CHAPTER II
ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER MOVEMENT AND EDUCATION IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

The consumer movement in Tirunelveli district cannot be viewed in isolation rather it is viewed as part of the Indian consumer movement. The Indian consumer movement historically can be viewed historically in two stages. The first stage consisted of what happened before the enactment of Consumer Protection Act of 1986 and the second stage consisted of all that happened after the enactment. Looking at Indian scenario, the formation of the Passengers and Traffic Relief Association and the Women Graduates Union Bombay in 1915 are the two important pioneering attempts with regard to the origin of consumer organizations. These came into existence much before the Indian independence and the enactment of Consumer Protection Act of 1986. With regard to Tamilnadu, the formation of the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Stores (TUCS) in Chennai during the year 1904, as the first consumer cooperative society, was an important milestone. This had grown into a cooperative consumer society with nearly 150 branches spread all over the Chennai city. The consumer Protection Council in Madras founded by Rajaji is still in existence. The real beginning of consumer movement in terms of sustained, visible and continuing expansion was during the sixties only with the formation of The Consumer Guidance Society of India, All India Bank Depositors’ Association, Bombay, Civil Trust, Bombay, Surat Consumer Association and Jyoti Sangh Grahak Suraksha Vibad, Ahmadebad. The Consumer Protection Council in Tiruchirappalli was formed in 1974 twelve years before the enactment of Consumer Protection Act of 1986. Jajie Mandanna, who established the Karnataka Consumer Service Society in 1970 was instrumental in the formation of the country’s first consumer protection board. Mandanna’s book titled the Indian Market place is one of the earliest books on consumer protection.

Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of this type were those associations of people which aim at promoting the welfare of the public without any profit motive. They were voluntary bodies having a constitution and rules of their own, and are free from government interference.

1 Mishra, S.K., Puri, V.K., Indian Economy, New Delhi, 2001, p.75.
They depended on donations and partly on government assistance. NGOs dealing with consumer problems were known as consumer associations or consumer organizations. The role of NGOs had become increasingly more significant over the last two decades. There are now more than 800 such organizations in India. These organizations were registered under the Societies Registration Act or the Companies Act or as Charitable Trusts. NGOs had undertaken various activities as part of the consumer movement. They performed several functions, like creating awareness about consumer rights and educate the general public about consumer problems and remedies through seminars, workshops and training programmes, providing legal aid to consumers by way of assistance in seeking legal remedy, undertaking advocacy of consumers’ point of view as representative members of consumer protection councils and others official boards, arranging comparative testing of consumer products through their own testing apparatus or accredited laboratories so as to evaluate the relative qualities of competing brands and publishing the test results for the benefit of consumers to become informed buyers, publishing periodicals and journals to disseminate information among readers about consumer problems, legal reporting and other emerging matters of interest. Most of these periodicals did not accept advertisements from business firms. They also made suggestions and recommended steps which were considered by government authorities in policy making and administrative measures adopted in the interest of consumers. Some NGOs had successfully used Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to enforce consumer rights in several cases. In other words, NGOs had filed cases in law courts in the interest of the general public, not for any individual.

Non-Governmental Consumer Organizations were basically non-profit, non-political in most cases, non-regulatory, independent advocacy groups promoting consumerism in India. Although they lacked statutory powers, they extended a critical support network for consumers when someone was found to be a victim of corporate malpractice and/or deceit. These organizations gave confidence to consumers that they were not alone in their fight for justice. They gave the assurance to consumers that they had the support of powerful and determined social organizations that could organize protest rallies against corporate entities no matter how powerful they are, or lobby the government or other statutory agencies to take notice of consumers’ grievance. Consumer organizations improved the awareness level of consumers about rights and advised them on the legal recourse they could take when consumer rights

3 Ibid.
were violated. These non-governmental consumer organizations collaborated with one another among themselves at district, state and national levels. A movement can never be built in an isolated manner. Only when they organize and support one another they are able to function effectively and their voices could be heard and policy changes could be brought about. The following are some of the salient consumer protection and advocacy groups working at the all India level which extend their helping hand to consumer problems in Tirunelveli district and consumer organizations in Tirunelveli District.

Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) was established in 1993 under the Societies Registration Act 1860.\(^4\) Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) had been a stalwart proponent of good governance. In 1996, CCC launched a national campaign on citizens' charter to implement transparency, accountability, standards of service and a public grievance redressal system at the government level. CCC had made notable achievements in influencing the making of laws, governmental policy decisions, and providing administrative infrastructure for protecting consumer interest. It also served as an umbrella organization for all other consumer NGOs in India.

Consumer Guidance Society of India (CGSI) was founded in 1966 to eliminate all possible forms of consumer exploitation.\(^5\) It is one of the oldest consumer organizations in the country and has been instrumental in lobbying the government to pass a consumer protection act. It had been a member of Consumers International for several years and seventy percent of the consumer complaints received by it have been resolved. CGSI had been instrumental in promoting consumerism by publishing its flagship monthly periodical "Keemat", performing product testing, providing consumer education at the grass root level such as schools, and giving legal guidance to consumers with grievances. It won the national award for consumer protection in 1991 for its long, dedicated and effective services to consumers.

\(^4\) Ibid., p.37.  
\(^5\) India Today, Consumer Guidance Society of India Warns about Hazards Caused by Cell Phones, Credit Cards, dated 10 June 2002.
Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) was established on October 7, 1985. Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) had grown out to be one of the country’s leading consumer advocacy groups. Instrumental in running campaigns for greater access to information, improved functioning of public utilities, greater transparency and accountability in governmental and private sector functioning, and protection of our open spaces and natural environment, CAG played a vital role in the growth of consumerism in our country. CAG specialized in attending issues that affect the common man’s life such as lack of hygiene, pollution of our natural resources, inaccessible healthcare facilities, corruption and lack of accountability for the government revenue from tax sources. CAG had been a member of Consumers International since 1990.

Association for Consumers Action on Safety and Health (ACASH) is a consumer organization that focuses on health-related consumer issues. It had conducted programs for the general public promoting consumer rights and overall dispersion of information regarding consumer safety. Founded by a group of doctors, lawyers and other eminent personalities, ACASH today helps consumers in India through education & awareness, training, developing IEC (Information, Education and Communication) material, networking, advocacy and lobbying and follow-up action. A member of Consumers International since 1990, ACASH is also a member of Globalink, International Network of Women Against Tobacco (INWAT), International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), Health Action International (HAI), Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI).

Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) protects consumer interest in India through consumer research, campaigns through media, creation / monitoring / enforcement of effective consumer laws, consumer advocacy and information dissemination. An apolitical outfit, CERC has research facilities recognized by the Indian government, and the United

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7 Ibid.

Nations has approved CERC as an NGO. CERC's mission includes environmental protection, creating transparency and accountability in the public and private enterprises and agencies in our country, resolving individual consumer complaints, ensuring consumer safety through product research, consumer education, awareness campaigns and product test results dissemination.

The Consumer Protection Council (CPC) is a consumer organization that is non-affiliated to any statutory agency.\(^9\) It should not to be confused with the governmental bodies established as per the Consumer Protection Act 1986. It was instituted in Ahmedabad, the CPC has been instrumental in undertaking consumer issues such as consumer safety, traffic safety and pedestrian safety. It had effectively and successfully pursued legal battles against governmental agencies when they neglect or fail to carry out their duties to the tax payers. CPC had been a member of Consumers International since 1986.

Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) originated from a rural background in Rajasthan.\(^10\) It operates five program centers in India, an advocacy center in New Delhi, and resource centers in several international locations. CUTS's consumer work is focused on consumer protection and consumer safety. With about 20,000 square feet office space, 140 employees, and affiliation to / recognition from major national and international consumer agencies, CUTS is truly equipped to be the champion of consumer causes in our country. It publishes a monthly 'Gram Gadar' which has been effective in ensuring justice for oppressed social masses. CUTS had been a member of Consumers International since 1990.

Consumers Association of India (CAI) was established on the world consumer rights day to be a powerful lobby for the consumer.\(^11\) It has successfully and determinately taken up the mission to spread awareness among consumers, educate them about their responsibilities and rights and to ensure that the consumers' voices can be heard. In the past six years, CAI had successfully settled over ninety eight percent of the 7500 complaints it had received through arbitration. For the remaining two percent CAI had supported the consumer in pursuing the

\(^9\) Mishra, S.K., Puri, V.K., \textit{op.cit.} pp. 77-78.
\(^10\) Ibid.
complaint through the Indian legal system. CAI had been a member of Consumers International since 2003.

Consumers' Forum is one the consumer organizations that existed in India long before the Consumer Protection Act 1986 was passed. The mission of the organization, at its start, was to promote consumerism by making aware, training and educating the consumers on their rights. This was particularly necessary when there were no stalwart laws in our country to protect the consumers. The forum provided free advice to consumers, conducts brain storming sessions on matters related to consumer protection and ensures the representation of consumers in national, state and district level consumer courts and legally mandated consumer protection councils. Consumer Forum has been a member of Consumers International since 1996.

Mumbai Grahak Panchayat (MGP), or Bombay Consumer Forum, started as an agitation against the increase of consumer prices near festival season for fair and free distribution of consumer goods. The distribution system that flourished was registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act 1960 and Indian Public Trust Act 1950 in the name of MGP. MGP promotes consumerism by bringing the consumer to the forefront of the logistics and supply chain of consumer goods as decision makers, executors and monitors. MGP's primary objectives include organizing the consumers for common causes, educating them and protecting consumer interest through legal and other means.

Voluntary Organization in Interest of Consumer Education (VOICE) strives to be the voice of and for the consumer that the governments and other statutory / regulatory bodies of the country seldom hear. The primary focus of this NGO was to establish informed consumers in India. Information dispersed to consumers through VOICE includes corporate negligence / misconduct on issues such as consumer safety or customer satisfaction, your rights as a consumer to get value for your money, and the recourse that can be taken if your consumer rights are defied. Founded by students and teachers of the University of Delhi in 1983, it was registered as charitable public trust in 1986, the same year the consumer protection act came into being.

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12 Ibid.
Grahak Shakti works towards creating consumer awareness by organizing various programs, street plays and on shows such as ‘Hello Geleyere’.\textsuperscript{15} The organization had undertaken a number of surveys like the one on spurious drugs in coordination with the Drugs Control Department – Government of India. Its campaign on credit cards and effective liaison with the regulator was an effective way to warn the erring bankers to conduct business ethically. It also participated in joint raids in coordination with the Department of Legal Metrology and some oil companies to check malpractices related to weights and measurement, adulteration and pilferage.

