7.1 Introductory

A person becomes a consumer as soon as he is born and continues to be so till he dies. However, he remains the victim of traders’ unfair practices throughout his life. A consumer want value for his money, but unfortunately he is deprived of that by the sellers of goods and services by deceitful means. To protect consumers from exploitation, the Consumer Protection Act was enacted in 1986, but still the consumer is suffering on account of some loopholes in the Act and because of ignorance of his rights especially in the rural India. It is true that we are lacking behind as far as the consumer awareness is concerned, a vigilant consumer is an asset to the nation but it is very sad that consumer movement is very weak in our country which should be activated and should become people's moment. Creating awareness amongst the consumers with regard to their rights and their protection, which is a positive sign of an aware society. Although all the states have constituted Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies to safeguard the interests of the consumers, but mass awareness is the need of the hour. Consumerism denotes a thorough safeguard for the consumers from all sorts of malpractices and exploitative deeds of market operators. Under the existing social conditions of India, every Indian Citizen has to be protected from the evils like unfair trade practices, adulteration, spurious or injurious manufacturing products, black-marketing, and price hike, overcharging etc.etc.¹

Goverments have been taking various measures to bring consumer awareness in this country in the era of globalisation but the rural consumers are ignorant about their rights. Consumers are the largest social group in any society. Consumers are the most unorganized group and need to be educated about their rights. Many of the consumers suffer deficiencies, losses and humiliation simply because they are not aware of the remedy as they feel that the damage caused is bearable as compared to the harassment and delay which they may suffer in pursuing the remedy before the court. In the present climate of structural adjustment, liberalization of the economy etc. consumer is in greater need of protection and awareness building, in order to be enlightened consumers. This is not possible only by efforts of Govt. Voluntary Consumer Organisations have to fill the gap. Consumer organizations, preference, have had to develop greater expertise in dealing with various consumer issues so as to handle them more effectively. Thus, groups exists which handles consumer education exist which specialize in handling complaints, advocacy and lobbying. Some handle consumer education, other test products for quality, safety and evaluation of services, while some tackle legal redressed and class action. Fund constraints, indeed, remain a limiting factor in countering or matching industrial and commercial interests, even to extract what is due to us as citizens, from the administration and policy makers, since the ‘back always stops’ with the consumer. It is necessary to have vigilant consumers and consumer groups. With the active work done by various consumer organisations, the earlier scenario has substantially changed. Now, consumers have greater choice not only in the market place, but also an easier access to their complaints redressal. Nevertheless, the doctrine of ‘caveat emptor’ still remains the cautionary slogan. Consumer awareness created by the NGOs accompanied by the right to information today remains the most effective tool for consumer protection.\(^2\)

Consumer awareness is that part of social component which increases the collective consciousness among the people and generate confidence in the individual to face the problem. Generation of awareness develops conscious efforts being taken by voluntary consumer organizations towards protecting the consumer interests and their rights in the marketing activities and undertaking different programmes and activities for the consumer education like.

Seminar, workshops, speeches, writing columns in the newspapers etc. the fact remains that the majority of consumers are still completely ignorant of the existences of COPRA.

The present chapter contains a brief summary of all the six chapters of the thesis. After giving the summary of all the chapters, the researcher has given certain suggestions which would help in raising consumer awareness by consumer organizations in future. The thesis has been written with two fold purpose - finding out what role consumer organizations are playing in promoting and protecting consumer interests and giving some suggestions for improving the working of consumer organizations.

7.2 Suggestions by the Researcher

After setting the base for the present thesis in Chapter One, an indepth study has been done on the topic of role of non-governmental organisations in the contemporary society. NGOs play the forefront role against poverty, underdevelopment and other social, national and international problems in all countries - whether they are developed, developing or are underdeveloped countries. They have taken it to be as third sector to supplement and complement the government and business sector. The NGOs come into existence to do those works, which government and business sector could not do, or could not do enough. Consumer protection is one such area, which needs attention from the NGO sector.

Even after so many years of Independence, the Indian consumers, largely poor, Illiterate, ignorant, apathetic or just defeatist, continue to be at the receiving end. The manifestations of consumer neglect are evident in the large scale adulterated food we eat, the spurious, unsafe and sub-standard products we buy, the repeated shortage of essential commodities accompanied by black marketing and profiteering, the hazardous drugs banned in most countries in the west that are available over the counter in our country, the glossy, the unethical and the manipulative advertisements that we are bombarded with, the humiliation, indignity and mental and physical harassment that we are subjected to at the hands of public sector under takings, such as the transport corporations, the railways, telephones, the nationalized banks and indeed in the polluted water and air we drink and breathe. And this despite the volumes of legislation holding the promise of consumer protection and the plethora of government departments specifically co-
constituted to implement these laws. Consumer protection is possible only when they are aware of their rights and duties.³

