need further research.

2. A comparative study on the issue of inheritance rights based on two denominations, the Orthodox Syrians and Reformed Syrians, has been another methodological consideration. It could focus on differences in knowledge and attitudinal levels on inheritance rights, existing within the Syrian Christian denominations. The influence of socio-demographic and economic factors on inheritance issues has been varied on the women of both denominations. Hence, for any further research work, similar stratification on the basis of women’s denominations and similar categories could be adopted.

3. The study has its methodological limitations and taking this into account, the researcher
suggests a few methodological aspects that can be employed for future research such as:
(a) Studies involving other Christian denominations, covering a larger sample of respondents, including men and unmarried women in the sample could bring out more divergent views.
(b) Studies involving Christian women who have joined the nunnery would be significant in bringing out their perceptions regarding inheritance rights.
(c) Research based on secondary source of information such as law journals or any legal publications, which report cases on inheritance rights for a particular period of time could be viewed as a topic of research.

4. Syrian Christian women of the study did display a fair level of awareness and knowledge regarding inheritance rights as per the Indian Succession Act (1925), especially Reformed Syrian women. However, women of both denominations were highly ignorant about the Retrospective Effect of the Indian Succession Act (1925), though the Act was implemented in Kerala in 1986, it carried a Retrospective Effect from 1951 onwards. So one major legal aspect which needs to be incorporated into the legal awareness programme would be to make Christian women aware about the retrospective effect of the Indian Succession Act (1925). The significance lies in the fact that, even if women do not move the court to get their due share in normal circumstances, when they are confronted in adverse situations they could avail themselves of the legal provision for equal inheritance rights. For this purpose, legal campaigns, village level awareness programmes, seminars and discussions need to be organised.

5. The attitude towards equal share in inheritance right in intestate property has vividly brought out the effect of higher education, that is, the college educated women opting out of their inheritance rights for various pragmatic and logical reasons and more so by the Reformed Syrian women. The higher preference for equal inheritance rights has been demonstrated by women of low education among both denominations. Such an outcome suggests that, women who preferred share in intestate property, were those who did not have adequate education and those in the lower economic strata who also represented families having lesser landed properties. So the equal inheritance right
seems to be more applicable to those who were in the lower economic class rather than in the higher economic class. Such an attitudinal difference calls for the review of the application of Indian Succession Act (1925) taking into account the class differences among the Christian community in Kerala.

6. The support shown by Syrian Christian women, with special reference to Reformed Syrians, towards the testamentary property right speaks of their desire to become heirs in the testamentary property, so as to ensure effective inheritance rights to women. Some of the prospective fall out of such a practice would be, ousting a cancerous practice like dowry and thereby deconstructing and transforming the culture in a more gender positive way. Possession and control over property also empower Christian women and promote the Welfare Effect of the family and Efficiency Effect of Christian women themselves. The practice could promote a sense of belongingness or bond with the native and support women who go through bad marriages, widows and single mothers. These findings stress the need for framing a legal policy in succession rights among Christians where daughters could become co-heirs along with sons.

7. Another important area of empowering women is to make them understand the importance of possession of land in their name. Even in cases where women do get their wealth from natal homes as shares, there is a tendency to dispose it off and convert it into moveable wealth at the behest of their husbands or in-laws. So the awareness about the importance of property ownership in one’s name should also figure as an important point in legal awareness programme.

8. The Syrian Christian women in the study were in a passive mode with regard to the inheritance share in the intestate property due to pragmatic, ethical or spiritual reasons. So there were no cases of women seeking legal measures to gain their share in the property. However, it is possible that there could be other women in the field area who were not part of the sample frame and who would like to press for their shares through legal intervention, but due to financial constraints or other problems, they may not be in a position to go ahead with it. Such women need to be empowered through legal aid services. First of all, women themselves need to become agents of change rather than be just beneficiaries and for this, educated women should take the initiative. Since
The *kudumbashree* programme is reported to be empowering women as agents of change in poverty eradication programmes, women could be addressed in such programmes to promote legal awareness regarding inheritance rights.

9. Legal awareness programmes for men to educate them about the legal changes in inheritance rights, organise seminars and discussions with men to promote gender positive attitudes towards inheritance rights especially to advocate the need for testamentary rights of women and to practice a gender inclusive Will.

10. Free legal services could be provided through legal aid centres for those women in the lower income class to seek legal intervention to gain their share in property.

Who could be the key actors to facilitate the process of empowerment of women?

11. Non-Govermental Organisations (NGO)s and women’s organisations can play a key role in the awareness programmes, legal aid services, counselling services and to provide financial assistance to economically backward women for them to seek judicial help to gain their share in the property.

12. The Church could also play a role in helping women in their parish if they are meted out with injustice in inheritance issues. Counselling services can be provided to the family members involved in an inheritance right feud to enable the women to get their due share through amicable settlement and such negotiations will help retain the family unity of siblings. In those cases which go beyond their level of intervention, women should be guided to take the right legal steps by linking them to the resource persons or agencies in legal matters.