The present piece of research is based on both primary and secondary data. The principal objectives of the study were to examine the consumer movement in selected urban and rural areas of Orissa, to study the awareness and attitude of consumers towards various marketing practices of manufacturers and Government regulations including working of Consumer Protection Act 1986. Another objective of the study was to examine the role of Voluntary Consumer Organisations (VCOs) in creating consumer awareness.

8.1 SUMMARY

The study has been put in eight chapters. The demographic characteristics of Indian consumer have been put in Chapter-II. The analysis of Indian consumer revealed that literacy rate has been continuously increasing. The consumption pattern of Indian consumer has been changing and there has been a favourable shift in the consumption pattern in the post liberalisation era. Significant changes in life style and buying habits of Indian consumer is witnessed. The average Indian is now spending more liberally than ever before. India is witnessing a middle class explosion. The economic reforms and post-liberalisation era have given a boost to the growth of middle class. The Indian rural market is also expanding very vast. By and large, the rural consumers continue to be marked by low purchasing power, tradition-bound community with religion, culture and tradition strongly influencing their consumption habits. It is witnessed that the life style of a sizeable segment of rural consumers has already changed significantly in recent years because of various reasons, such as growth in income, education, enlarging media reach etc. The rural development has been diversified and thus has become attractive to corporates.
Chapter-III gives a picture on origin and development of consumer movement in India as well as in Orissa. It is observed that rising prices of goods and services, inflationary tendency, rising income, spread of education and awareness, advertisement of goods and services and above all, the enactment of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 have been responsible for consumer movement. However, poor organisation of consumers, poor implementation of laws, poverty, etc. have not helped to take the consumer movement to an expected height.

In Orissa as in other states the consumer disputes redressal machinery consists of District Forum and State Commission. The Government has taken a few steps in establishing Kalyan Mandal (Voluntary Consumer Societies at Block level), Chetana Bhawan, Consumer education in school and college curriculum, etc.

Chapter IV gives a bird's eye view on consumer related major government regulations such as Sale of Goods Act, BIS Act, Standard of Weights and Measures Act, The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, Essential Commodities Act, The Environmental Protection Act, etc. The salient features, scope and the major provisions of these Acts have been highlighted in this chapter.

A discussion of Consumer Protection Act 1986 has been given in Chapter V. Seeking redressal through courts is not only time consuming but also a costly process. Therefore, the Consumer Protection Act (COPRA) was enacted in 1986, which has subsequently been amended in 1991, 1993 and 2002. The Act is supplemented by Consumer Protection Rules. The COPRA enshrines the rights of a consumer to be informed about quality, potency, price etc. It aims at providing an inexpensive and expeditious redressal machinery to dispose of the consumer grievances. The Act provides a three-tier set up to redress the consumer grievances at the District, State and National level. It seeks to promote and protect six consumer rights. It applies to all goods and services except if otherwise provided by the Central Government by notification.
Though the Act was expected to bring about a revolutionary change in the consumer awareness and attitude it has not achieved much in this direction. Consumer grievances are piling up at the District and State level and disposal has not been satisfactory. Even the apathetic attitude of the consumers has discouraged themselves to go to the redressal forum apprehending harassment, delay etc. It is also observed that filling up vacancies at the District Fora and State Commission has been unduly delayed. In addition to this, there has been dearth of adequate facilities for smooth conduct of the redressal machinery. The present researcher feels that the Act can be properly implemented with the cooperation of all concerned viz., Complainant, the alleged party and the government. All these parties need a change in their attitude and they all should be proactive.

While the study provides new empirical insights with consumers' attitude towards the marketing system in India, it should be realistically viewed as exploratory due to various limitations and constraints. This is discussed in Chapter VI.

Chapter VII aims at ascertaining and evaluating consumer related activities undertaken by voluntary consumer organisations and consumer activists working in Orissa. Their suggestions for improving consumer awareness and protecting consumer interest are also discussed here.