Consumer protection policy addresses these issues in a variety of ways. In so doing, it recognizes, as pointed out in the United Nations Guidelines, that “consumers often face imbalances in economic terms, educational levels and bargaining power” and that consumers should have “the right of access to non-hazardous products, as well as the right to promote just, equitable and sustainable economic and social development”. Thus measures are adopted to attempt to ensure, (i) minimum levels of safety and quality; (ii) that consumers have adequate and accurate information to enable them to make informed individual choices; (iii) that high ethical standards are observed in the market place; and (iv) that consumers have adequate and enforceable legal rights when their legitimate expectations are not realized. This is done through a variety of legislative and administrative measures, education and information programmes. Government can also become more responsive to the community at large by fostering ways in which they can become aware of the needs and expectations of their citizens as consumers. Indeed, the existence of a strong and active consumer movement assists governments in their efforts to improve the position of ordinary people, both in providing a perspective different from and, where necessary, countervailing to well organized and powerful interest groups, and also in playing a very practical role in helping to implement policy goals.

Consumerism in India, like other developed countries, started much earlier. India was perhaps among the first few countries to enact legislation to protect consumers’ interests. The ancient economist like Kautilya and Brihaspathi laid down the rules to safeguard the interest of buyers and sellers alike. During the period of the ancient Rome also, protection was available to the consumers. In recent times Swami Vivekananda declared that the ‘Consumer is King’ and Mahatma Gandhi was described as the world’s greatest consumer activist by Ralph Nader, the pioneering American consumer activist. The earliest effort to organize consumers in India was made in 1949-56.⁴

The independent India adopted a socialist pattern of society. Securing rapid economic growth and expansion of employment, reduction of disparities in income and wealth, prevention of concentration of economic power, and creation of the values and attitudes of a free and equal society, *inter alia*, have been the objectives of all our plans. The Indian government, therefore, adopted planned development through industrialization and more specifically through Five Year Plans. It was necessary for the purpose of effective implementation of these plans to empower the government to control production, quality, supply and distribution. Therefore, the decade of 1950s saw the enactment of number of laws to safeguard the interest of consumers from various angles. In India, the development of consumerism largely took place in the 1960s and 1970s which reached to the middle class in the 1980s.

In furtherance of these legislatives attempts, the *Consumer Protection Act*, 1986 was enacted for better protection of the interests of consumers and for redressal of consumers’ grievance. This law, as a matter of fact, meets the long felt necessity of protecting the common man from such wrongs for which the remedy under ordinary law for various reasons has become illusory. The Act does in as much as no court fee is payable. Parties need not to engage lawyers, they can present their case themselves or through any representative. The *Consumer Protection Act*, 1986 is an important statute enacted to protect the interest of consumers and to provide simple, speedy, inexpensive and efficacious justice to the aggrieved consumers. The importance of this lies in promoting welfare of the society by enabling the consumer to participate directly in market economy. This magnificent piece of legislation has several laudable distinctive features. India is perhaps, the only country in the world to set up separate courts or tribunals to deal exclusive with the consumer disputes and a time limit has also been provided in the Act for the adjudication of consumer dispute with in a period of 90 days and 150 days where testing is involved. It also entitles the aggrieved consumer to write out the petition and file it before the ‘Consumer Disputes Redressal Machinery’ without spending anything on court fees and on engaging the lawyers. It confers six important rights on consumers with the avowed object of ensuring better protection and welfare. When this Act was originally enacted in the year 1986, it empowered the consumers to enforce these rights on individual bases and, therefore, applied in reality only to specific transactions between a buyer and a seller. However, the scope of these rights filing of class action complaints by group of consumers having a common interest/grievance. It is very
gratifying to note that over one million cases have already been taken to the Redressal Machinery and preponderance of them have been resolved in favour of the consumers.

A consumer has also an option to file a complaint through recognized consumer association. The major consumer organizations which are shouldering made impact on the Indian consumer movement are the Madras Provincial Consumer Organization (1949) the Consumer Guidance Society of India (1966), the Consumer Education and Research (1979), the Consumer Unity and Trust Society (1984), VOICE (1883), Common Cause (1981) and the Akhil Bhartiya Grahak Panchyat (1975).⁵

International consumerism found its origin in the late 19th and in the early 20th century marketplace in the United States. The United States of America has been the leader in consumerism in the world since consumers first began to recognize that they had rights in the marketplace.⁶ The international consumer movement owes a lot to an American lawyer Ralph Nader. Under his direction, consumer movement achieved the unprecedented success. It is certainly interesting to note how the consumer movement became a mass movement in the recent decades. Although there were isolated consumer groups fighting for consumer rights, the idea of consumer rights being an integral part of every citizen’s daily life, become popular with the heroic fight of Ralph Nader, a great consumer activist.⁷

The movement began to spread to the Western Europe and then to Australia, Japan and then to other parts of the world. The reasons for the slow progress of consumer protection movement in India⁸ are due to following reasons:

(i) Docile Nature of Consumers


An Indian consumer is very well known for his subservient behavior who keeps accepting defective goods as a result of *Karma*. The Indian consumer is subject to a far greater degree of exploitation at the hands of the trade than the consumer in the western countries. It has been pointed out by Maitra Committee that one per cent error in the commercial transaction would cause the consumers an annual loss of Rs. 160 crores in India.

