CHAPTER FIVE

PROBLEMS FACED BY CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

IN THEIR DAY TO DAY FUNCTIONING

5.1 Introductory

Consumerism as one of the social movements witnessed by the history in its contemporary times is primarily an outcome of the problems encountered by the consumers in a market situation. In a laissez faire economy, where the marketing concept is an accepted cardinal principal to guide the formulation of business plans, a consumer is normally placed on top of the organization chart as the king. The concept of marketing is defined as consumer orientation backed by integrated marketing aimed at generating consumer satisfaction as the key to satisfying organization goals. Nevertheless, the fact remains otherwise. Even in the so called affluent and a highly competitive economics, the consumer is not a king in reality. In the case of the under developed and developing economies like India which are virtually sellers markets, his position is anybody’s guess. A consumer is a king without a privy purse. The situation has called for a number of government measures and greater consumer awareness. In addition, a number of voluntary organizations have also come up in order to protect the interests of consumers and also to educate them regarding their fundamental rights in the market place.¹

“Consumerism” is likely to dominate the Indian market in the coming years, that is, in the era of the economic reforms in the present years and increased direct foreign investments in the retail sector. The transition will be from a predominantly ‘sellers market’ to a ‘buyers market’ where

the choice exercised by the consumer will largely be influence by the level of consumer awareness achieved. By ‘Consumerism’ we also mean the process of realizing the rights of the consumer as envisaged in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 viz., right to safety, right to choose, right to be heard, right to redress, right to consumer education, right to satisfaction of basic needs and ensuring right standards for the goods and services for which one makes a payment. The big multinationals will leave no stone unturned to gain the attraction of the consumer and will try to gain a respectable market share. However, some of the companies try to engage in the unscrupulous, exploitative and unfair trade practices like selling defective and unsafe products, resorting to adulteration, fleecing consumers through false and misleading advertisements, indulging into hoarding and black marketing etc. The earlier approach of caveat emptor, which means ‘let the buyer beware’, has now been changed to caveat venditor ‘let the seller beware’. There is thus an active need for having awareness on the consumer protection rights and other related activities.²

Strictly speaking, whatever the consumer movement has attained and wherever it has reached, has primarily been due to the efforts put in by the voluntary consumer organizations. Voluntary consumer protection relating non-government organisations have played a very important role in the development of consumerism as a movement in India. NGOs have acquired momentum in the last few decades due to their direct linkages with the general public and hence they are able to go in for the dialogue and enable participation of general masses. On a cost benefit analysis, voluntary organisations deliver goods at a much less cost as compared to government machinery. Owing to their particular capabilities especially in the fields of education, public awareness, poverty alleviation, women issues, environment, safety and protection, rehabilitation and consumer awareness, etc. NGOs have done immense good to the society.

Voluntary organisations have also contested many cases before judicial authorities on behalf of individual consumers. These organisations have always

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effectively stressed the need for protecting consumer rights in the meetings of advisory councils, namely, Central Consumer Protection Council and State Consumer Protection Council constituted under the *Consumer Protection Act*, 1986\(^3\).

In recent years, debates on role of consumer organisations have primarily focused on the authenticity and the credibility of these organisation. However, a close examination of the trends in the global and national contexts suggest a number of problems faced by these organisations.

In the last chapter I have discussed the working of voluntary consumer organizations in depth. My indepth study and my interviews (both formal as well as informal) with some of the leading consumer activists has given me a fair idea about the problems and the stumbling blocks being faced by these organizations.

The current chapter has been devoted to the detailed discussion of some of these problems. Although problems faced by the voluntary consumer organisations have also been discussed to some extent in chapter two as well, however, the current chapter highlights the specific problems being faced by the consumer organizations in their day to day functioning. The researcher has divided these problems under two categories - the initial problems and the current problems. Besides discussing these problems, certain weaknesses of these organizations have also been discussed in the chapter.

**5.2 Weaknesses of Consumer Organisations**

Organisations create the structures that determine the effectiveness of their programmes, goals and performance. Such structures also reveal the strength and weakness of the institutions or establishments they represent, be they business, labour, government or consumer groups. They seem to be well structured. Ogaanisationally,

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they surely are no match for better business bureaus, chambers of commerce, and other types of organizations that represent business.