8.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The study revealed that Indian manufacturers still are following the selling concept though the consumers in general expect that they should follow marketing philosophy. This is true both in urban and rural Orissa.

The consumers of Orissa are yet to feel the benefits of competition among the various brand players due to liberalisation and globalisation. It is true that competition has brought in quality improvement both in product and after-sales-service. This message has to be taken to the people. Even if there
is a sign of consumer awareness because of improved literacy etc., it is found that some manufacturers and service providers avoided owning their responsibility when some deficiencies in some products have been pointed out. The present researcher felt that the marketers/ manufacturers believe in creating customers rather than retaining them. **Further, they are more interested in profit making rather than serving the consumers.**

At places, the consumers believe that some manufacturers have started operating on the philosophy "Seller Beware". Efforts are on to improve the quality of products and services to satisfy the consumers. Some of the respondents have expressed that this is due to the consumer consciousness. This is a healthy sign of consumer movement. Many respondents both in urban and rural Orissa have opined that at times they have faced problems in making intelligent buying decisions because of large varieties of brands of different products. There is a mixed reaction to pay higher price towards packaged items of different products. **Some of the consumers both in urban and rural area have developed a taste for packaged food items rather than loose ones.**

The analysis of responses and perceptions gathered from the respondents revealed that the after-sales-services provided by the manufacturers and dealers are improving. **The researcher is fully convinced that this will go a long way on the part of the marketers for customer relationship building.** It is a good sign that products and services have become more accessible now than in the past because of competition both from within and outside.

Advertisements and other promotional activities carried out by the manufacturers provide a lot of information to the buyer. Marketing is the exposed arm of business and advertising is the most exposed arm of the marketing functions. Scrutiny of the marketing practices of firms, in general,
and advertising practices in particular, by Governmental bodies, the media, public interest groups and others is inevitable as well as desirable from the standpoint of larger social welfare. **Most of the responding consumers perceived that advertisements misled the consumers.**

**Of late labels have become informative and educative.** As high as 92 per cent of urban consumers and 53 per cent of rural consumers go through the labels attached to the packaged items. They are satisfied with the information such as ingredients, manufacturing date, expiry date, quality certification like ISI and Agg mark, etc.

However, 60 per cent of the respondents both in urban and rural areas have never checked the quantity content in a package by actually weighing the same. Whatever is printed on the package has been accepted by them. This consumer apathy is due to the fact that the packages bear the words "Net weight when packed". They further believed that this cannot be challenged in consumer redressal forum.

**Consumers both in rural and urban areas have become more information-seeker.** They probe a lot while making purchase decisions. This is proved from the fact that many mistakes committed by the consumers are due to their carelessness and ignorance.

A sincere effort was made to ascertain whether the Consumer Protection Act and the consumer movement have been successful in making consumer aware of his rights. **It is observed that there is still lack of education and lack of generation of consciousness among the rural and urban consumers.**

**It is a good thing that the consumers have become gradually more assertive in the market place.** The marketers have become more responsive
towards consumer demands and consumer complaints. However consumers proved to be more assertive than urban consumers. **The marketers are gradually becoming more consumer friendly by handling their complaints fairly.**

Consumers have asked for after sales service from the dealers. However, 54 percent consumers in rural areas as 24 percent consumers in urban areas have received no response or delayed response. **It goes to prove that rural consumers are more neglected by the manufacturers or dealers in providing after-sale-service.**

More than one third of rural as well as urban responding consumers have not asked for detailed information about the product while shopping. However, a comparison has revealed that urban consumers are more assertive in demanding information and exercising their right to be informed.

Majority of the responding urban consumers prefer ISI quality marked products. They perceived that ISI means quality, good brand, reputation. 45 per cent of rural respondents also prefer ISI marked products. **It is a healthy sign for consumer movement.**

As already pointed out earlier that there are a host of legislations for promoting consumer interests and protecting them from the malpractices of manufacturers and traders. However, it has been observed that a substantial proportion of consumers has failed to approach the various authorities under these Acts for their redressal.