In Tamilnadu, there is one organization that co-ordinates the activities of all the consumer associations. This is known as Federation of Consumer organizations in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry. Its acronym is FEDCOT.\textsuperscript{16} FEDCOT is a unique Non Governmental Organisation in the sense that it is both an organization and a movement. High spirit of voluntarism present in FEDCOT has kept up the high morale in the Double faceted consumer federation. With a view to decentralize power and to encourage wider participation of talented people in the running of the Federation, various directorates have been created with independent charge. From 1992, a number of training programmes ranging from consumer awareness programmes to highly specialized workshops have been organized to build up a strong base for informed consumer activists. FEDCOT had conducted four state level consumer conferences at Trichy in September 1992, at Madurai in February 1994 exclusively for women, at Chennai in March 1997 and at Salem in February 2001. FEDCOT has carefully cultivated a working relationship with the network of many Non Governmental organizations in India and Abroad. FEDCOT was adjudged as the Best Consumer Group among the Voluntary Consumer Organizations in the country for the year 1994 and received a cash prize of Rs. 50,000/- and a certificate of merit by the Government of India. FEDCOT in collaboration with CI- ROAP, Kuala Lumpur and UNICEF conducted Street Food Vending Survey in three major districts and Iodine awareness campaign throughout Tamilnadu respectively. FEDCOT has published a number of books such as the judgements of consumer cases in Tamil for the benefit of consumer organizations and people who are involved in consumer affairs.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
FEDCOT is very dynamic in organizing several programmes in collaboration with state level bodies and district level consumer organizations. The Thiruvallur District Secretary organized a consumer awareness programme through Direct Telecast in Jack Television on every Sunday from 10 to 11 a.m. Opportunities are provided to consumers to clarify their doubts. This programme has been telecasted continuously for forty three weeks. A seminar on safe investment was organized on 8 May 2010 at Chennai Collectorate Hall Presidentship of Commissioner K.Rajaraman, I.A.S. A training programme on consumer problems was organized on 11 May 2010 for the staff of Government Hospitals, Cuddalore. Another programme was organized for government officials on 11 May 2010 at Tamilnadu Pollution Board at Guindy. On 12 May 2010 two days programme on food adulteration was organized at Chennai Savera Hotel for officials of various departments. On 14 and 15 May 2010, an awareness programme was organized about how to purchase gold and about the Hall marking procedure at Chennai. A rally was also undertaken at Mambalam, Chennai to create awareness about hallmarking. A meeting to felicitate the Nilgris District Secretary P. Natarajan was organized and he was awarded the title of Sevai Sudar. On 30 June 2010, in Chennai Collector office Hall, on behalf of FEDCOT Trainer Tamilselvi participated in a seminar on medicines and medical service. On 22 and 23 July 2010, FEDCOT in collaboration with Indian Standardization Committee organized a seminar on food adulteration. On 29 July 2010 the general secretary of FEDCOT participated in a television programme on how to purchase gold was telecasted on 13 September 2010. A discussion was organized with the Videocon Administrative officials to express the problems in the sales and service of Videocon products and ways and means of rectifying them was pointed out. On 7 October 2010, a meeting was organized in the Secretariat with the Food Minister, Secretary of the Department of Central Petroleum. Different oil company representatives participated in this. The Vice president and the general Secretary also participated and offered constructive suggestions.

On 13 and 14 November 2010, two days training programme on consumer awareness was organized at Dindigul Gandhi Gram. About 120 volunteers participated in this programme. The investigator organized this programme successfully. On 26 November 2010 a training programme for self help groups was organized by Pioneer Trade Organization and this was successful.

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
conducted by FEDCOT. On 5, 6 and 7 of January 2011 three days training was conducted at Maraimalai nagar District Council Hall for government officials and all the speakers were from FEDCOT. On 25 January 2011 a training programme on RTI Act was organized by the Hindu College Pattabiram, Chennai. K. Murugan and D. Ramani of FEDCOT acted as the Resource persons for this programme. On 12 February 2011 Consumer festival was conducted at Chennai Loyola College. An interesting Debate was organized on the topic of men and women who are cheated easily. About 48 complaints were received by FEDCOT from different consumers. They were settled by letter correspondences with the concerned parties. FEDCOT has published the following books: A Safe Investment, A Training Manual for Consumer Volunteers and Consumer weapon.\(^{19}\)

Freebies and prize contests have become the order of the day in a highly competitive market. Be it promotion of electronic goods or fast-moving consumer goods, everything comes with an attractive price tag. The festival season, beginning with Navaratri, has only further aggravated this fierce competition and free gift for every purchase and prize contests advertisements galore all around. FEDCOT has created a special cell to fight these unfair trade practices.\(^{20}\) FEDCOT’s State Chairman, P. Duraisingam, told that they have planned to move the Madras High Court and the State Consumer Grievance Redressal Commission against the free gifts and prize contests, as they violated the Tamil Nadu Prize Scheme (Prohibition) Act 1979. How can one allow such unfair trade practices in this State where the sale of lottery is banned asked Duraisingam, who listed out the negative aspects of such schemes and contests. The attractive offers such as dream houses will naturally induce the common man to make an unnecessary purchase of products. He also suspected the genuineness of the methodology adopted to select the winners of competitions. Who conducts it, when, where and how is a big question. Pointing to a prize competition of a soap company offering houses and clocks worth Rs.1.25 crores as prizes, he said that their guess was that they spend at least a few crores on advertising this offer itself.\(^{21}\) He questioned the source of the huge sum. It is natural that the expenditure on advertisement and prizes will also fall on the shoulders of the consumer. Despite the presence of over 400 consumer protection associations in Tamil Nadu, the State witnesses

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) The Hindu, High Court to be Moved Against Companies Prize Contests, dated 7 October 2005.
more such practices than elsewhere. In some cases, companies from other States come here with contests, whereas nothing of that sort happens in their home States. The lackadaisical attitude of the State police is one of the reasons for this. Whenever our members try to lodge a complaint, it is rejected. These cases are not in the list of priorities. The District Supply Officer, who is also the District Consumer Protection Officer, should handle these cases suo motu without anyone preferring complaints. Last year, the FEDCOT issued notices to sixty one companies that violated the Tamil Nadu Prize Scheme (Prohibition) Act, among whom twenty five withdrew their offers. Police complaints were preferred against forty seven companies in the State.

Creating awareness among government officials was sought as one of the approaches to strengthen the consumer movement. This was undertaken because they are educated and they could be easily organized. Moreover they hold the position of power and they are in constant touch with the common people. In this connection FEDCOT envisaged that they should be invited to become part of the consumer organizations. Therefore they invited them to become members by different consumer organizations. The response of the interested government officials was that they could not become members of voluntary organizations as there was a general government order prohibiting them from becoming members of such organizations. Therefore a representation was made by the secretary of FEDCOT to the Government of India to request it to issue specific instructions to the effect that Government Servants can also take up leadership as office bearers of the consumer organizations with intimation to their respective Head of Department. When opinion was sought on this, the special Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection had also recommended the request of the Secretary of FEDCOT. The Government of India had directed that a Government Servant, who wanted to become an office bearer of any consumer organization, can become so but should get previous sanction from the Government in terms of the Rule fifteen of the Tamilnadu Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and the individual should ensure that his/her activities do not attract the provisions of any Conduct Rules. The Government of Tamilnadu carefully examined the request of the General Secretary, FEDCOT. Accordingly it directed that the Government servants shall participate in the Consumer Movement, subject to the condition that

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their official duties should not be affected because of their participation and that prior permission of the Government of Tamilnadu wherever necessary, should be obtained under the Tamilnadu Government Servants Conduct Rules, 1973 by the concerned Government Servants. Moreover it was made clear that they should not accept any remuneration for their service in consumer organizations.

It is useful to note that a Workshop on consumer protection and allied services was held at Tirunelveli District Collectorate on Thursday for government officials. Inaugurating the workshop, District Revenue Officer G. Srinivasan said that the government officials should clearly understand various aspects of Consumer Protection Act, rights of consumers etc., so that they could discharge their duties without fault. It was found easy to make the government officials aware of their consumer rights as they are an educated and enlightened group. Tirunelveli district coordinator of Federation of Consumer Organisations — Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry (FEDCOT) G. Venkatachalam spoke on Consumer protection laws and rights of consumers while the investigator explained the salient features of Right to Information Act, 2005. Ganapathi Subramanian spoke on Personality development. Tirunelveli District Supplies Officer and Consumer Protection Officer N. Sukumar clarified the doubts of the participants.

Besides wiping out the protein-rich traditional cereals of the land, food stuff made from genetically modified crop will also have a carcinogenic effect on consumers, organic farming expert G. Nammaazhvaar has warned. He was addressing a workshop on ‘Genetically modified food and consumers’ health’ organised in Tirunelveli by the Federation of Consumer Organisations—Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, the Consumer Research, Education, Action, Training and Empowerment and ‘Thanal,’ Thiruvananthapuram. He said the increased use of genetically modified seeds had resulted in higher expenditure for farmers, as they had to procure pesticides and fertilizer in large quantities, and consequently the pesticides and other chemicals used on the crops would have an adverse impact on the consumers, too. “The Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane and chlorofluorocarbon, which were marketed as revolutionary

inventions, have now been banned worldwide after their harmful effects were realised. Similarly, the whole world will one day understand the destructive impact of the genetically modified crops and the food prepared from them. To protect themselves from these crops, the farmers should switch to natural farming. District Revenue Officer G. Srinivasan; FEDCOT chairman P. Duraisingam; Rev. Fr. Cruz Antony, parish priest of St. Xavier’s Cathedral Church; and G. Venkatachalam, district coordinator of FEDCOT, participated. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Duraisingam said the government should fill the vacancies in all consumer redress forums across the State and immediately convene the meeting of the State Consumer Protection Council, which remains dysfunctional for the past four-and-half years.

Federation of consumer organizations in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry (FEDCOT) got split into two in 2008 and the VCOs attached with that federation have begun to quarrel instead of fighting for the cause of consumer protection. On 4 March 2012, there was a meeting at Tiruchirapalli for the unification of FEDCOT and the leaders of the Consumer Movement accepted the unification. Now FEDCOT is the umbrella organization of all voluntary consumer organizations in Tamil Nadu having 360 members. FEDCOT, as a member of Consumers International had also obtained funds from it for its member organizations for different activities and programmes.

CONFET has been formed in 1991 and registered under the Societies Registration Act 1975. The focus of CONFET is creating awareness amongst all classes of consumers about their rights & duties and to empower the consumers. CONFET has close networking with Regional consumer movements like the following.  

Bless – Cuddalore, CCC - Consumer Coordination Council, New Delhi, CAG - Consumer Action Group, Chennai, CAI - Consumer Association of India, Chennai, CCI Consumer Confederation of India, Tamil Nadu, Creed Centre for Rural Education Empowerment and Development, Chidamarabam, Federation of Dalit Villages for Livelihood Rights, Tamil Nadu, Peoples Watch, Madurai, Coastal Action Network, Nagapattinam, CATALYST TRUST, Chennai, Global Community Monitor, USA, Other Media, New Delhi, Tamil Nadu Environment Council, Dindigul, Equation, Bangalore, Thozhmai, Chennai, SASY, Tindivanam, and Seeds - Socio-Economic, Empowerment & Education development Society, Tamil Nadu.

The programmes of such bodies are sincerely carried out and executed. The Regional, National and International Consumer Organizations have great confidence in CONFET and entrusted many works like Street Food Testing, Drugs Testing, Real Estates, etc. CONFET has the endeavour to work in tandem with other like minded consumer groups and NGOs in carrying forward CONFETs vision and mission.29 CONFET has a long list of consumer groups under its network. CONFET has been tied up by the Government of Tamilnadu which is an agency of Government of India to open school consumer clubs. The CONFET is the Nodal Agency in Cuddalore District for such School and College Consumer Clubs. The assistance of the Education Authorities are taken. Under the directions Government the Consumer Club Coordinators from among the staff are appointed. Essay, quiz, singing, drawing competitions are held under the auspices of CONFET. The members of the above clubs engage themselves in conducting surveys, in celebrating and bringing awareness during the important days notified by the UN. CONFET had published books on the following titles.30 Human Rights Act, India, Consumer Act 1986, India, Right to Information Act 2005, India, The Lokpal Bill, 2011, Domestic Violence Act and Indian Medical Association- Press Meet – Sipcot Pollution cancer-Issue.

The activities of CONFET are wide ranging on the following areas from the date of inception. CONFET is imparting training to consumer activists, lead organizations, Panchayat leaders, NGOs for preparing them to get readied for facing the challenges that they have come across. In particular Govt. Officials are also given training duly supported by Government Departments. The Women SHGs from the rural areas are also given training. School and College students are also brought under the training schedule. Especially the members of NSS, Rotaract and such other voluntary groups are brought under the training. During the training course materials are supplied to the participants. The Resource persons are drawn from the legal fraternity, educationists etc. CONFET is giving special attention to the art of advocacy. The CONFET is collecting the proposed bills that may be presented in the legislating bodies and making propaganda on the merits, demerits, amendments needed to be incorporated in the proposed Acts. The CONFET’s future plan of action centre’s around this concept. The traders and service providers are provided with

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
materials and information for providing quality and standard goods and services to the consumers. In this direction the help of the lawyers, experts in the respective fields are also availed. The Government agencies are also brought in this network so that they appreciate the petitions and representations of consumers. Efforts are also being made to include the Consumer activists in Statutory bodies. In order to provide a safe environment to people this has initiated action against Nuclear Power Project.