Another problem confronting consumer organization is that some emphasize many issues and overlap with others, while others select a single issue and concentrate on it to the total exclusion of everything else. Even the age of various organizations gives few clues as to the future of the consumer movement. For example, two groups have reached their fortieth and seventy-fifty anniversaries, respectively. On the other hand, too many consumer groups appear one day and disappear the next. What is indicated is that growth can take place by doing things differently from an organizational point of view than in the past stronger and more effective organization with programs that do things for the overage consumer will have to evolve. It is not enough to appeal to the beleaguered citizen to join still another organization for what is supposed to be his/her own good. More meaningful activities should be the theme if greater effectiveness is to be achieved. The change will have to be in the direction of doing thing for the consumer, thing that the consumer can perceive as beneficial. To be successful, consumer organization must represent consumer better than the other group claiming to represent them. It is no wonder that both business and government attempt to protect the consumer.4

- Although these organisations are committed to their work, they are by and large ill-professional. Many of these organisations lack clear vision, mission and strategies and hence their interventions become a journey without a destination.
- Voluntary Consumer Organisation means a one man show in many cases.
- Any producer depends upon the customers from whom he has to collect back his investment. The product are checked and tested by him. So he carefully produces and promptly supplies. However, that is not the case with the voluntary consumer organisations. They are not directly answerable to the beneficiaries to whom they ought to be because money comes from the other end, that is, the donors. Hence in the context

of charity, welfare, relief or development or empowerment there is every possibility to take advantage of financial and other resources.

- Accountability and Transparency are found very less among consumer organisations
- Management is poor. Many organisations do not have service rules and regulations. Flexibility is the advantage for consumer organisations. However, too much of flexibility result in loose administration. These organisations seem to give less important to personal management though they are better in project implementation.
- It is sad to understand that those who fill in every field including politics ultimately reach voluntary sector and pollute the standards of the system.
- Voluntary Consumer Groups workers lack a shared vision and mission.
- Voluntary Consumer Organisations may do good field work. But reporting and documentation is summarily poor and in certain cases nil.
- Internal and external evaluations are not conducted on a regular basis. Self-assessment mechanisms are not found in voluntary consumer organisations.
- In some cases these organisations and funding partners (local) join together and forget the people for those causes they have to mete one another.
- To get the work done in time, voluntary consumer organisations also grease the palms of the government regulation authorities.
- In some cases duplication of work is done by different voluntary consumer organisations causing wastage of financial as well manpower resources.
- Small consumer organisitons are looked down upon by grown up organisations. Mutual trust and help unseen.
- As flow of foreign funds is considerably getting lesser and lesser organization particularly the ones which maintain huge staff structure are already facing enormous financial constraints in sustaining themselves.

5.3 Initial Problems Faced by Consumer Organisations

In this section, I have made an endeavour to highlight some of the defects, difficulties or problems that these organisations face while functioning. In India, there is a great need for the consumer movement to grow further. Even though there are now more than 2000 organisations all over the country, there are still many areas where consumers have not come together.
Although major problems are same: funds, recruiting and retaining skilled staff, lack of governemental support but only the nature of issue has changed. All these are interrelated. All these problems are universal phenomenon for all NGOs. To name a few major issues faced by consumer organizations at initial stage are:

5.3.1 Financial Constraints

Funds for every organisation are always a problem at every stage. It is very difficult to generate funds. Paucity of funds is a major stumbling block that most voluntary groups are faced with and this severely affects their effective functioning. Though large sums of money have been earmarked for public interest groups by various philanthropic organisations, the government and also various foreign funding agencies, for different schemes and programmes undertaken by public interest groups, a sizeable amount of these funds go unutilized. The main reason for all this paradoxical situation is the lack of access to any consolidated information regarding the type of activities under which grants are available.

Most of the voluntary organizations suffer from paucity of funds. Government does not give cent per cent grants in aid for their numerous programmes. Voluntary agencies, too, have to make matching contributions which they are sometimes unable to manage and are, therefore, unable to avail themselves of the grants. And most of the funds allocated to the various schemes are not revised for so many years which is rather most necessary to match the unabating rise in prices due to uncontrollable inflation, further complicates their financial position, making them incapable of rendering services of quality. Voluntary organizations need to raise funds through various means and resources. They have limited financial resources. The sources for raising adequate financial resources are very limited. Even though the state and central governments extend financial support it is not adequate for the volume of work involved.