The Department of Consumer Affairs under Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is responsible for the formulation of policies for Consumer Cooperatives, Monitoring Prices, and Consumer Movement in the country and Controlling of statutory bodies like Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Weights and Measures. Department fund the Voluntary consumer organisations to carry protection activities. A list of consumer organisations that have been granted assistance from consumer welfare fund during Standing Committee is published in Upbhokta Jagran, the monthly journal published by the Department. Government does many things, but cannot do everything. Here comes role of voluntary consumer organisations. The arguments in favour of VCOs are:

(i) They are able to encourage popular participation in consumer awareness. Govt. bureaucracy has in general failed to work with people;

(ii) Government bureaucracy has to work on the basis of rigid rules and regulations. Voluntary Consumer Organisations are more flexible in their approach and are work oriented rather than rule-oriented;

(iii) Voluntary Consumer Organisations have right kind of commitment and initiative to work with consumers. They are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of consumers. Govt. bureaucracy is more impersonal and self-interested;
(iv) Because of their moral commitment, consumer organisations show solidarity to the people and the client groups they serve. Their strength lies in informal structure of membership. Volunteer force and services on an honorary basis of most of the members distinguish their working style from govt. operations by salaried employees functioning within a hierarchical and rule bound structures;

(v) Voluntary Consumer Organisations as the third sector have the skill and motivation to organise and motivate consumers at the grass root level. They have been successful in organising consumers in urban areas to fight for their rights and apply pressure on other two sectors;

(vi) Voluntary Consumer Organisations have greatly eased the burden of government expenditure by mobilising resources for development. Their success lies in their capacity to tap vast reservoirs of social energy not easily accessible to Govt. Organisations. or their private entrepreneurs;

(vii) Voluntary Consumer Organisations are good for health of an economy as they raise awareness among its consumers about their rights; and

(viii) Bureaucracies are criticised for their lack of responsiveness to public services at the local level. Service responsiveness is better assumed when voluntary consumer associations who work in close association with the consumers who are in charge of behavioural change.

In this era of extremely aggressive marketing, it has become the need of the hour to protect the interest of the consumers and educate them about their rights. Although Consumers Forum are working throughout the country, they are confined to individual grievances. In many cases, it is not financially liable to take a small claim to them. There is a need to launch consumer awareness campaign with the help of voluntary consumer organisations and other interested agencies in this regard to redress common consumer grievances. As per Article 19, Part III of the Indian Constitution, all citizens shall have the right to form associations or unions to further their group interests, subject to any restrictions that may be imposed by the State in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order or morality. Every citizen who is also a consumer can combine with other consumers to form associations, and exercise this right.
provided under the Constitution effectively, consider issues of common interest and work towards solving problems facing them. Voluntary Consumer Organisations are working:

- With a focus on consumer education, demonstration of food adulteration, weights and measures, health & hygiene, environmental education, and traffic rules are commendable.

- Creating awareness amongst the consumers with regard to their rights and their portion, which is positive sign of an aware society although all the states have constituted consumer forums to safeguard the interests of the Consumers and ensure their protection, but mass awareness is the need of the hour.

- The sincere efforts of organizations like complement the efforts being made by the Government to empower the consumer by making him aware of his rights and to assert those whenever necessary.

- It is because of the determined work of dedicated VCOs that various legislative measures have been taken in the part to protect and safeguard the interest of consumers. Indeed, consumer rights have become inalienable part of movement.

All these roles that consumer organizations are playing in society can be grouped under five categories, such as consumer awareness and education, product appraisal, networking with other consumer organisations, complaints, settlements and consumer research. In many colonies or residential areas, associations of persons or groups of persons are set up to look after the interests of that area or group. They might be working under different names such as Residents Welfare Associations, Associations for Consumer Guidance, Consumer Forum, Consumer Welfare Agency, Citizens Guidance Society, Residents Protection Agency, Centre for Investors Protection, Residents Union, Grahak Panchayat, Organisation for Consumer Protection and Education etc. They activities of these organisations, irrespective of their names, are focused on the welfare of their members, who are ultimately consumers of one product or the other. Even it the association is of the producers or manufacturers of some products, their members are consumers of some other products. Therefore it can be said that organisations may have different names but their main work relate to the welfare of their members who are ultimately the
consumers of one product or the other. We cannot imagine an association whose members are not consumers at all.