Voluntary consumer organizations offer substantial support to Government to the cause of consumer welfare and checking rights violations. There are general VCOs as well as consumer organizations that are focused on a specific sector. Currently, there are 112 general purpose VCOs that are registered with the Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection department. These VCOs have done good co-ordination work for implementation of consumer welfare schemes across the State and Government will be utilizing their good services for implementation of consumer schemes during current year also.

The following is a district wise list of 112 Voluntary consumer organizations enrolled in the mailing list maintained by the Commissioner of civil supplies and consumer protection.31

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Source: Mailing list maintained by the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection in December 2011.

It is reported that there are more than 300 Voluntary Consumer Organizations functioning in Tamilnadu. These organizations are steadily proliferating with all kinds of people in their fold and asserting their right. Most of them would like to get themselves registered under the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection. Therefore it is stated that a policy is adopted with regard to registration. When a VCO applies for registration, the file is referred to the concerned Collector for verification. In case there is nothing adverse in the report of the collector the names and details of the VCO are entered in the Register. Only those VCOs who
are registered are eligible for financial assistance based on the recommendations of the District Collector. Though VCOs play an important role in spreading consumer awareness among the people in Tamilnadu, there are some bogus organizations which are more interested in asserting the rights of the consumers. It is therefore imperative that there should be formal process of filtration and classification of VCOs when they are registered. In this connection, the following courses of action have been decided as per G.O. Ms. No. 70 Cooperation, Food and Consumer Protection (H2) Department, dated 26 February 2004. A Standing Committee consisting of the representatives of the Department of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection and members drawn from reputed VCOs will be set up to screen the new applications for enrolment. The applicant VCO should have a legal entity, registered under the Societies Registration Act or any law in force. The registration should be current and the organization should produce the proof of the currency of registration and filing of the annual returns including accounts and statements up to the previous year to the competent Authority, the organization should have its statements audited regularly by Chartered Accountants. The applicant VCOs should have well defined objectives, a set of by laws, should not designate itself as a council or a Commission or a Forum and have its office bearers elected in a democratic manner. No one who is convicted or fined for any criminal offence on any ground should be enrolled as a member of the organization. The applicant VCO should be non political and non commercial and should be managed by a nonproprietary management. None of the elected office bearers should be in active politics and desirably twenty to thirty percent members of the organization should be women. The applicant VCO should not be run for profit of any group or individual but serve the general public without any distinction of caste, creed, colour, gender or religion. It should not collect money from business houses or industry by way of donations and advertisement charges though it may collect reasonable contributions towards the cost of service rendered by it from the respective consumers. It should not indulge in any threatening or intimidatory tactics while dealing with disputes or arrive at any unjust understanding with opposite parties of the disputes. It should not elicit or canvass for any candidate seeking election for political and professional bodies of trade unions. Lastly the VCO with a consistent track of working in the area of Consumer Activities

for over ten years with published proof of services can be grouped as A grade VCOs, those with three to ten years of service record with B grade and the rest can be categorized under C grade.

The Consumer Protection Council in Tiruchirappalli had been one of the resourceful and dynamic NGOs in Tamilnadu. It had been a model for many consumer organisations in Tirunelveli District as well as in Tamilnadu. It had undertaken several consumer issues successfully. It is one the oldest one in India as well as in Tamilnadu. It has got its roots established in the year 1974, after the consumer councils of Bombay and Calcutta. Founded in January 1974 by Rajiv Taranath, Dinamalar R. Krishnamurthy, M. Meenakshisundaram and S. Pushpavanam, it has grown from modest beginnings, and is today the rallying point for the consumer movement in Tamil Nadu. Its objectives are to inform itself about consumer’s problems, to channelize consumer’s grievances to officials, to educate consumers of their rights and help them exercise them and to protect consumer’s interest in general. Starting with thirty members, the organization today prides itself with a total strength of 850 members. Its activities and focus on consumer protection have brought it into focus both at the national and international level. It has served as a member of the Central Consumer Protection Council, Government of India.

On April 26 1974, in the first General meeting of the Council Regional Transport Officer ordered the removal of air-horn. In November secretary gave oral evidence before the Joint Select Committee of Parliament regarding Prevention of Food Adulteration Act. In December, the organization conducted a survey on the needs of Tiruchi-Madras Rail Passengers which resulted in two carriages getting added to Rock Fort Express. In 1979, 600 people demonstrated in front of air-conditioned cinema hall protesting against beating up of a member who demanded air-conditioning in the theatre during a film show. Collector ordered reduction in fare in case there was no air-conditioning. On April 14, 1980 this organization campaigned against adulteration, took samples and worked with Dr Murali, the Municipal Health Officer. This had created awareness among the public. In 1984, the representatives contributed to the discussion on the draft of consumer protection Act in New Delhi organized by Government of India, department of Civil Supplies. In 1986 this measured the noise pollution level at five different places in Tiruchi for 14 hours a day for 8 days and drew up noise pollution map of

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Tiruchi. This was followed by a meeting with government officials in which decision was taken to remove the air horns. On the complaint made by this organization in 1987 about irregularities in reduction sales, MRTP Commission intervened and warned the Textile Shop and the Textile Shop was made to give an undertaking to MRTP Commission.

The Toll collecting contractor for the new coleroon bridge kept the old bridge closed. This organization moved the Central Government to intervene and opened the old bridge for local traffic and stayed toll collection for it. One day First State Level Conference of consumer groups and individuals was organized. On April 24th 1988 Madras–Bombay Super fast train was introduced as a super fast train. Because of representation and pressures of this organization this train was re-designated as Express train. This organization was nominated to the Bureau of Indian Standards as the consumer representative from Southern States and to CPC. This team also had the privilege of meeting Ralph Nader and working with him for about a week in September. In 1989 this enabled 150 BPC – LPG customers in Indian Oil Corporation to get themselves transferred when they complained of poor service. This obtained LPG Connections to 14 people who were denied for the past 5 years. This published a survey on tooth paste, quantity at National level. Moreover this conducted a survey at national level on the delivery system and delay in the operation of postal services. This conducted a survey at National Level on Telegram Services and published the findings and results for improvement. This obtained Rs. 20,000/- as compensation to a baby boy, when a doctor while injecting left broken needle inside for a day.

In 1990 this organization had represented India as one member-delegation in the International Standards Organisations in Florida, USA and visited standard Organizations in USA. This became a member of ISO working group to evolve ISO guide on product information and instructions for use. This conducted a survey on public telephones. This exposed loop holes in free rice distribution of Government of Tamilnadu and demanded its withdrawal in the State Consumer Protection Council Meeting in October. Food minister accepted their demand and withdraw the scheme.

In 1991, Rs.8,000 was awarded as compensation by state commission for a passenger who had to travel in an unreserved compartment to Bombay because a reserved ticket was given on a day in which the train did not run. Food minister announced the appointment of

35 Ibid.
consumer organization representatives in vigilance panel for Fair Price Shops. 

A Doctor apologized in Newspaper when a boy died in a twenty four hour nursing home which was unattended for four hours during which the boy died. In the same year courier companies and television companies were made to pay compensation for their defective service and goods respectively. The department of Southern railways passed orders for the allotment of 4 berths for Tiruchi in Madras Tuticorin Express because of their lobbying. The Department of Posts advanced the closure of Post-offices to six p.m. and therefore this organization campaigned and extended it to eight p.m.

In 1992 ten rural consumer education camps were organized. With the aid of Central Government 100 Adulteration Detection Kits were prepared and distributed to all consumer groups in Tamilnadu. This organization was nominated to the working group on Public utilities commission to regulate public utilities like transport, power and communication. By the efforts of this organization Rs. 13,148/- was awarded as compensation by state commission as Railways evicted a passenger who had a confirmed reserved ticket to Bombay. This had persuaded the Union Minister of Telecommunication to nominate consumer organisation representatives in Telecom Advisory Committees all over India. As a followup, the Secretary and many others were nominated to Tamilnadu Telecom Advisory Committee. This won a compensation of Rs. 5.5 Lakhs from National Commission for the widow of a passenger who had a tragic death inside a bus belonging to the Tamilnadu transport corporation.

In 1993, under the pressure of this organization the Union Minister for Railways for the first time fixes the speed of fifty five kilometers per hour as the norm for super fast trains in India. Subsequently twenty three trains were deleted from super fast list in supreme court case filed by this organization. In 1994 this organization prepared the report on citizen’s charter for the working group of Central Consumer Protection Council. This won several cases in District, state and National Consumer Commission Resolving over 200 complaints a year.

In the same year this had conducted a Regional Programme of Training of Trainees in association with consumer coordination council New Delhi for representatives of consumer organizations from South. This won a case in District Consumer Forum against City

\[\text{\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.}\]
Cooperation Bank which refused to give the interest rate contracted as per Fixed Deposit Receipt. Bank was ordered to pay compensation plus interest. This organization did a survey on the impact of withdrawal/reduction of excise duty as several commodities in Union Budget widely published. This was nominated to central Consumer Protection Council.

In 1995 this was nominated member Doordharsan Advisory committee council and renominated to Telecom Advisory Committee. This had conducted state level training programme for eighty consumer activists at Tiruchi. This took up the case of Rehana Begum, a girl of eight years old for whom the needle broke and got struck inside while giving injection in Government Hospital. The doctor and the nurse were transferred. This won a case in National consumer dispute redressed commission against Railways when a passenger with confirmed ticket was detrained. A compensation of Rs. 16,000/- was obtained for the passenger.

In 1996 this was elected to Governing Council of consumer coordination council an apex body of consumer organisations. This detected a cement adulteration unit at Thiruvanaikovil Tiruchi and civil supply police took action. This enabled the seizing of one bag of ration rice while it was being siphoned off. In 1997, this organization was nominated to Divisional Railway users consultation council. This organization under took a forty eight hour fast to draw the attention of the Department of Telecom for not insisting on the display of information about tariff and permitting excess collection by phone booths. This move had resulted in the necessary action by Department of Telecom.

In 1998 this organization had participated in an International Workshop on ‘Public Administration / Issues of Governance’ in Theodore Academy, Germany for a period of ten days. This studied functioning of Citizen’s Charter in London at the delivery point for 3 weeks. This had celebrated Public Utilities Week and arranged a meeting by Chief General Manager Telecom, PMG Posts. Additional General Manager Southern Railway. This had obtained an order for compensation from Banking ombudsman for the first time in Tiruchi for a bank customer for his loss. This organization took notice of two false money circulation schemes under the banner Green Glory & Thivya Jothi and stopped their operation completely and saved

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
thousands of consumers from fraud. This had helped a Kumbakonam consumer by way of getting compensation from a courier from state consumer commission. This had also conducted workshop on citizens’ charts on railways in Chennai association with consumer coordination council. This enabled a college student to get refund of the tuition fees he had paid and set a new trend. In the year 1999, this organization was invited by the Union Finance Minister for pre-budget consultation. This conducted a consultation meet on Citizen’s Charter for Railways in Tiruchi – Additional General Manager inaugurated prepared the model charter. This had Participated in a live-phone-in Programme with Southern Railway General Manager for about one and half hours in Door Dharsan television Chennai answering questions from viewers on 13 February, 1999. This organization was able win a case and obtain a compensation plus sum assured amount of Rs.60,000 from Life Insurance Corporation for the family of Mrs. Rajalakshmi who died in an accident. This had filed a case and won a compensation plus sum assured amount of Rupees 2.5 lakhs from LIC for the family of Mr. Anand who died suddenly under the category of early claim. Both in District Forum, Tiruchi.