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5 As told by Preeti Shah of the Consumer Education and Research Centre, Ahmedabad to the present researcher during an interview with her.

Most consumer organisations receive their funds wholly or partly from membership fees and the sale of publications, and private donations.\textsuperscript{7} Inspite of the availability of the grants-in-aid to a large number of voluntary organizations, still a majority of them still face an acute problem of the paucity of funds. As a matter of fact, finance is the life-blood of any and every organisation. There are a number of ways through which the consumer organisations can raise funds. Normal sources are collection of entrance fees and subscriptions, donations and government grants and aids from other sources. It reveals that subscription from members is the main sources for consumer organisation and the rest are additional sources.\textsuperscript{8}

Financial resource - to buy equipment and other things for establishment at initial stage was a biggest problem for almost all consumer organisations visited by the present researcher. After registration, an organisation has to wait sometimes upto three to four years to get funding. Initially it was completely voluntary basis, that is, during 1980s. Although all organizations started almost with zero budget or with a couple of hundred of rupees. For example the Consumer Unity and Trust Society started with zero budget in a garage in June 1983 with publication named \textit{Gram Gadar}. In March 1994, it was registered as a Society.

As funding is a major problem for consumer organizations, on account of lack of money, there is complete disinterest among the consumers. The rich have enough money, the poor do not feel the need to maintain standards and only the fixed income middle class is hit by price hike. The life have become so fast today that there is absolutely no time for any voluntary work. It is amazing to find that very little number of complaints have came up before the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums. The Directorate of Consumer Affairs, Delhi Administration set up in 1985 has a scheme to give a matching grant of 50\% to consumer awareness programmers or to the registered bodies. During some years, no money was been given to any society of any nature, whatsoever. The Consumer Federation of India has beaten the fund problem. The funds are necessary to run effectively the consumer organisations which have to engage not only in sorting out the problems of the consumers but have also to take up the educational programmes.


Almost ninety percent of the organisations are financed by the external agencies. The unlikely situation of voluntary consumer organisations being funded locally often places these bodies in a contractual relationships with the donors. This only weakens the ideological bases but also the grounds on which voluntary bodies may bargain with donors. There are also certain perennial problems which voluntary agencies face in the process of seeking, getting and utilizing grants-in-aid some of which are mentioned below: Despite served years of working of the grants-in-aid system for various types of projects, most of the voluntary organizations still have problem of formulation of project proposals which are acceptable to grant-giving bodies especially for smaller organizations.

On the other hand, although voluntary agencies have accepted implementation of the schemes formulated by the grant-giving bodies with financial assistance, yet the structure and tailored schemes of grant-in-aid have placed limitation on their initiative and innovation based on community felt-needs. This experience has tied the hands of the voluntary agencies over the past decades in innovation is the causality because of readymade schemes of grant-in-aid.

The newly established voluntary agencies find it difficult to get grants as according to the rules; normally agencies which have worked for less than three years, are unable to make a beginning of even well conceived, well-formulated projects based on the felt needs of the people because of non eligibility for grant. Preparation of the budget estimate to be submitted along with the project proposal and application for grants as they have neither the resources to budget nor staff to formulate budget estimate.

Many of the voluntary organization complain of the problem of space, particularly in the metropolitan areas, not only for running the services but also for their office. On the one hand, there is s dearth of land and the exorbitant market rents and on the other; there is the absence of grants or local resources for constructing buildings.

Because of modernization, professionalization and introduction of management technologies, voluntary organizations need certain minimum infrastructure and administrative expenses. Unfortunately, grants-in-aid rules do not allow for such administrative expenditure except contingencies. The grants giving agencies should provide a lump sum amount or certain
percentage of the approved expenditure of the project which could be appropriated by the voluntary agencies for covering administrative or overhead expenditure.

Despite interaction of more than three decades the donor agencies, in the absence of attempt of giving problems of the voluntary agencies have been the maintenance of accounts, the major problem of the voluntary agencies have been the maintenance of proper books of accounts because of non availability and financial affordability of accounts staff.

Audit is yet another difficultly with smaller organizations. Despite the fact that the central social welfare board accepts certificates of a local officer, like the block development officer, yet most of the time they do not take responsibility of certifying free of charge the accounts of the voluntary organization for which they have a official obligation. However, this facility, then if available, is likely to be misused and there is likelihood of corruption entering voluntary agencies.