On the whole, it is found that the consumers are reluctant and apathetic to bring the cases to the notice of various redressal authorities. Only in few cases the responding consumers have defended their cases at the appropriate level without taking the help of lawyers and consumer activists. As
per law the complainant can fight his case by himself. In this regard the voluntary organisations have to do a lot of work in Orissa to educate the consumers.

It is a good thing that majority of the consumers are aware of the existence of various complaint redressal machinery. But surprisingly, almost two-third of the respondents are not satisfied with the functioning of District Fora.

The respondents have felt the need of playing a positive role by VCOs, and the media and the government in the promotion of consumer awareness. Their complaint before the present researcher was that these agencies have not played their role effectively and adequately. It is also observed that the Consumer Day/Consumer Fortnight is not observed seriously and with sincerity.

Some of the manufactures and service providers have opened their consumer grievance redressal cells as a part of their self-regulation programme. It is observed that hardly thirty percent of the responding consumers felt the sincerity of these organisations in disposing of consumer cases. There has been adequate legislative provisions to protect consumer interest and to promote consumer awareness. However, there is a common complaint about the effective implementation of the Act.

The VCOs on the other hand allege lack of cooperation from government machinery. Inadequate resources at their disposal is a major obstacle to spearhead the consumer movement in an extensive manner.

There is a general feeling that the government regulations are adequate to protect consumer interests. However, both urban and rural responding consumers have expressed their dissatisfaction in the manner of their implementation.
Chapter VII deals with the perception of voluntary organisations on consumerism. The researcher made personal interaction with some of the activists engaged in protection and promotion of Consumer Rights. Their perceptions about consumer redressal machinery were noticed. Their suggestions in spearheading consumer movement were also solicited. It is observed that complaint handling, advocacy and litigation are the main functions of voluntary organisations with regard to consumer welfare programmes.

The study tried to find out the role played by consumer activists in Orissa. They have not reached up to the public expectations in creating awareness about consumer rights. Most of their activities are limited to complaints handling advocacy etc. Interestingly, no voluntary organisations have in house testing facility for testing the products like CERC, VOICE etc. It is revealed that 75 per cent of the responding voluntary organisations have handled cases less than 50 during the year 2003. It is a very dismal picture. This shows lack of consumer education and awareness. Voluntary organisations should provide counselling, guidance and assistance.

However, the research on consumerism and publication of consumer journals have not gained much importance in the perception of consumer activists. Their main source of funding was from donations received from individuals and membership fees. Sale of literature and foreign grants do not give enough financial support. 68 percent of the respondents were not satisfied with the functioning of the redressal machinery.

8.3 TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

H₁ Urban consumers are more aware regarding their rights than their rural counterparts
• There is a significant difference between urban and rural consumers about the philosophy adopted by the manufacturers. Urban consumers
believe that the manufacturers have started operating with the philosophy that the "Seller beware". This is not the case with rural respondents (Table 6.5).

- More than 70 per cent of the urban consumers are aware of the existence of redressal machinery (Table 6.45).
- More than 57 per cent of urban consumers are aware of ISI quality Certification (Table 6.38).
- Roughly 54 per cent of rural consumers have received either no response or delayed response from the manufacturers with respect to their complaint (Table 6.34).
- Urban consumers are more aware than rural consumer with regard to seeking of product information during purchase (Table 6.36).
- Urban consumer are more aware than rural consumers about functioning of redressal agencies in their localities (Table 6.45).
- As regard the existence of consumer cells, urban consumers are more aware than their rural counterparts (Table 6.52).

Thus the hypothesis "Urban consumers are more aware regarding their rights than their rural counterparts" holds good.

\( H_2 \) \hspace{1cm} The voluntary organisations do a commendable job in promoting awareness among consumers about their rights

- 47 per cent of total respondents are indifferent towards ISi mark. This is due to lack of education about quality certification mark (Table 6.38).
- Role of voluntary consumer organisations in creating awareness on consumer rights among consumers is not encouraging. They have not played their role in urban areas effectively (Table 6.40).
- 51 percent of the respondents revealed that they were not aware about the existence of Consumer Associations working in their locality (Table 6.41).
More than 50 per cent respondents are not only reluctant to bring their cases to District Consumer Forum, but are also apathetic and have a low confidence in the functioning of the Forums (Table 6.46).