In the year 2000, this organization was invited by Union Finance Minister for pre-budget consultation of January 2000 in which two of their suggestions were accepted. This won a compensation plus sum assured for Rs. 1.5 lakhs to Mrs. Rajam in a case filed against LIC. This organization was nominated again to a Central Consumer Protection Council. This detected 317 bogus cards in ration shop. This worked in Close association with District Administration to get 235 layouts approved in Tiruchi City. This trapped with the help of CBI, two Telecom Linesmen while they received bribe and gave witness to the act. Subsequently the lineman was dismissed. This organization was nominated as Member, Public Hearing on Pollution Control.

In the year 2001, this organization was invited again by Union Finance Minister for pre-budget consultation. This also campaigned for amendments to Consumer Protection Act through newspaper articles and in meetings. This won compensation for a Railway Passenger Stephen who could not board the train for want of information regarding cancellation of first class. This helped District Collector in Verification of electoral rolls with volunteers. This filed another 410 cases against Chinthamani on behalf of depositors and awarded refund and compensation in 283 cases. This got sundry deposit which was unpaid for eleven years from LIC to Lalitha through

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39 Ibid.
a case filed in Thanjavur District Forum. This won a compensation and return of money for a BHEL, Co-op Bank Customer who was defrayed by a Bank.

In the year 2002, this organization measured noise pollution with sound level metre and a noise pollution seminar with Seethalakshimi Ramasamy College was conducted. Following these it also campaigned for ban on air-horn. It won a case against Kasi Housing Ltd., on behalf of Professor Usha Devi. It surveyed the distance of bus stop from ground level and campaigned for reduction. It started a campaign for reduction of fax charges. In the year 2003, it published “A Handbook on Consumer Protection Act.” at a function Chennai. C.Sitaram & co has sold two editions so far. In the year 2004, this organization won a case in National Commission against Chinthamani coop society for payment of deposits and also got a written agreement with Chinthamani coop society by which society would pay Rs. 7.5 lakhs every month to the depositors through the council towards Principal long denied. This also reduced Public fax charges from Rs.30 to Rs.10 per page. In the year 2005 this organization had won two cases against LIC and got back Rs. two lakhs and Rs.20,000 for policy holders. It also got a refund of 70,000 for defective air-conditioner. It also won a case against dealer for refund of defective television. In the year 2006 this organization had pressurized Chinthamani cooperative society to return to the 462 depositors a principal amount of Rs. 3.12 Crores.

The Trichy-based consumer protection council, filed a case before the district consumer forum on behalf of S Ramesh, whose wife Pushpalatha died in the hospital on October 16, 2006 due to heavy bleeding after delivering a baby boy. Secretary of the council S Pushpavanam had argued before the forum that the hospital had no facilities for a safe delivery. The bleeding started within one hour of delivery at 7.23 pm and it was only noticed around 8.30 pm, according to a cardiologist's report. The district consumer forum has ordered G V N Hospital on Babu Road in Trichy to pay a compensation of Rs two lakh to Ramesh whose wife died in the hospital on the day of admission due what the forum held as negligence and deficiency in service.

40 Ibid.

41 The Times of India, Consumer Forum Fines Trichy Hospital for Negligence, dated 8August 2012.
The importance of consumer associations in Tirunelveli district is manifold as they aim to protect different consumer rights. Consumer associations are important because of the following needs as expressed by Ganapathy Subramanian. 42 An important object of consumer association is the united fight of consumers against harmful and unsafe products produced by manufacturers and sold by traders. The examples of such products are medicines causing side effects, sold without any written warning, sale of stale products, etc. The next area is protection against Unfair Trade Practices. Businessmen do various unfair trade practices like overcharging the customers, using inaccurate weight and measures, selling inferior quality goods, resorting to black marketing, etc. Consumer movement protects the consumers from such malpractices. Protection against Pollution is another area of interest and concern of consumer organizations. Due to consumer movement, business organizations are under pressure to take the necessary measures to control air, water and noise pollution. These consumer organizations facilitate the coming together of consumers. It was very easy for business organizations to exploit unorganized customers. However, due to consumer movement, customers are collectively able to fight for their rights. Thus, consumer movement has succeeded in uniting and getting a fair deal for consumers from the business world. They also control on Monopolistic & Restrictive Trade Practices. Many Laws and Acts have been introduced to protect the interest of consumers against monopolistic and restrictive trade practices of businessmen. The main activity of consumer organizations is creating Consumer Awareness. Consumer movement creates awareness among consumers and educates them through lectures, seminar, workshops, media, public meetings, etc. regarding consumer rights. They also take care of timely Supply of Essential Commodities. Consumer movement has made it possible for consumers to form Consumer Co-operative Societies for production and distribution of essential commodities on co-operative basis so as to ensure their regular supply at reasonable prices. After sale service is provided by manufacturers and sellers to the customer even after effecting sales. Seller must provide after sale services in case of consumer durable products. The seller is supposed to undertake free repairs and maintenance of products sold during the warranty period. The awareness about this right of consumers has been brought through consumer movement. Moreover since consumers are now united, they are able to exert pressure on the government to enact various laws and introduce

42 Personal Interview with Ganapathy Subramanian, General Secretary, Tirunelveli District Consumer Awareness Movement, dated 28 January 2011.
measures for consumer protection and so they act as advocacy groups. They also act as a link between Consumers and Business Community. Various consumers, by passing on consumer grievances and their suggestions to business organizations are getting justice for consumers. Various consumer protection associations help the consumer to get their complaints against malpractices of traders, redressed through Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies or Civil Courts.

It is a fact that every one is a consumer and it is therefore important that everybody should unite together to protect our interests. The consumer associations are an ideal set up to come together to provide collective resistance against all kinds of associations. The main function of consumer associations are education and protection of the consumers. Many consumer associations are playing an important role in the direction of consumer protection. From the reports it is found out that the following voluntary consumer associations (VCOs) are registered with the office of the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection in Tirunelveli district.

1. Tirunelveli District Consumer Rights Protection Council,
   9, Kullappirai Street, Tirunelveli – 627 006
2. Tamil Nadu People Consumer Organization,
   14, Law Chamber, District Court Complex, Tirunelveli 627 002.
3. Consumer Protection Cell,
   16, Arasalwar Street, Sengottai, Tirunelveli District - 627 809.
4. Sankarankoil Taluk Consumer Rights Protection Welfare Scoeity,
   21/43, Kilavadi Vinayagar Koil Street, Sankarankoil 627 756.
5. Tirunelveli District Consumer Protection Sangam,
   47, Sankar Colony, Palayamkottai, 627 002.

Tirunelveli District Consumer Rights Protection Council is functioning at 9. Kullappirai Street, Tirunelveli Town with the following office bearers: A Ganapathi as President, P. Victor Thangaraj and B. Augustine as Vice-Presidents, G. Venkatachalam as General Secretary, T.Kanagalakmi and C.Vijayan as Joint Secretaries and D.Gopalan as Treasurer. They work for

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the redressel of the consumers through strategies such as telephonic conversation, letter communication, personal meeting, dialogue and finally filing of cases. 44

This organization has settled many complaints through telephonic conversation. The following are just a few of them. A ceiling fan purchased from an Electricals at Tirunelveli Town became faulty within a month of purchase. On speaking over phone a new fan was exchanged by the Electricals. A grinder from a shop at Tirunelveli Town became faulty and that was replaced with a new grinder. A consumer withdrew some money from an ATM Counter. A double entry was made. The consumer made representations to the Bank authorities. But it was not rectified. On telephonic conversation, the problem was settled immediately.

This organization has settled many problems by sending notices to business concerns. A Jewellery shop at Tirunelveli Town was making false attractive advertisements by way of announcements of different prize schemes to increase their business. This organization sent a notice asking them to stop the false advertisements and the management of that Jewellers immediately obliged. Similarly this organization had sent a notice to another Jewellery shop when they made false and attractive advertisements and stopped the advertisement. A bus conductor of Government Transport Corporation collected Rs.5.00 instead of Rs.3.50 and based on the complaint received about this, notice was sent to the Management of that Transport Corporation. The concerned conductor was made to apologize and return the balance amount of Rs.1.50. 45

This organization also adopts an approach of dialogue with the representatives of the erring concerns and settles the issues. It came to the notice of this organization that a gas distributor at Puliangudi was engaged in some malpractices. Based on the complaints received, notice was sent to the Regional Manager of Indane Gas and to that Agency. Representatives of both organizations came to this office and the problems were discussed through dialogue and they were settled. But because of continued complaints, the Indane gas has withdrawn the distributor rights of that Agency.

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44 Personal Interview with G. Venkatachalam, General Secretary, Tirunelveli District Consumer Rights Protection Council, dated 30 January 2011.

45 Personal Interview with G. Venkatachalam, dated 30 January 2011.
This organization also meets the problem creating persons and speaks to them about the problems in their business dealings and resolves the problems for the benefit of all consumers. A trader at Kodeeswaran Nagar, Tirunelveli Town was selling things over and above the MRP. The representatives of this organization met the proprietor and made him to sell the goods at MRP.

Tirunelveli District Consumer Awareness Movement is registered under societies Registration Act as 2102/2006. It is functioning from Melamada veethi, Palayamkottai with S.R.Anantharaman as Chairman, K.Ganapathy Subramanian as General Secretary, A. Balasubramanian as Treasurer, Padmaja Anantharaman and A.Arumugam as Vice Presidents, Aruna Sivaji and Kanchana Suresh as Joint Secretaries and G.Venkatachalam as Honorary Consultant. This association is functioning quite effectively by undertaking several activities. This has organized an essay competition of the topic ‘the role of students in consumer protection’ on 23 December 2007. A programme on consumer awareness for the rural people was organized. World consumer Day is regularly conducted. An awareness programme was organized on global warming. An awareness programme for women consumers was organized. A seminar on food adulteration was organized in collaboration with the corporation officials. An exhibition on consumer awareness was organized. Ganapathy Subramanian, the General secretary obtained best consumer counselor trainer award from the District Collector. A training programme to exercise the voting right through voting machine was organized. This association has also filed consumer cases when necessary. For instance, a teacher had purchased a Nokia cell phone and it became faulty and it could not be set right by the Nokia service agency. The seller was not ready to replace the same with another piece. A consumer complaint was filed and his grievance was rectified with along with a compensation amount of Rs. 3000/= by the Tirunelveli District Consumer Redressal Forum.

The Tirunelveli District Consumer Awareness Movement has released two Tamil handbooks to create awareness among the public on 'Right to Information Act 2005' and 'Rights and Duties of Consumers'. The handbook on 'Right to Information Act 2005' explains in detail about the newly-introduced Act, its salient features, the ways and means of getting information.

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47 The Hindu, Consumer Forum Releases Handbooks, dated 18 December 2006.
from various Government departments, procedures to be followed in preparing the application, the processing fee, etc. An application model has also been given in the handbook, which would be of useful to applicants. The thirty page handbook on ‘Rights and Duties of Consumers' elaborately explains the right to safety, right to choose, right to be informed, right to be heard, right to redressal, right to consumer education, right to healthy environment, right to basic needs, etc. Besides clearly explaining the Consumers' Protection Act 1986, the handbook narrates the duties of consumers and powers of the consumer redressal forums.

Apart from these, there are many voluntary consumer associations functioning in Tirunelveli District as registered just under Societies Registration Act. Most of them are affiliated with these registered VCOs. Some of them would like to get themselves registered with the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection at the Tamilnadu level. The following are few of them.

1. Puliangudi Consumer Protection Society is a Puliangudi based VCO functioning under Societies registration Act as No 88/91 at 3A Sankara Vinayagar Koil street, Puliangudi. The President is Venkatesan and the Secretary is Ramiah.