When the researcher interviewed some of the office bearers of consumer organisations, they pointed some of the most crucial issues relating to finances. Top of these all is the issue relating to the fund-raising. Garnering resources for meeting expenses is very hard for the voluntary consumer organizations in India is due to the indifferent attitude of common man. Magazine-difficulty in enrolling subscribers, once enrolled for one year-do not review subscription. These organisations face difficulty in raising resources-all kinds of resources. If they approach international organisations, they want credibility. Their volunteers also expect compensation for the work they do. Governmental funding is also subject to strict audit. Funds received are committed to the specific purpose. Finding accommodation at reasonable rate-conduct market rent-hard to get it-that is why opted for basement, as it has lesser rent. Further, the fund amount even if granted is meager; these organisations have to spend from even own resources. Since Consumer Coordination Council made apex body-grant given to them no sub-grants is allowed. Three lakh each grant was given to the Consumer Coordination Council, VOICE, Delhi University for their helpline.

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9 VOICE is working in a basement.
Arun Misra talked about two types of organizations - big and small. Smaller ones are surviving for their existence and bigger organisations with more funds gets diverted from their aim. Similarly Manu Bhai Shah mentioned that foreign funding had gone down. They have diverted their funds to the under developed countries Africa etc, and on calamities - sunami, floods, draught etc. etc. Earlier India and consumer movement used to get a lot.

Kamat Kumar from the Consumer Guidance Society of India said that most important problem faced by CGSI was funds and recurring grants. They argue that if you have money, you will get everything, otherwise not. CGSI has big plans, projects, ideas to culminate, like consumer clubs, where drawing competitions are held etc. etc., but CGSI do not have funds to implement them.

CGSI tries to generate money through fund raising activities. For example, by organising drawing competition in schools on consumerism. Then best drawings are selected and students and participants are awarded prizes. Those best ones are converted into greetings, which helped to raise some funds. Some portion from this was also given to students. This way student feels happy and develop their confidence, and CGSI also generates some funds.

It is the matter of fact that some unscrupulous elements have made fortunes by floating voluntary organizations for their personal gains and managing grants from the government. It is a common experience that there have been serious changes of misuse and misappropriation of funds received as grant-in-aid from the government, foreign donors and raised through their own resources by the voluntary organizations obliging the government to institute enquires into these allegations by appointing commissions of enquiry and committees. A proper mechanism for supervising and monitoring the activities of voluntary organizations is, therefore, imperative. Few organisations do activities just for name sake and do not justify their funding.

5.3.2 Recruiting and Retaining the Skilled Staff

As mentioned earlier, because of lack of funds, the voluntary consumer organisations cannot employ specialists. Only five to six people are involved in most of organizations. It is very difficult to run it. There is also lack of clarity on the respective roles and responsibilities of lay voluntary workers and of the whole time paid professional social workers. This has created considerable irritants in the working of the voluntary agencies for the removal of which conferred joint efforts have to be made by the voluntary worker and the trained social workers.
Most of the voluntary agencies face the problem of attracting the really qualified and experienced professional staff for implementing their programs because of their small operations and meager financial resources, on the other hand, the grass-root level agencies do not have access to training. Hence workers would be given training, orientation and refresher courses etc. The Central Social Welfare Board itself had very low motivation for training. Non-availability of long term training facilities for worker of voluntary agencies also created problems.

Since voluntary agencies were traditionally run and man-aged by the voluntary worker there have been problem adjustment and mutual apperception of their roles and those of the paid staff. Those of the national voluntary agencies which tired to have a whole time and paid professional chief executive have done away his system because of the lack of charity on the respective roles and functions of professionally trained paid worker and elected voluntary workers.

The revision of the pay-scales and allowances under the government consequent upon the implementation of the recommendations of the forth pay commission, in the central and the state sector has further aggravated the problem of staffing of the voluntary agencies as they cannot afford payment of salaries to the staff even to the extent of fifth heir percent of what get they get under the government including their perks. However, in cases where grants-in-aid include provisions for salaries of the staff or less at the government scales also created problems as not only there is disparity between their pay scales and those of the permanent staff of the organization but also among the staff of different projects funded from different sources, because of the variation of the pay and allowances of different categories of staff in the same organization.

This is the next problem and that it is very difficult to find people with idealistic value and approach. Next, it is also very difficult to hold professionals and educated people for long time and above all quality comes with price only. Voluntary consumer organisations could not retain people with limited salary. And hence no stability is therefore for long time.