Weak financial position of many voluntary organisations stand in their way for spearheading consumer welfare movement (Tables 7.3 & 7.4).

58 per cent of urban and 72 per cent of rural respondents are not aware of the World Consumer's Day (Table 6.51).

There is a gap in supplying information to the consumers to become well informed (Table 6.23).

It is revealed that 75 per cent of VCOs have handled cases less than 50 during 2003 (Table 7.8).

Thus the hypothesis "The voluntary organisations do a commendable job in promoting awareness among consumers about their rights" does not hold good.

**H3:** The urban and rural consumers in general, suspect the dealers in respect to their advertisements, pricing, packaging and weighment practices

- Both urban and rural consumers felt that manufacturers are interested in profit making rather than serving the consumers (Table 6.4).
- Both urban and rural consumers do not benefit from competition. They are still exploited in the market place in some form or other (Table 6.2).
- Both urban and rural consumers strongly perceive that advertisements mislead the consumers (Table 6.15).
- Manufacturer's advertisement is a reliable source of information is in doubt (Table 6.14).
- Exploitation of consumers deserve more attention by manufacturers (Table 6.17).
- Consumers hesitate to pay higher price for packaged food items (Table 6.11).
• As high as 60 per cent of responding consumers are not careful about weighing packaged items (Table 6.20).

Thus the hypothesis "The urban and rural consumers in general, suspect the dealers in respect to their advertisements, pricing, packaging and weighment practices" holds good.

H4: The consumer movement is gaining momentum both in rural as well as urban areas

• Manufacturers have started operating on the philosophy that "Seller beware" (Table 6.5).
• Manufacturers have improved quality of most products and services (Table 6.7)
• Manufacturers have become more responsive to consumer complaints now than they were in the past (Table 6.27)
• After-sale-Services provided by the manufacturer have been improved. (Table 6.32).
• 61 per cent of urban and rural respondents asked for product information while making their purchases (Table 6.36).
• 53 per cent of responding consumers have approached various redressal agencies and organisations for their grievances. This moderately high percentage is due to their growing awareness (Table 6.42).
• 73 per cent of urban and 52 per cent of rural respondents are aware about functioning of consumer redressal agencies in their localities (Table 6.45).
• 42 per cent of urban and 46 per cent of rural consumers have filed cases in consumer redressal machinery (Table 6.46).

Thus the hypothesis "The consumer movement is gaining momentum both in rural as well as urban areas" holds good.
8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Though there are signs of increasing consumer awareness among both urban and rural consumers in Orissa, there is a scope for speeding up of the movement in the larger interest of all concerned. For this, the present researcher likes to suggest a multi-pronged approach. It is felt that, to spearhead the consumer movement; the consumer, the marketer, trade associations, government and voluntary organisations have to play their respective roles.

8.4.1 Generating Awareness

An attitudinal change has to be brought about in the minds of the consumers. They should be organised and united. Consumer unity is the strength. They should fight out collectively against exploitation by traders in the market place. There are various Acts and Regulations prevailing in our country to protect the consumer interests. They should bring cases to appropriate enforcement agencies instead of bringing all consumer cases to Consumer Redressal Forums.

The consumers should file cases in a proper manner. They have many rights and responsibilities. They should keep cash memos for the items purchased in order to file a complaint in a consumer court. They should have the responsibility to file cases and appeals within stipulated time period.