2. Sankarankoil Taluk Consumer Protection Society is another Sankarankoil based VCO functioning under societies registration Act as No 74/94 at 41 Annalsalai, Sankarankoil-627 756. The President Mohamed Ali and the Secretary is Subramanian.

3. There is one more VCO functioning from Sankarankoil. It is known as Sankarankoil Taluk Consumer Rights Protection Society, functioning at 21/43 Vinayagar koil street, Sankarankoil.

4. Southern Peoples’ Consumer Movement is yet another Panagudi based VCO functioning under Societies Registration Act as No 51/99 at 157, Main Road, Panagudi, with Josephraj as President and M. Rathinam as Secretary.

The Consumer Protection Council at Sengottai was started in 1992 to protect the welfare of consumers, to enlighten them about the fundamentals of the Consumer protection Act of 1986 through Trainings, workshops and symposiums, to redress the grievances of affected consumers by getting compensation and to create consumer awareness among students of schools and

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48 Personal Interview with Venkatesan, President Puliangudi Consumer Protection Society, dated 29 January 2011.
colleges. This cell has the following office bearers. R.K. Dass as Chairman, E.Shunmugavel as Vice Chairman and R.Srinivasan as Secretary and Treasurer. K. Varadharajan, V.Sharmarajan, A Shenbaga Ganesh, S. Sundaram, P. Murugesan and Sheik Saleem are the Executive members. The cell had thirteen gents and six ladies members. This cell had been affiliated to the Tamilnadu consumers forum as a Joint Member since 1992 and it had been functioning as a Member in the Consumers Federation and in the International Consumers Organisation.

Southern Peoples’ Consumer Movement is yet another Panagudi based VCO. It is functioning as a society under Societies Registration Act as No 51/99 at Panagudi with Josephraj as President and M. Rathinam as Secretary. This movement was started on 15 August 1999 with 25 members. The following activities had been reported by this organization. It had undertaken consumer related problems such as problems in public distribution scheme, Electricity consumers grievance day with the Divisional Engineer, World consumer day celebration, and conducting consumer awareness programmes to school students during their NSS camp.

Apart from these consumer related activities, this organization was found to undertake multifarious activities such as the following which are not connected with consumer related problems. They had undertaken non-consumer related problems like polio awareness camp, Aids awareness programme, participation in DIG Grievance day, Drinking water problem, Fund raising for Gujarat earthquake relief programme, Bus Transportation problem, Distribution of Dictionary to poor school students, Awareness through posters about sand smuggling, Rain water harvesting awareness, raising funds for school building funds, funds contribution to Kumbakonam school fire victims, sending relief materials and funds to Tsunami affected people, contribution of desk and bench to school, contributing prizes for government school students, creating awareness about jaundice problem and preventive methods, constructing benches for sitting at the bus shelter, welcoming cycle peace rally participants, helping the school to conduct NSS programme, Free distribution of notebooks to poor students during the celebration of Kamaraj Birth day Celebrations, Publication of historical materials about nearby villages.

Apparently they seemed to be dynamic but their activities are not focused on consumer related problems. While this question was raised to the office bearers, they said that they also need periodical training and orientation to streamline their vision and programmes.

Melapalayam Consumer Protection Association was started on 15 March 2009 with T.M. Mohammed Ehiya as President, A.S.M. Mohaded Sheriff Sindhani as Vice President, P.M. Abdul Jaffar as Secretary, P.N. Sheik Udhuman as Joint secretary and M.P.S. Abdul Rahman as Treasurer and it continues to be active till date.  

It had been recorded in the minutes book that they had been successful in getting a scholarship from the Backward class commission for a ninth standard student who was not sanctioned scholarship even though he had applied for the same. The problem was dealt with after obtaining information through the powerful weapon of Right to Information. In two mutton stalls there was problem in the use of ordinary weighing scale and it was pointed out and changes were brought about for the use of electronic weighing machine. When someone bought a match box bundle containing ten match boxes, one box did not have any match stick and it was pointed out to the shop owner and to the agent and the problem was rectified by obtaining a fresh match box.

As salient features of their activities, it was pointed out that there was three beef shops in the residential area of thirty second ward. And they were creating health hazards to the people in the locality. The problems were highlighted to the Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation and they were shifted to some other non residential area. Moreover problems relating to the distribution of water, not fixing of street lights were pointed out from time to time and they were rectified.

While discussing with the office bearers of the association, they discovered that the problems they had handled were of micro level problems and the need to identify the macro level problems and to work in collaboration with other district level, state level and national level organizations was expressed. They expressed the need for trainings for their members and they

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50 Personal Interview with Mohammed Ehiya, President, Melapalayam Consumer Protection Association, dated 30 January 2011.
also hoped that in future they should begin to have interactive and sharing sessions with other organizations at a higher level.

Mostly the consumer organizations are registered under societies Act. The advantage with this type of registration is that they can increase the number of members and form various committees to look into the different types of consumer problems. In contrast it was found that there was one organization registered under Trust Act. It was Valluvar Environmental Protection and Consume Awareness Trust with the acronym VEPCAT. This functioned with Senthil Kumaran as President, K. Venkatachalam as Secretary and M. Ganesan as Treasurer. The activities of this organization included blood donation, Celebration of Women’s Day, Distribution of free educational materials to poor students, Paying fees for a Tenth Standard and Engineering student. After much discussion with the office bearers they realized that the activities of this organization were also not very much related to consumer problems but they were of purely social service oriented.

A cordial and respectful relationship between the VCOs and government departments is very vital for consumer protection. But one is forced to come to the conclusion that consumer bodies were becoming irrelevant. With the bureaucracy treating the consumer bodies either with contempt or at the most condescendingly, the forums are all at sea. Consumer activists here lament that non-conduct of meetings for expressing people's grievances itself has become a major grievance. They alleged that the officials were not interested in holding meetings with the consumer organizations or even convening a session of the statutory panel such as the District Committee of Consumer Organizations. As per the letter of A.M. Swaminathan, Secretary, Co-operation, Food and Consumer Protection Department, all Secretaries to Governments/Heads of Departments/Government undertakings concerned with consumer affairs should organize

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51 Personal Interview with Senthil Kumaran, President, Valluvar Environmental Protection and Consume Awareness Trust, dated 31 January 2011.


53 Letter of A.M. Swaminathan, Secretary, Co-operation, Food and Consumer Protection Department, Chennai, dated 10 November 1994.
regular meetings with the leading voluntary consumer organizations of not less than four a year so as to enable these bodies to represent their grievances/suggestions and recommendations.

But the order is followed only in the breach, going by a number of complaints received by the Government. Lakshmi Pranesh, who later became Consumer Protection Secretary, in her letter dated 10 December 2001, instructed the District Collectors to convene meetings every month with the VCOs and take follow-up action on the matters put forward by the organizations. As it was brought to the notice of the Government that such meetings were not conducted regularly, the instructions were reiterated again and again. Even now such complaints of non-conduct of meetings with the VCOs regularly are not wanting... I therefore request you to ensure that the meetings with the VCOs are convened regularly in future and a report thereon is sent to the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection. The Government will be constrained to take a serious view of any violation of the instructions." K. Kathirmathiyon of the Consumer Cause, C.M. Jeyaraam of the Citizens' Voice Club and Mahalaxmi Subramanian of the Kasturibai Ladies Association here alleged that the meetings of the district committee of the VCOs had not been held properly in the past few years. Last year, a meeting of the District Committee was held on October 9. This year, it was held under the chairmanship of the District Revenue Officer on July 31. The next meeting, scheduled for November 19, was postponed twice and was yet to be held. These meetings if at all held, which hardly evoked proper response from officials, turned out to be a mere "farce." All that most of the Departments would say was that the officials concerned had been "advised" to look into the issue. "That is the end of the issue, because there has been seldom any follow-up," lament the activists. Even minutes were not properly prepared, they alleged. Though MLAs and MPs were members of the committee, "they are never invited." The Tirunelveli District Collector ordered that the local bodies conduct separate meetings, as lack of basic amenities was the major grievance. But no local body ever bothered to do so.

The major activity of these voluntary consumer organizations is consumer education. According to United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection, consumers enjoyed eight

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54 Letter of Lakshmi Pranesh to All Collectors, Secretary, Co-operation, Food and Consumer Protection Department, Chennai, dated 10 December 2001.
rights of which consumer education is one.\textsuperscript{55} This aimed at enabling consumers to acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services, while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities and how to act on them. Consumer education is a process that equips people to function as responsible consumers in a complex, technological society.\textsuperscript{56} It helps them understand their value systems; develop sound decision-making procedures in the market place; recognize their rights and responsibilities; and understand the cumulative effect of consumer decisions on the community, economy and environment. Consumer education should help to open the consumer eye of the consumers. The consumer eye concept means that an informed consumer looks at a product critically and analytically, first from his own point of view as an individual consumer, then with the interest of the community at large in mind. Consumer education must inculcate the responsibilities of consumers. Responsibilities always precede rights. If consumers want their rights recognized, they must first exercise their responsibilities. A free market economy can only function effectively with the support of an educated consumer. Consumer education is a way to balance the power between the producers and consumers. Consumer education provides the insight necessary to develop citizens into responsible and intelligent acting consumers.

Education is the first line of defense against fraud and deception. It is the most powerful tool for progress of the country and is a social and political necessity.\textsuperscript{57} Undoubtedly, knowledge is power. It is education, which transforms the individual’s personality, enriches the mind, sublimes the emotions and illuminates the spirits. Education leads to liberation- liberation from ignorance, subjugation, exploitation, superstition and prejudice. Education has a well-defined role in creating conditions of change. Education helps an individual as a consumer in making rational choices and protects him from trade and business related exploitation. It can help one to make well-informed decisions before one spend money. Only knowledgeable and alert consumers, who aware of their rights and responsibilities, can protect themselves efficiently. Where the literacy rate is high and social awareness is greater, the consumer cannot be easily


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

exploited. Informed, educated and aware consumers are assets to the society as well as the functioning of constitutional democracy. Education and information bring independence, which in turn contributes to the growth and development of individual personality.

In India 240 million people are between the age group of ten to nineteen. But this demographic dividend is not something that comes to India automatically. It could well turn into a demographic disaster in the absence of right type of education. Consumer awareness plays a key role in customer decision making. By increasing customer’s knowledge about a product, service or business, a healthy economic environment is established in which customers are informed and protected and businesses are accountable. It benefits both individuals and society as a whole. From individual point of view it enhances critical thinking, improved life skills and increased self-confidence. Consumer awareness benefits the society by promoting satisfaction, increasing economic stability and creating realistic customer expectations.

Palayamkottai, one of the twin cities of Tirunelveli, is on the eastern side of the river Thamirabarani. Palayamkottai was known as the Oxford of South India because of the existence of many educational institutions. The district has a literacy rate of 76.97 percent which is above the state average. As of 2005–2006, the district had a total of 2,494 schools. Tirunelveli district has the following educational institutions: one University namely Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, twenty five Arts and Science colleges, one Medical College, one Siddha Medical college, one Veterinary College, Twenty Engineering colleges, one Law college. Manmaniam Sundaranar University, established in 1990, was named after poet Sundaram Pillai. The University has a network of 102 affiliated colleges in three southern districts. Already in 1878, there were two colleges in the district: the Madurai Diraviam Thayumanavar Hindu College and St. John’s College. Sarah Tucker College, the first college for women and third college of the district, was started in 1895. The fourth and fifth colleges namely St. Xavier’s and St. Ignatius Colleges of Education were established in 1923 and 1957, respectively.