Difficult to pay salary as per the market rate staff is one of the problem because of which the staff is not prepared to work for longer period. Only those continue, who are committed to social
cause or any other particular cause. Due to financial constraint, it is really difficult to utilise services of qualified persons.

Non availability of Dedicated Professionals is another problems. In India, competent professionals with the skill, ability and spare time to volunteer to help poor consumer are few. The high cost of hiring these professionals dampens the interest of voluntary organizations in the consumer movement. Inadequate technical personal and trained/devoted workers to take up rural development activities. Due to low salary and less chances for promotion, they face the problem of recruitment and retention of trained, committed and qualified staff for different types of activities.

It is believed that the personnel working in voluntary organizations may be of different kind. The main requirements of the personal working in such organizations are a sense of dedication and commitments and interest in the social services. Voluntary organizations earlier were assumed to be served by unpaid social workers imbued with the spirit of service and did not require any special education or training.

However, the present trend of professionals in social services emphasizes proper education and training of personnel in the context of scientific and technological advancements impinging on the quality of services to be provided for various types of clientele. Through education for professional social work has started in India in the year 1936 itself, the trend of appointing trained social workers has not so far developed in the field of voluntary action. Secondly the growth and development of the schools of social work in the rural parts of India. And more over the curriculum development is also urban persons who are either willing or trained to work in the rural society. Moreover, these professionally trained persons have high expectations in terms of salaries, status, opportunities for their growth in the career of their choice. Training facilities for personnel employed in voluntary organizations therefore need to be made available at grass-root level to cater to the requirements of all types of workers at all levels to hierarchy.

5.3.3 Lack of Governmental Support

There are associations which are not considered to be the associations merely because the Indian Companies Act does not give it a right to be treated as a representative or recognized association.
Unfortunately the enactments confer a preferred status on voluntary consumer associations without there being any machinery set up to inquire into their antecedents.\(^{10}\)

The co-operation from government is not that much which is required by all voluntary consumer organisations. Concerned department officials do not have friendly attitude to CANS. Political interference is very much in this field and non-political organisation faces problems. Most of voluntary organisations do not get govt. grant on regular basis. the Consumer Education and Research Centre / W.G.U. also faced problems because of non-cooperation from Govt. authorities, C.F.D.A. / Municipal Corporation etc etc.

The activities of consumer groups and the functioning of the various Forums and Commissions under the Act has, without doubt, raised the general level of consumer awareness in the entire country. Due to the strong presence of consumers and markets in urban India, consumer action is by and large on urban consumer activity. Even the rural consumer folk should also be educated about their rights and roles to be played.\(^{11}\) But due to non co-operation from govt agencies, consumer groups are not able to work to their full strength. Governments have hardly filed complaints, even though they are empowered to do so, under the Act. Only a few states have conducted significant government sponsored consumer awareness programmes.

5.3.4 Problems Regarding Establishing Credibility

Although establishing credibility is still a problem for smaller organizations, but all organisations visited by the researcher mentioned that they faced this problem at initial stage of setting up. They struggled hard to overcome this issue with public as well as private sector.

5.3.5 Indifferent Attitude of the Manufacturers and the Service Providers Towards Consumers and Complainants

The progress of the consumer movement in India has been delayed because of various problems created by unscrupulous traders and indifferent consumers. Some of the important problems are:


Voluntary Attitude of Erring Traders is another major problem being faced by the consumer groups. The voluntary organizations run risks when exposing fraudulent traders. These traders try to paralyze the activities of voluntary organizations either by influencing the corrupt politicians and / or the corrupt police officials or even by instigating rowdy elements.\(^\text{12}\)

Swaran Kohli, one of the oldest consumer activists in the country, mentioned that before the *Consumer Protection Act*, 1986 was passed, they did Packaging Commodity Orders. In Bombay, because of monsoon, eatables, especially sugar becomes soggy. They approached to Civil Supply Department to pack sugar in plastic bags. They did not agree to it as it will add to cost and will be expensive. Then they asked them to make consumers aware about this good practice which was in their favor. She further mentioned that at that time, Wheat was imported from U.S. which had Dhatoora seeds in it. In U.S. this was not even used to feed cattle – whereas in India – supplied to humans for usage/consumption. They had to fight against quality of wheat. Adulteration is there at very large scale. Even Govt. Department supplied goods, have it in it. She mentioned about Dhania Powder having horse dung in it. All these were basic problems. The other problem was regarding complaints. Manufactures, dealers, they don't care for complaints and consumer organisations had to approach them again and again. Another issue was who to approach in bigger trading houses as they did not have organized set up for handling complaints.