We have a number of acts covering various aspects of purchase and sale, such as, Sale of Goods Act, Essential Commodities Act, Drugs and Cosmetic Act, Weights and Measure Act, etc. There are also appropriate authorities under these Acts to deal with consumer related cases. However the present researcher feels that there should be self regulation instead of statutory regulations. Awareness should be generated among producers and traders to take the help of self regulation which will help promote amity between seller and buyer on a lasting basis. In this regard, the Trade Associations and Chambers of Commerce are to play their role effectively.
Government should give adequate funds for proper functioning of redressal agencies. It should take enough interest in filling up vacancies of the post of members of the District Redressal Agencies and State Commission. It should also allocate adequate funds to VCOs for spearheading consumer awareness in organising seminars and arranging similar programmes mostly in rural areas. Any vacancy in the incumbencies of the members of the Redressal Agencies should be filled up immediately. The District Forums and the State Commissions should be provided with necessary infrastructural facilities including required office building/office space at a central location. The budget for the District Forums or the State Commission should also be reasonably adequate. Government should be responsive to consumer problems. The Department of Consumer Welfare should make continuous evaluation and monitoring of all redressal agencies and voluntary organisations working in this field.

Redressal machinery should dispose of the cases as far as practicable within prescribed time limit. The District Forums and the State Commissions should not be bogged down in hyper legal technicalities and procedural complexities that characterize civil courts. Simple law, simple procedure and simple execution should be the guiding principles for the working of Redressal Agencies. The Consumer Forums should function in the most informal manner as "Popular Forums".

The Redressal Agencies should ensure that where the complainant or the opposite party is not represented by a counsel, no disadvantage occurs to the other party. The District Forums and the State Commissions should bring about drastic and speedy reduction in the number of cases pending for more than six months.

Media plays an important role in making a consumer informed about his rights. It is the media which can create consumer awareness in the most
effective manner. Both electronic and print media should play a positive role in this direction. Important case decisions should be publicised through electronic and print media. There should be panel discussions in TV relating to consumer issues.

Voluntary consumer organisations should develop, adapt and/or reproduce educational materials and organise community-centred mass-based participatory awareness programmes to spread consumer literacy and to make the consumer conscious of his/her rights and remedies. They should provide counselling, guidance and assistance to the consumer, especially the needy one, to handle a complaint or dispute either by arriving at a pre-trial negotiated settlement with the opposite party or by resorting to redressal mechanism.

Voluntary Organisations should undertake field projects and surveys to identify the needs and demands of the consumers; conduct action-research to gain new insights to bring further improvements in the on-going consumer welfare programmes; and set up consumer product testing laboratories for comparative testing, marking and evaluation.

Training programmes, workshops and orientation courses should be organised by VCOs to develop the understanding, knowledge and expertise on consumer protection provisions and to keep abreast of the most recent facts and developments in this field.

Observing consumer Day is not enough. It should be observed in both letter and spirit. A broad based information, education and communication strategy should be adopted to make the average consumer even in remote rural areas of the country aware of his rights to avail simple, speedy and inexpensive redressal under the Act.
Research to assess the level of information on consumer protection in different parts of the country should be conducted on regular basis. Consumer protection and welfare provisions and programme should be integrated into curriculum of school, college and university education.

The Central Government, State Government, Central and State Consumer Protection Councils, the Bureau of Indian Standards, Weights and Measures departments, Consumer Grievance Cells of Trade and Industries and Voluntary Organisations; in co-ordination and collaboration with each others should strive to fulfil the various awareness programmes throughout the length and breadth of the country.

All will benefit from growing consumer awareness and consumer movement. The multi-pronged approach suggested herein shall definitely go a long way to help develop consumer movement in Orissa both in urban and rural areas. Only then the consumer may finally begin to receive all that he pays for.

8.5 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present research work has been carried out in certain selected urban and rural areas of Orissa. Some of the findings may hold good elsewhere as well. But indepth studies could be made as to why the consumers are shy of complaining and taking grievance to the redressal machinery. Even studies can be made to find out the degree of self regulation and working of consumer grievance/complaint cells established by some of the industrial houses of India. The role of Voluntary Consumer Organisations in promoting consumer movement could be researched into a great detail.

Thus is the study on "Consumer Movement, Attitude towards Marketing Practices and Government Regulations - An Exploratory Survey of Urban and Rural Consumers".