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58 Ibid.
59 Tirunelveli District Profile, National Informatics Centre, Tirunelveli, 2012.
In Tirunelveli district, a Government Law college was established to meet the requirements of the people of the southernmost part of Tamil Nadu in the year 1996. The year 2007 set another milestone in the history of this college when Masters Degree in Constitutional Law and Human Rights was started. The Tirunelveli Medical College and its teaching hospital are located at High Grounds, Palayamkottai. It was established in 1965. The Government Siddha Medical College was established at Palayamkottai on 30 November 1964. Technical education in the district dates to 1844, when Mrs. Caldwell, wife of Bishop Robert Caldwell began a school to teach girls lace-making at Idyangudi. The Government College of Engineering was established in October 1981 to fulfill the needs of people in the southern region.  

The Tirunelveli District has 241 kindergartens, 1501 Primary schools, 431 Middle schools, 114 High schools, 185 Higher secondary schools and twenty eight Teacher-training institutes. In 1986, the Revenue District of Tirunelveli was divided into Tirunelveli and Thoothukkudi districts. A new post, District Educational Officer at Tenkasi, was created. The names of posts of District Educational Officer, Tirunelveli Central was changed to District Education Officer, Tirunelveli; the District Educational Officer, Tirunelveli South was redesignated as District Educational Officer, Cheranmahadevi. The three District Education Officers serve under the Chief Educational Officer.

Consumer voluntary organizations in Tirunelveli district are mainly engaged in the promotion of consumer education to different groups. Consumer education in the schools and colleges in Tirunelveli district is a recent phenomenon aiming at creating consumer awareness so that in future the students will become worthwhile citizens of India. These efforts are also found to be supported by the Tamilnadu government. It had given Rs 10,000/- in 2005 and 2007 for two years and in 2011 a sum of Rs. 5000/- was given for the promotional activities of student consumer clubs. In Tirunelveli district consumer clubs are functioning in twenty five schools and fifteen colleges.

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60 Tirunelveli District Profile, National Informatics Centre, Tirunelveli, 2012.
61 Ibid.
The Objectives of the Government of Tamil Nadu with regard to consumer education in educational institutions are educating children about rights of the consumers as provided in Consumer Protection Act, 1986, mobilizing youngsters by instilling in them the spirit of protection of consumer rights, imparting knowledge about the role of consumers in protection of their rights, and strengthening the consumer movement in India.

The primary objectives of the Citizen Consumer Club are to collaborate, cooperate, actively participate and function in accordance with the Department of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, Government of Tamil Nadu. In order to achieve the above said objectives, the club initiates seminars, conferences, consumer-fest, competitions, publishing articles on consumer issues, etc., Mainly these activities were undertaken on two occasions. One was National Consumer Day celebrations on every 24 December and the other was World Consumer Rights Day celebrations on every 15 March.

These consumer clubs used the following simple guidelines such as the 5 R's to easily remember as day to day duties of a consumer. The first duty focused on Reduce meaning consume only what is needed. If possible reduce consumption of water, electricity, fuel and other non-renewable resources. The second one focused on Refuse meaning refuse to purchase the goods and articles when they are not needed, even though advertisements forcefully attract the consumers to buy. The third duty focused on Reuse implying that if a product can serve for a longer period, use it instead of buying a new one. The fourth one was Recycle meaning don't litter the environment instead recycle degradable or recyclable materials through scrap dealers. And lastly the fifth one was Rethink and this emphasizes that before making every purchase the consumer has to rethink whether the particular articles or goods are absolutely needed.

While discussing with the students of a club, it was found that they articulated that the following Remedies were Available to Consumer. The first familiar remedy was that of removing the defect pointed out by the appropriate laboratory from the goods. The second

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64 Personal Interview with Muthulakshimi, Coordinator, CPC, Saradha College, Tirunelveli, dated 10 February 2011.
65 Personal Interview with Muthulakshimi, dated 10 February 2011.
66 Personal Interview with SVL Michael, Coordinator, CPC, St Xavier’s College, Palayamkottai, dated 11 February 2011.
remedy was to replace the goods with the new goods of similar description which are free from similar defects. The third remedy was to return the price of the charges paid by the complainant. The fourth remedy was to pay such amount as compensation to the consumer for any loss or injury suffered by the consumer due to the negligence of the service provider. The fifth remedy was to remove the defects of deficiencies in the services in question. The sixth remedy was to discontinue the unfair trade practice or the restrictive trade practice or not to repeat. The seventh remedy was to withdraw the hazardous goods from being offered for sale. And the eighth remedy was to provide for adequate costs to parties.

These consumer clubs were functioning under the guidance of a teacher or lecturer who is interested in consumer affairs as well as students’ consumer awareness programmes. Trainings were conducted periodically for these counselors at the district level and sharing also take place about how each consumer club is functioning. The counselors seemed to have a good understanding of the objectives of the consumer clubs.

One consumer counselor at the school level came out with the following description of objectives of consumer clubs. The objectives of consumer education at school were to educate independent, discriminating and informed consumers. It was to equip the pupil with knowledge and insight into the conditions of being a consumer in a complex multifaceted society by providing basic knowledge in such areas as consumer legislation, personal finances, economics, persuasive advertisements, consumption pattern, environmental issues, global resources, housing, clothing, price and quality, diet and health. Schools should contribute to making pupils aware of the influences they are exposed to with respect to life styles, consumer habits, values and attitudes.

A district level trainer of consumer clubs had the following comments and observations to say. Consumer education involved giving students cognitive skills to help them make informed decisions. It also implied an understanding of the impact of individual business and government decisions on the lives of others. In addition to this, pupils felt the need to develop a certain attitude towards consuming. Speaking about the consumer education programmes another

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67 Personal Interview with Anbu, J., Coordinator, CPC, Magdalene Matric Higher Secondary School, Palayamkottai, dated 11 February 2011.
counselor said that it was a way of thinking which is linked with solving of problems of day to day affairs and he views that the skills range from learning to cope with present circumstances, to participating as citizens to influence change.  

The following reports about the different programmes organized in schools and colleges in Tirunelveli District had been collected from different sources. The National Consumer Protection Day celebration was held at St Xavier’s Higher Secondary school, Palayamkottai. Speaking on that occasion, Collector Samayamoorthi said the consumers, while checking the quality of the products they were buying, should also take a note of the date of manufacture and expiry, the batch number, the actual weight etc. and should get the receipt for every purchase as it alone would help the consumer get his grievance redressed, if any, after the purchase. If the seller refused to give receipt for the sale or the product was of substandard, the buyer should inform the District Consumer Protection Officer and file a formal complaint through e-mail for speedy action. Samayamoorthy also gave away prizes to winners of inter-school singing and essay competitions conducted as part of consumer day celebrations. An awareness exhibition was also organized as part of the function.

The consumer club of St Xavier’s college of education had a very clear focus about the need and objectives of the consumer club as pointed out below. The Citizen Consumer Club of our college was an affiliated club to the Department of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, Government of Tamil Nadu, which was established at the beginning of the academic year 2009-2010. The club had evolved its own objectives in aligning to achieve the common goal of the Department of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, Government of Tamil Nadu. This club had organized one day seminar on consumer awareness on 20 February 2013.

The Annual Report of Rani Anna College, Tirunelveli indicated that the following activities were carried out in that college. On 13 July 2009 an awareness programme was conducted in our College. Fifty students joined this club. On 17 March 2009 a District level

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68 Personal Interview with Muthulakshimi, dated 11 February 2011.
69 The Hindu, National Consumer Day Celebrated, dated 1 February 2013.
70 Personal Interview with Daniel, Coordinator, CPC St Xavier’s College of Education, Palayamkottai, dated 11 February 2011.
workshop was organized in Raj Mahal, Tirunelveli and thirty students participated in that workshop. On 19 February 2009 a special lecture on Consumer’s Right was delivered by B.A. Abdul Kareem of Sadak Abdullah College of Palayamkottai. On 10 August 2009 a lecture on consumer problems and Solutions was delivered by Professor Velammal. On 27 August 2009 an awareness programme was conducted by enacting a drama and reciting a poem. On 2 and 3 September 2009 an exhibition on consumer awareness was organized in that College. The members of the club prepared albums, charts and captions. On 22 September 2009 a Seminar on Consumer Education was arranged. Abraham Muthukumar of St. John’s College gave a Special lecture on Consumer Protection Acts.

It is found that Consumer Awareness and Movement forms part of the syllabus of different courses in universities and colleges. Manonmaniam University has prescribed a paper on social value education for all Under Graduate courses with two credits in the second semester from the academic year 2008-2009. The fifth unit of this paper has the syllabus on globalization and Consumer Movement. In this context, students are expected to study the Objects, Acts, Rights of consumer, Role of Consumer Councils, Grievances and Redressal mechanism. Moreover Manonmaniam Sundaranar University is also offering a post graduate diploma course on Consumer Awareness through its Directorate of Distance and Continuing Education programme.73

A group of hundred college students from six different colleges assembled together to have a reflection about their level of consumer awareness.74 The following were the findings of the study. While assessing the awareness of student regarding the statement that weekly quota is not forfeited if not purchased, it was observed that only seventeen percentage of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be twelve and majority of the students who were unaware of the law was seventy percent. While assessing the awareness of students regarding the statement that samples of food grains to be displayed in sealed plastic bags, it was observed that forty eight percentage of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was

73 Personal Interview with Paulraj Joseph, Former Director of Distance Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, dated 13 February 2011.
74 Report of the Inter-Collegiate Awareness Camp on PDS, St Xavier’s College, Palayamkottai, 2012.
estimated to be nineteen percent and the students who were unaware of the law was thirty three percent.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the information that yellow receipts had to be issued with date of purchase, it was observed that fifty two percent of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be thirteen percent and the students who were unaware of the law was thirty five percent. While assessing the awareness of students regarding the law that there is no ruling that ration quota can be purchased only once a day, it was observed that a meager fifteen percentage of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be twelve percent and majority of the students who were unaware of the law was seventy three percent.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the law that no fees to be charged for adding or deleting names in the existing ration card, it was observed that a small percentage of twenty five percent of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be nine percent and majority of the students who were unaware of the law were sixty six percent. While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it was mandatory to display registration number of the ration shop, it was observed that majority of sixty one percent of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be eight and students who were unaware of the law were thirty one percent. While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it was mandatory to display inspector’s name and time of his weekly visit, it was observed that only thirty one percent of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be eighteen percent and students who were unaware of the law was estimated to be fifty one percent.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it was mandatory to display of stock position of all ration commodities in units, it was observed that only nineteen percent of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be twelve percent and majority of sixty nine percent of students were unaware of the law. While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it was mandatory to display of official price list, it was observed that thirty three percent of
the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be twelve percent and majority of fifty five percentage of students were unaware of the law.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it was mandatory to display of total number of ration cards registered with the shop, it was observed that meager fifteen percent of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be eleven percent and majority of the students namely seventy four percent were unaware of the law. While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display of total number of units registered with the shop, it was observed that only fourteen percent of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be eleven percent and a majority seventy five percent of students were unaware of the law.

The press in India has always been sensitive to the performance of their duties so that those who are involved in the matter of policy can do justice to their roles. The consumer is advertised as the king by the seller and service provider; but in actual practice treated as a slave or servant. He should realize his importance and prepare himself to exercise his rights with responsibility, which requires the knowledge of various consumer protection and welfare acts which have been enacted over the years to safeguard the interests of consumers. Today it is rightly said that a consumer makes a good citizen and ultimately a good Democrat. Promoting awareness through the dissemination of information is the fundamental task that the media can make towards the development of consumerism. Media has played a vital role in welfare of consumer through books, magazines, newspaper, broadcasting, radio, telephone, TV, movies, documentaries etc.

The following are the suggestions for the major Media features to be considered.\textsuperscript{75} The major features of media that should be considered is the attitude of the media towards consumers awareness about their rights and consumer education. Media is a dais where all can come together, express their views whether similar or divergent and still need not be the

follower of particular ideology or school of thought. Media permits diversity of opinion and at the same time it can continue its functioning on one particular ideology. Grievances of different parties, dimensions of different problems, arguments, counter arguments on the particular issue can rightly be reflected by media alone. People often call press as a fourth column of democracy. The position can be extended to all forms of media because only print media is not influencing opinion of public, on the contrary electronic media, in terms of its coverage is more exhaustive and effective.