### 5.3.6 Indifferent Attitude of General Public Towards the Consumer Protection Movement

People have cynical attitude and are apathetical and say “*Kuch Nahi Hota*” Attitude of public is generally not supporting one. People do not want to get indulged in social work as it was not going to pay anything to them, as people do not get involved without personal interest. On the same hand, people who get indulged in this activity, do not gets support from the family, as they feel it to be useless work. Consumer Awareness is still very low despite of big campaigns. General apathy of public, as they have let it go approach.

Ms. Kamat mentioned that Individual comes rushing/running to you when he has some problem, otherwise if you tell him that who system is sinking - he will say, let it sink, I will take action

when I will be affected. More of self-centered approach by individuals. Collapsing, let it collapse approach. George Cheriyan had similar view. According to him, the foremost thing is that common consumer does not come forward with complaints due to general apathy. If we buy something faulty, we do not take action with that, rather we plan not to buy it from him again, because we feel that if we will say something to him, it will disturb our relations.

Voluntary organizations are meant to provide opportunities to the citizens for democratic participation but they have not been able to fulfill this obligation due to the method and manner in which they function, and failed to attract people, interested in constructive work and failed to attract people, interested in which constructive work and develop channels for people’s enthusiastic participation. Some of the factors responsible for such a state of affairs are general backwardness of the people, absence of adequate number of dedicated persons, over emphasis on targets and time bound programs, political interference and vested interests, easy availability of funds without proper planning and easement of felt needs and safeguards for the community, distrust of agencies and workers who do not have a base in the community and are unable to win its support and lack of decentralization which could give a feeling of being partners in development rather than development being thrust from above.

Communication Barriers also pose problems for the consumer organizations. When dealing with the multi-lingual consumers cases the voluntary organization may have to face certain communication problems. However these can be managed to a certain extent. Poor, indifferent and ignorant consumers have always been a problem as a high level of illiteracy and ignorance among consumers prevail. In addition, poor hampers the growth of consumer movements in India. The passive nature and indifference of Indian consumers are other factors responsible for the slow progress of the consumer movement.

The importance of consumer education for a consumer organisation. For the survival, growth and development of a consumer organisation, the support of the society is vital. And acceptance can come only when the people know of the groups successes, efforts, and activities. Similarly for funding agencies also, the credentials and image of an organisation are important factors in
deciding whether funds should be given. This is where visibility of the group becomes important.\footnote{“5 Day Workshop for Consumer Groups (West Zone): A Report”, \textit{Consumer Confrontation}, January-February 1991, p. 4.}

5.3.7 \textit{Lack of Awareness About the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and About Other Laws}

Before 1986, consumer organisations had to advocate very strongly for the enactment of the \textit{Consumer Protection Act}. It did not happen overnight. Consumer activists had to fight at different levels for this Act. Finally their hard work was paid with the 1986 Act coming into existence. Once it was implemented, consequent problem came into picture. Then voluntary organizations had to fight for spreading awareness about this legislation. As it was new Act and not much information was available, paid staff as well volunteers struggled due to lack of knowledge of the procedure. Moreover, there was not much scope of professional development for the office bearers. Hence it was another issue faced by the consumer organisations.

5.3.8 \textit{Non-Cooperative Attitude of the Media}

Other major problem was non-co-operation from media at initial level. Firstly, because they are more interested in advertisement givers than social work. Secondary, if a consumer organizations have done or said anything against particular magazine or newspaper, they did not write articles and support to the voluntary organisations. This has been solved to some extent, but still due to commercialization, they are more interested in advertisements. Media is not supportive in publishing product testing reports as they o not want to spoil their relationship with big business houses that support the, financially.

5.3.9 \textit{Centralization or Confinement of the Consumer Movement to the Urban Areas}

Voluntary organizations are more developed in urban area as compared to rural areas. The backwardness and ignorance of the rural consumers and lack of enthusiasm among social workers to work among them in the absence of availability of minimum comforts are the two important reasons for the backwardness of the voluntary consumer organizations in rural areas. Voluntary consumer organizations therefore need to operate in rural areas on a bigger scale to enlist the cooperation of village people in making their lives better.
The government has made some efforts to motivate people to decentralize the voluntary organizations by way of making some special provisions of eligibility conditions for getting grants. Therefore, there is a considerable growth and development of voluntary organizations in rural areas.

5.4  Current Problems Being Faced by the Voluntary Consumer Organisations

While doing research for the present thesis as well as while conducting interviews with the consumer activists and leaders of the consumer organizations, the researcher found that even current problems are same except few which are added to the list:

5.4.1  Sustainability

Initially the problem was to establish a voluntary consumer organisation and now lack of assured funds on a continuing basis from government and funding agencies is a problem. It is clear that the expansion phase of the 1980s is likely to slow down. Not only those additional sources are no longer available but there are also significant shifts in the manner of allocating those resources. So, the challenge of sustainability is not merely of material stability, of how to generate resources in coming period, but it is also a challenge of ensuring intellectual and institutional sustainability.

5.4.2  Problem in Creating and Maintaining the Required Infrastructure for Running an Effective Consumer Organisation

Small and lack of Infrastructure is there, because of which we are to use our own telephone, computer. Very bad infrastructure is there, from whom to charge from. Manu Bhai Shah, the then chief executive officer of the Consumer Education and Research Centre, Ahmedabad told the researcher that now CERC had established their our organization and that they could not remain stable. CERC, according to Shah, are to grow further. If we say about our funds-we have generated Rs. 33 crores in 28 years from foreign funding as well as local. We want to grow further. Then problem is of funds.

We have established / running different labs. That is we have got out in house labs. Other organisations are using labs of other prople, but we conduct our lab testing in our in-house labs.
So, now running and maintaining these labs is imp. For testing we have to by samples, if we want to conduct product testing of A.C. Refrigerator’s, but that becomes very difficult to purchase them. So, now problem is of funds. With expansion and growth, Finance grows up up-so. Voluntary organisations face constraint for that. Allotment of land from government agencies is also difficult due to commercialization. Voice has been approaching D.D.A. for so many years and DDA agreed for it after so many efforts.\textsuperscript{14}

5.4.3 The Challenge of Partnership

It has become increasingly evident that the decade of the 1980s was a decade to build a distinctive and separate identity of consumer organisations. However, now with the growing requirements of using resources more efficiently, with the recognition that the central problems of consumers cannot be solved unilaterally. It has become imperative that we work towards building alliances and partnerships beyond any differences. This challenge of working in partnership should be looked at. The ways and means are found by the leadership of consumer organisations to work towards building such partnerships in order to address problems of consumers.

Swaran Kohli said for networking, we had Indian Federation of Consumer Organisations, where all organisations used to meet and discuss, but now it is no more. The absence of coordination council of voluntary consumer organizations existing at local, state and national level has laid to the common problems such as overlapping, duplication, non-coordination etc. the absence of such a common forum also incapacities voluntary organizations to offer united stand against the government when it humiliates them by extraneous considerations at the behest of politicians and egoistic government officers. This state of affairs also does not facilities exchange of information, data collection, research, training and publication and also does not create favorable conditions where common difficulties can be placed before the government.

5.4.4 The Challenge of Professionalism

There is increasing pressure on voluntary organisations to function in a more “professional” manner.
Poor maintained of records and accounts and lack of attention to organization building through education, persuasion, motivation, staff development and guidance. The success of the consumer movement depends a great deal upon the effectiveness of the consumer groups. And consumer groups can be effective only if they are equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills.\textsuperscript{15} Although bigger organizations are already on the road of professionalism, but smaller organizations have to travel long way to reach there.

\textbf{5.4.5 Reluctance of the Youth to Join the Consumer Protection Movement}

Most shocking observation of researcher was that young people are not joining the organisations. Consumer movement needs young talent. However due to their studies or profession, they do not spare time for this. One of the office bearer said that she has two young daughters. One is advocate and other is an I.T. professional, but they do not have time and are not interested in joining consumer movement. He said he is 60, Mr. Purohit (volunteer of the CGSI) 65, and so on. We have members between 60 to 85 but no young people. Not adequate membership, consumer organisations want young blood coming forward and not too busy, who can devote time. Consumer associations have only retired people working for them. Moreover youth can bring fresh ideas as all consumer activists have been using their ideas for long time now. When researcher visited some of the consumer groups, senior consumer activists were pleased to see a young researcher doing work for consumerism.