Considering these aspects, problems of consumers can rightly be expressed by media, whatever may be the form. In explaining consumers' problems, atrocities against consumers, educating consumers and making them aware of their problems. Earlier it was presumed by a good citizen as an essential aspect of sound democracy. Today it is rightly said that a good consumer makes a good citizen and ultimately a good democrat. Promoting awareness by spreading information is the primary task that media can perform towards development of consumerism. Information is the asset. Exploitation of consumer is due to absence of this vital role by providing right information at right time to consumers. Ignorance regarding prices and price-behavior changes market structure and fluctuations in economy is not understood by ordinary consumers and hence they fall prey to exploitation and malpractices.

Media plays a crucial role in changing and influencing the thoughts of the people. Media has a great power to influence what we think about things happening around. The role of media is not only to seek solution to the many problems of the country, but the task of media is also to inform and educate people so that a critical awareness among the people is encouraged. Presently people have faith in the press more than any other institution. The press should be fair, truthful and courageous while protecting the interests of consumers in many cases. People prefer to believe the reports in the press as the official announcement of the Administration. Public interest issues as handled by the press are unparalleled. This is more so in case of issues of interest to consumers. The fate of the poor of the issues in the services sector, low quality products, cereals adulterity, rampant corruption, bureaucratic tendencies of public officials, nepotism in high places, the black market, smuggling and artificial shortages of goods are carefully distinguished by the media alone. Because of this, the media is accepted as a champion

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
of public cause. Following are the different activities that different media have been committed to promoting consumer awareness.\textsuperscript{77}

The electronic media have started campaigning for the education of consumers through regular communication to regulate social communication from the constitutional rights of consumers as well as when and how to use it. Regular announcements about how the consumer should start with his claim and that this should be put in place are very useful. Press is playing a leading role in promoting the movement consumers in this country. Publication of the weekly column about consumer affairs has become an established practice. This column deals with the issues, rights and obligations of consumers and how consumers can effectively exercise their rights. Some newspapers published the main events of major cases and disputes between consumers and merchants. For example: the Economic Times published a column entitled "caveat emptor", which only deals with current problems and consumer complaints against traders.\textsuperscript{78} The newspapers should give good coverage to news related to consumer forum when consumers win cases against trader or company. Some newspapers publish stories often on issues of consumer interest or complaints or incidents related to the major consumer issues. These news stories are usually designed after considering the merits of a news consumer event.

The exploitation of consumers is due to the absence of such a key role in providing right information at the right time for consumers. Ignorance about prices and price behavior of market structure and fluctuations in the economy changes is not understood by ordinary consumers and therefore are victims of exploitation and consumer malpractices. Therefore there is a need for greater role of media to regulate consumer protection mechanism for the betterment of consumers in this changing era. Media in any form, whether printed or electronic, is a mirror of the times and society we live in connects us with the world and the world to us. Media also plays a useful role in establishing good relations or friendship between the merchants and shoppers. The promotion of fair trade practices, the establishment of codes of conduct for businessmen is the task that the media can only assume. The concept of ethics in the economy relates to morality, ethics, professional ethics and organization.

\textsuperscript{78} The Economic Times, Caveat Emptor, dated 23 January 2009.
The following are some suggestions regarding the role of media in consumer protection. Tirunelveli has an all India Radio Station which is broadcasting number of programmes. The consumer associations and people in general expect from all India Radio a programme like the one that caters to farmers. Whenever the agricultural officers want to communicate some message to the far remote villagers, they seek the help of the All India Radio Programme. They have some message to communicate daily and therefore a particular time is allotted. Like that it should also allot a particular time to consumer protection. In Tirunelveli, many different leading Tamil newspapers are printed and published. The newspapers could allot some space to speak about consumer problems and achievements. Only then the awareness level of the people at large will increase.

Consumers are heterogeneous in composition; they are from different religions, speaking different languages, using different products and maintain loyalty to their tradition. They are also mostly poor, illiterate, ignorant and do not know the role of consumption of economic system as well as quality of life. Therefore, consumers face wide range of problems in their day to day dealings in the market place, banks, hospitals and etc, and some of their problems are lack of safety, absence of quality control regulations, food adulteration and unfair trading in the marketing. In the early days, consumer was considered as King of the corporate activities, but in the modern society, they are no longer safe against the mal practices, substandard goods and unsatisfactory services. Consumers have no choice expect to face a wider range of buying situations than in the past, an increase in the number of consumer problems and disputes particularly relating to consumer rights and legal protection. To meet these challenges effectively consumers must support themselves against these problems since they are not automatically protected by the working of the market. Thus, consumer’s best protection is knowledge of consumer rights and remedies which exist to resolve these problems when they occur. At present, women are working as multi tasked role players like house maker, employer, business and professional women with their hard work. In these positions there has been a gradual evolution in the status of women and they are called as marketers. Women account for almost of all domestic

79 Personal Interview with Senthil Kumaran, President, Valluvar Environmental Protection and Consumer Awareness Trust, dated 31 January 2011.
80 Personal Interview with Mohammed Ehiya, President, Melapalayam Consumer Protection Association, dated 30 January 2011.
purchases including health care and sustain her family as a homemaker. Homemaker was the actual buyers for the food in the family. Home makers took independent decision in all the areas of food buying except financial aspect. Women’s position as care givers has meant that women engaged in the part of buying things that provide sustenance for home and family. Although it is often played down, it is clear that women have a great deal of influence in the economy as consumers, in other words, a lot of spending power. As consumers, women live under a good deal of pressure. Many women must find ways to feed their families on a limited budget. They search for a balance between affordability, nutrition and availability countered with the personal preferences of their families. Stopping for fast food seems easier than rushing home to cook dinner for the family after a long day at work. The Indian consumers are cheated to rupees in crores annually through various device invented by clever businessman, producers and traders. It is found that people prefer to absorb and endure the wrong done to them rather than light against injustice. This is because consumers do not know the ways and means or racing them confidently. Woman is an active partner in the family today. Women are the key factor in all purchase decisions and have become purchasing mediator in her family. She has obtained a position in the society by desirable quality of her education and employment. Product manufacturers recognized the need of women support; hence they communicate and try to convince them through all possible media. They plan the marketing strategy to attract this segment, satisfy their needs and retain them. Consumerism is a social and economic command that is based on the systematic formation of a desire to buy goods and services in better amounts. Women play an essential role to functioning in their family. Women who are working outside of home face the added problem of time constraints. Certain purchases may be made to save time and energy when women are squeezed between work and family responsibilities. Women need to be aware of the consumer rights. Safe and fair financial services are important for consumers especially in women consumers, as they were offered substandard products, overpriced, unsafe or worthless by the product manufacturers. Several products were not even registered with standards and quality in the market. Not only the legislation but its effective implementation is very important. If consumer courts would be operational in every province, it would bother one to file a case against any manufacturer, protection of consumers from various unfair trade

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practices. The worst affected victims of these commercial organizations need to be protected and the consumer is protected through consumer protection. The exploitation of the consumers by manufactures and businessmen by producing sub standard goods and hiking of price necessitated the researcher to look into the awareness of women about their consumer rights. Therefore discussions were held with women self help groups functioning in Tirunelveli District. It was reported that generally the women consumers showed low level of awareness about consumer rights. The main reason for low awareness of consumer rights among women consumers is low education and low socio-economic status. It can be further concluded that as the awareness of women consumers regarding consumer rights decreases, its utilization of their rights also decreases. Thus, the exposure of media, awareness training camps through Government and NGOs and other educational institutions improve the awareness level of consumer rights and thereby increase utilization of their rights. It was suggested that a series of training programmes could be organized for these groups on consumer rights.

Over all, Consumer Clubs were established in one thousand Schools and in five hundred colleges of Tamil Nadu and they are functioning well. Establishment of 1500 consumer clubs have yielded good results and shown rapid growth of consumer movement in the State. Students are showing keen interest and are actively participating in competition and out-reach camps. Awareness level has also increased rapidly. Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department, being the Nodal Department for consumer protection activities in the State of Tamil Nadu has also allocating funds for various activities and purposes for the growth and sustenance of citizen consumer clubs. Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department, for the past four year, has implemented following activities for the growth of consumer clubs by providing necessary funds from the State Fund and also allocated certain amount from the Grants given by Government of India.

TANSSCOPE published a Handbook for use by members of Consumer Clubs. The said Handbook comprised of basic information on how to establish and run the Consumer Clubs and

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82 Personal Interview with Dr Kanchana Suresh, Joint Secretary, Tirunelveli District Consumer Awareness Movement, dated 28 January 2011.
83 Personal Interview with Dr Kanchana Suresh, dated 28 January 2011.
general awareness on the subject to be covered. Also, Annual Calendar of activities of a model Consumer Club was suggested. The Handbook was published in both Tamil, the Regional language and English to facilitate English and Tamil Medium School for the benefit of all the Consumer Clubs. Similarly a Teacher Reference Book was also published for usage of Teacher coordinators of consumer clubs for guidance and has been provided to all the teacher coordinators.

Every year a specific amount was allotted for the purpose of imparting training to Teacher Coordinators of CCC. This programme was conducted at district level. Besides training the teacher Coordinators of existing CCC, it is felt that, training to teachers of non-CCC educational institutions was also necessary to motivate them to form CCC in their institution. Government of India provided C.D.s. containing ten episodes relating to consumer awareness messages. Tamil dubbed version of such episodes were telecast in doordarshan. Besides, episodes were also copied in C.D.s and provided to school consumer clubs through district administration. Government of Tamil Nadu produced short films in DVD format about consumer awareness in regional language and telecast through Doordharshan during 2008 and 2009. This DVD was screened in all CCC programs across the State and was well received.

In order to conduct CCC awareness conferences, exhibitions, adulteration camps, etc., by the students of CCC in all districts a sum of Rs. 26,10,000/- has been allotted. With a view to motivate the students of CCC, district and State level awards are being marking their active participation in CCC and these awards are being given every year. A sum of Rs. 3,09,000/- has been spent for the purpose. Thus an amount of Rs. 87,38,438/- was spent towards the activities related to citizen consumer clubs. The Scheme of Citizen Consumer Clubs is a huge project and its implementation and sustenance mainly depends on active participation of teachers of schools/colleges who are nominated as coordinators of CCC. Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection has the larger responsibility of managing the Public Distribution System and hence this department alone cannot manage its implementation. In order to implement the scheme of Citizen Consumer Club in all educational institutions effectively, this Department requires coordination of Education sector and therefore a proposal has been sent to Government of Tamil

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Nadu requesting orders for formation of Citizen Consumer Club Steering Committee with representatives of all the education departments as members such as school education, collegiate education, medical education, technical education, law education and employment & training.