\textbf{5.4.6 The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 not Implemented in Latter and Spirit}

Almost all consumer activists talked about loopholes in the \textit{Consumer Protection Act, 1986}, which is a hurdle in working of consumer organizations. Swaran Kohli said that Justice Gokhale and one Situ Sukhtankar were there in the committee to go through the initial draft of the Consumer Protection Act and they suggested very strictly: (i) There should be no representation by lawyers; (ii) There should be no adjournments; and (iii) There should be time limit for deciding the case.

At that stage they emphasized on these issues but today these flaws have taken prime position in delaying justice to consumers. Less involvement of Advocates should be there. As big business houses and traders are using services of advocates. These advocates seek adjournments from Consumer Courts on basis of being sick but can be seen appearing in other courts. Alibi is being used by advocates to delay the process. Consumer organizations are already having problem of lack of skilled workers and these delaying tactics make professionals of voluntary consumer organizations avoiding appearing in courts for consumers. However, even now things are not moving as they should be, in consumer management. Conditions of Act are not fulfilled. Staff and Bench are not observing requirements set by Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Vacancies are the legal and non-legal members in the Forum are not filled up. Amendments to the 1986 Act have added more teeth, but still it has not become complete movement. Consumer courts are very slow in their working. All these legal hassles regarding complaints discourage consumers to fight for rights. Anant Sharma said implementation of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is not actually implemented - 90 days rule is in words only.

Still State councils are not properly functional in many states. Barring a few recent notable exceptions, majority of state govts have been rather indifferent in their attitude to implementing the Act. In reality, several districts in various states still do not posses their own functional District Forum. Surinder Verma said that now as court fee is there in consumer courts. We asked to dispense / give this amount to organisations, Proposal is there for last 10 months but could get approval.

### 5.5 Conclusion

Consumerism, an offspring of the buyer’s market, is deeply rooted in the U.S. because of the missionary Zeal of Ralph Nader and his associates. Sellers markets like India has copied the concept. In India there are various consumer organizations. These are mostly concentrated in urban areas. Only a few are known all over India. These organizations have been taking a keen interest in consumer problems.

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Some of the consumer organizations are doing remarkable work in the area of consumer protection. But due to various constraints these organisations have been restricted to, few activities. Gujrat accounts for 45 per cent of the consumer groups whereas rural India which accounts for nearly 80 per cent of the population does not have a single consumer protection group. There are a few organizations which are involved in dissemination of information and education.\textsuperscript{18}

With the increasing awareness among the consumers and consumer organizations about the malpractices adopted by the trader, few organizations are taking up the samples and publishing the results of their tests.

The studies further reveal that most of the organizations are experiencing problems regarding finance, manpower and lack of professional skill. They also observe lopsided development of consumer organization and vindictive attitude of erring traders towards them. There are numerous reasons of helpless position of the consumer organisations. Some of the reasons and difficulties in securing self-sufficiency of voluntary consumer organisations were:

(i) They find difficult to directly control their funding sources;

(ii) They have no chance of participating in the distribution of government budget;

(iii) Target groups are too poor to pay for their services;

(iv) A few of them depend on contributions from membership dues as well as funds from international sources;

(v) They do not derive profit form their own activities;

(vi) Their field work among target groups is limited;

(vii) The practice of self-deception becomes pervasive dues to less educated fields workers. And inadequate reporting to headquarters, etc.;

(viii) Their younger employees initially joined them with altruistic motives, but later got disillusioned as they desired to go in search of social and economic incentives for their future; and 

(ix) Their dependence on donor agencies make them abandon basic objectives to obtain new projects which are favourable to the funding agencies.\(^{19}\)

On the basis of the above discussion, I would like to argue and forcefully reiterate that unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, the consumer protection movement has got a bright future in India. It has already seen the growing awareness on the part of the consumers and citizens for which a lot of credit need to be given to the activist role played by the media. Apart from governmental seriousness in the matter, consumer activities, organisations, and other voluntary associations have also to play their part in the furtherance of consumer movement. Above all, the consumers have to be aware of their rights and should assert themselves in the market place.\(^{20}\) I would conclude the chapter by saying that concerted and co-ordinated effort as well as the consolidating action on the part of all the stakeholders shall go a long way in strengthening this movement.

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