In the State of Tamil Nadu there are 2994 colleges and 8142 secondary and higher secondary schools. At present 1500 Citizen Consumer Clubs had been established in schools and colleges under the first, second and third Phases of the programme. All of them were functioning well and show progressive results. Students were showing keen interest in gaining knowledge about consumer protection. Consequent upon the good performance of these consumer clubs, Government of Tamil Nadu had decided to extend this scheme to all educational institutions. In order to mobilize CCCs, it had been decided to appoint four Regional Coordinators and fifty two district Coordinators. Appointment of Regional Coordinators to Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruchi & Madurai were completed. Appointment of District CCC Coordinators was under process. Further in this process to motivate and facilitate CCCs and non-CCC students, a talk show on consumer protection and awareness under caption “Arinthukolveer ariyavaippeer” (know yourself and make it known to others) had been conducted by TANSSCOPE. Joint Commissioner (CS) led the program with five VCO activists. The program was telecasted on 19 September 2010 in Doordharshan Poodigai Channel as one hour program. In order to extend the scope of consumer club in all Educational Institutions i.e., Secondary & Higher Secondary schools, Arts & Science Colleges, Medical Colleges, Engineering Colleges, Polytechnic Colleges, Nursing Colleges, Pharmacy Colleges and Teachers Training Institutes and to build consumer movement through formation and facilitation in developing into resource groups, Government of Tamil Nadu through TANSSCOPE have appointed 4 Regional CCC Coordinators and allotment of districts to four regions are as indicated below. The Chennai Region consisted of Chennai North, Chennai South, Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur, Vellore, Tiruvannamalai and Villupuram districts. The Coimbatore Region consisted of Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Salem, Namakkal, Erode, Tiruppur, Coimbatore, Nilgiris and Karur districts. The Tiruchi Region consisted of Cuddalore, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Tiruchi, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Pudukottai and Dindigul Districts. The Madurai Region consisted of Theni,
Madurai, Sivaganga, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari Districts.

Job responsibilities of Regional CCC Coordinators included visiting all educational institutions, motivating them to form Citizen Consumer clubs, opening of Citizen consumer clubs in 100 percent of Colleges, ensuring functional, effective and student-driven Citizen consumer clubs in each College, coaching for effective running of Citizen Consumer club, conducting district level Annual Workshops every year for Citizen Consumer Club Coordination in June, preparing Annual Action Plan in collaboration with District Supply and Consumer Protection Officer / District Citizen Consumer Club Coordinators, reviewing the implementation of Annual Action Plan once in three months, organizing awareness campaigns together with District CCC Coordinators, ensuring proper documentation of activities and best practices of Citizen Consumer Clubs through online web based tools, weekly reporting to TANS SCOPE by e-mail on activities during each week and attending monthly / quarterly review by Commissioner / Joint Commissioner / Deputy Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection.

For the Orientation-cum-training program, one lecturer and two students from non-CCC educational institutions of a district are invited and orientation has been given to the participants to form CCC in their educational institution. Out of CCC-colleges which are running CCC is a successful manner has been given preference to conduct the program with willingness. The college selected for conducting the program should have big auditorium. The college has arranged for eminent speaker to give lecture on various topics on consumer protection. VCOs are given preference for giving lectures. Books, pamphlets, posters, etc are printed by the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection and distributed to the colleges that are conducting the program through District Supply and Consumer Protection Officers. All educational institutions of a district are invited for the consumer festival. Out of CCC-colleges which are running CCC in a successful manner is given preference to conduct the program with willingness. The college selected for conducting the program should have big auditorium and a play ground. Government Departments, Oil Companies, etc, have launched stalls. The college has arrange for eminent speaker to give lecture on various topics on consumer protection and has to conduct competitions viz., essay writing, speech, drawing to students and to award prizes to
winners. VCOs are given preference for giving lectures and conducting competitions. Books, pamphlets, posters, etc are printed by the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Officers.

One CCC-college per taluk has been selected to conduct outreach camps through their CCC-students in five remote villages of the taluk. The college selected for conducting the outreach camps will spread consumer awareness messages among the mass dwelling in remote villages at grass root level by conducting Nukkad Natak, Street Shows, etc. Pamphlets containing awareness messages on consumer protection and on PDS will be distributed by the students to the mass gathered during outreach camps. VCOs have guided the students for the camps. Pamphlets, posters, etc are printed by the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection and distributed to the colleges that the conducting the program through District Supply and Consumer Protection Officers. Duration of conducting one program in one village will be for three hours and approximately students have spent fifteen hours for conducting outreach camps in five remote villages of one taluk.\(^8^7\)

It has been proposed to create consumer awareness through the State and District machinery for reaching remote and backward areas, targeting rural consumers at grass root level, educating them of their consumer rights, empowering them with information to ward off exploitation and redress grievances. Adhering to the guidelines issued by Government of India following activities are carried out during the month of February 2011 to spread out consumer awareness messages at grass root level. According to the statistics there are 2994 colleges and 8142 secondary & higher secondary schools totaling about 11136 educational institutions. Out of 11136 educational institutions 1500 institutions have established Citizen Consumer Clubs which is 13.4 percent. Hence it has been decided to motivate non-CCC educational institutions to form CCC and to facilitate existing CCC by conducting festival and out-reach camps.\(^8^8\) Accordingly three projects have been designed and all the projects are decided to implement through colleges that have established Citizen Consumer Clubs. Non-CCC educational institutions of a district are invited and given orientation for formation CCC in their institution. Successful CCC College in a district has conducted the program. Eminent speakers gave lectures on various topics on

consumer protection. VCOs are given preference for giving lectures. Rs. 15,000/- has been provided each district for this half-a-day program and Books, pamphlets, posters, etc. are printed and sent from Commissioner’s office.

All educational institutions of a district were gathered under one roof and exhibitions, competitions, lectures, dramas, etc., on consumer protection related topics are arranged. Successful CCC College in a district conducted the program. Rs. 70,000/- had been provided to each district for this one day program and Books, pamphlets, and posters were printed and sent from Commissioner’s office. CCC college students in a taluk conducted outreach camps in five remote villages of the concerned taluk. CCC Students spread consumer awareness messages among the mass dwelling in the remote villages at grass root level by conducting Nukkad Natak and Street Shows. Pamphlets containing awareness messages on consumer protection and on PDS were distributed by the CCC students to the mass gathered during outreach camps. Rs. 10,000/- had been provided to each Taluk for conducting outreach camps in five remote villages. CCC students spent about fifteen hours for conducting outreach camps in five remote villages of a taluk. DS & CPO formed Celebration Committee comprising of Teacher CCC Co-coordinator of the educational institution selected for conducting project, three reputed VCOs of concerned district, all TSOs of district and one official from DS & CPO’s office. Preparation of invitations, arranging of resource persons, approaching Government Departments of the district for launching stalls during consumer festival and overall supervision were the responsibilities of DS & CPO. CCS & CP had provided necessary Funds to the district administration for distribution to colleges selected for conducting the program. Reading materials such as booklets, pamphlets, posters and DVDs to the participants attending the program had been provided by Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection through District Supply & Consumer Protection Officer.

A seminar to discuss about the rights and responsibilities of consumers towards investment schemes was conducted on 8 May 2010. TANSSCOPE had organized the program through FEDCOT, a VCO, by providing financial assistance of Rs. 49,755/- VCOs from all corner of the State participated. Eminent personalities offered valuable information towards

safeguarding the interest of consumers against unethical trade practice in financial trade. Another seminar to bring out awareness on sustainable consumption of resources like water, electricity, fuel, etc. among general public was conducted on 25 February 2011. TANSSCOPE had organized the program through two VCOs namely Tirunelveli District Consumer Protection Association, Palayamkottai and Women Consumer Protection Organization, Madurai by providing financial assistance of Rs.90,000/- The seminar is meant for housewives, school children and booklet with awareness information about sustainable consumption was also released. In order to provide a platform for consumer activists to exchange their experiences and to train the upcoming consumer activists for providing efficient services to general public in an ethical manner, a two days orientation-cum-training was conducted at Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul district on 13 and 14 November 2010.\(^91\) The program has been organized through FEDCOT by providing financial assistance of Rs. 1,26,897/-. VCOs from all the districts are participants and the program includes training on awareness generation, counseling, complaints handling, establishment and managing Voluntary Consumer Organization, etc.

In order to propagate consumer awareness information, a stall had been set up in the Tamil Nadu Tourism and Trade Fair 2011 conducted by Government of Tamil Nadu, Tourism Department from January 2011 to March 2011.\(^92\) The visiting public were provided pre-purchase and post purchase consumer advice for availing goods or services through the staff of Consumer Advice Centre, Chennai. Besides providing pamphlets containing valid consumer awareness information, short consumer awareness television clippings were also screened for the information of Public visiting Trade Fair 2011.

Awards for Districts Collectors for exceptional performance in consumer grievance redressal were given to motivate better performance. Besides this, Awards were also issued to best VCO, Best School CCC and Best College CCC. State Level CP awards 2009 were given to the winners during the State level National Consumer Day 2010 & World Consumer Day 2011 held at Tiruchirapalli district on 5 January 2011.

\(^91\) Report of the Orientation cum Training for VCOs Dindigul, Gandhigram Rural University, dated 30 November 2010.

\(^92\) The Hindu, Trade Fair Attracts over Seventeen Lakh People, dated 8 March 2011.
To educate consumers about their rights, in general, and laws standards, rules and codes in each sector through print media, a well designed quarterly magazine Tamil Nadu Nugarvoor Kavasam was published and distributed to all Government Offices, Voluntary Consumer Organisations and Public Libraries in the State. This registered magazine had been priced as Rs.10 per copy and was receiving subscriptions from public and Directorate of Public Libraries. Every month 8500 copies of magazine were printed. An exclusive web site with valuable information for consumers like definitions, duties and responsibilities of consumers was maintained through National Informatics Centre, Chennai. The said website contained details of all programmes on consumer protection / awareness, all publications of this Department besides having provision for filing complaints regarding exploitation of consumer rights. Also the website provided information relating to all the services provided by Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department.

Consumer protection measures/methods can be understood by dividing them into three categories namely promotional activities, Government legislative measures, and judicial machineries at the National, State and District levels for consumer grievance redressal. It is undisputed that consumers constitute the largest unorganized public body in the country and protection of their interests and rights is of vital importance in a well regulated and independent mechanism to provide quality goods, services and utilities to the satisfaction of consumer.

Among the promotional activities of government departments, Tamil Nadu State Society for Consumer Protection and Empowerment (TANSSCOPE) stands first. It is the State Governmental Organization responsible for promoting and coordinating all the activities relating to consumer awareness and protection in Tamilnadu.\(^3\) TANSSCOPE had been formed and the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection was nominated as its President Ex-officio. It was registered under Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975 and Certificate No. 70/2009 was obtained from the Registrar of Societies Central Chennai. This Society also takes steps to raise funds from State Government, National and International agencies for undertaking Consumer Protection and awareness generation activities in a large scale. All consumer awareness activities are implemented by the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department.

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\(^3\) Government of Tamilnadu G.O. (Ms.) No. 210, Co-operation, Food and Consumer Protection (H2) Department, dated 12 December 2008.
Protection Department, Government of Tamil Nadu in co-ordination with VCOs in State/District mailing list. Presently, TANSSCOPE is disbursing the fund amount to the concerned organizations adhering to the orders of Commissioner of Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. The following are the office bearers of the society. Commissioner of Civil Supplies & Consumer Protection as the President and Additional/Joint Commissioner of Civil Supplies & Consumer Protection (CCS & CP) as the secretary, Deputy Commissioner I, O/o. CCS & CP, Chennai as Joint secretary, Deputy Commissioner II, O/o. CCS & CP, Chennai, Assistant Commissioner I, O/o. CCS & CP, Chennai, Special / Additional / Joint Secretary, Co-operation, Food and Consumer Protection Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, and Joint Secretary / Deputy Secretary, Finance Department, Government of Tamil Nadu as members.\textsuperscript{94}

Majority of consumers of Tirunelveli district are ignorant about consumer laws and do not know the role of consumption vis-à-vis economic system. The entire marketing operation is aimed at profit maximization at the expense of consuming people. Malpractices like adulteration, short weights and measures, high prices, false and deceitful advertisement and packaging are pervading the market even when the government claim to have passed maximum legal laws protecting consumers compared to other countries in the world. Consumers are ignorant and feels powerless to utilize the available redressal mechanism to resolve their grievances. Consumer laws are not popularized among the common people and they are unable to comprehend them because they are framed in highly technical terminologies. Consumer awareness programmes are not systematically organized for students as well as people. Consumer awareness programmes are not part of the curriculum for both school and college students. Celebrating consumer days twice a year is not sufficient to create consumer awareness.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.