Thus it is clear that every one of us is a consumer and it is, therefore, important that we unite together to protect our interests. The efforts of consumers can be more effective only when they unite to work together. A consumer can learn from the experiences of the others only when they have a common platform to share their experiences. A consumer organisation is one such forum which can meet the needs of consumers of all kinds.

In India, there is a great need for the consumer movement to grow further. Even though there are now more than two thousand organisations all over the country, there are still many areas where consumers have not come together. There are a number of reasons for this. Consumers are mostly ignorant, illiterate, apathetic, non-resistant and are accustomed to accept whatever is given to them. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that they could not come together to form Consumer Organisations. Absence of consumer organisations have led the sellers and manufacturers to practise all kinds of malpractices and exploit the consumer in all possible ways. It is, therefore, necessary that consumer organisations are set-up in every nook and corner of the country to reverse this situation.

A consumer organisation can get itself registered either under the *Companies Act*, 1956 or under the *Societies Registration Act*, 1860. Only those organisations carrying on a business for profit are generally registered under the *Companies Act*. The *Societies’ Registration Act*, 1860 provides for registering societies formed for the promotion of literature, science or the fine arts, or for the diffusion of useful knowledge or for charitable purposes. As a consumer organisation is an association of consumers formed with the object of furthering the cause of consumers and to protect their interests, such an organisation can be registered as a society under this Act.

To make the findings of the study to reach at meaningful conclusion, an attempt has been made to get information by interviewing prominent consumer activists to know their views, ideas, and suggestions with regard to the improvement in the day to day functioning of the voluntary consumer organizations. The researcher has selected the consumer organisations, those are actively involved in the consumer movement which includes:

(i) Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad
The present study has examined and analysed the functioning of these groups in the past. We could state that these organisations have done wonderful jobs in the past. The study has predominantly dealt with actuality of their working. The researcher has first selected 10 leading organisations in India and then collected relevant information on these consumer groups, such as address, head of institution, number of personnel, main areas of work, publications, annual budget, sources like funding and activities like complaints handling, education, research, litigation, lobbying, boycotting, consumer advocacy etc. etc.

The researcher has personally visited these organisations to collect information and data about their functioning, problems, publications etc. Apart from these organizations, researcher also visited:

- WGU, Mumbai
- Forum of Free Enterprises, Mumbai
- Consumers Forum, Delhi
- Entrepreneurship Development Institute, Ahmedabad

The indepth study and interviews from consumer activists has given the idea of problems being faced by these organizations. Although problems faced by NGOs have been discussed in chapter two as well, but chapter six highlights the specific problems of consumer organizations. The researcher has divided these
problems under two categories - The Initial Problems; and the Current Problems. Before discussing these problems, weaknesses of these organizations have also been discussed.

An endeavour has been made to highlight 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 two thousand organisations all over the country, there are still many areas where consumers have not come together. Although major problems are almost the same, that is, paucity of funds, problem of recruiting and retaining skilled staff, lack of Govt. support etc. etc., but only the nature of issue has changed. All these are interrelated. All these problems are universal phenomenon for almost all the NGOs.

The **Initial Problems** faced by Consumer Organisations, broadly speaking are:

(i) Financial Resources.

(ii) Recruiting and retaining skilled staff.

(iii) Lack of Govt support.

(iv) Establishing credibility.

(v) Indifferent attitude of manufacturers/ service providers towards complaints..

(vi) Consumer movement not taken seriously by people.

(vii) Advocating for COPRA, and when COPRA was passed- lack of awareness- new act, no knowledge of procedure to volunteers.

(viii) Non cooperation from media.

(ix) Centralization in urban areas.

The **Current Problems** faced by consumer organizations are:

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9 Preetie Shah told researcher during interview.
(i) Sustainability.

(ii) Creating and maintaining infrastructure for running effective consumer organization.

(iii) The challenge of partnership.

(iv) The challenge of professionalism.

(v) COPRA not implemented fully in spirit- loopholes causing trouble to vulnerable consumers and consumers organizations. Important to mention are

(a) No Lawyer Representation

(b) No Adjournments

(c) Time Limit

The researcher, after knowing the difficulties of these organisations, suggests certain tips for the improvement, proper functioning of these consumer organizations. To begin with, some of the general suggestions for all voluntary consumer organisations are:

(i) With help of G.O.I. (Government of India and consumers)-make current working more sustainable.

(ii) Tips to improve financial situation.

(iii) Need to concentrate more on consumer education.

(iv) There is need to concentrate on different target groups: different age groups- different setting.

(v) Using services of volunteers.

(vi) Then dividing their areas of work and moving towards expertise and perfection.

(vii) Sharing resources and information.

(viii) Creating effective networks and partnerships at state as well as national level for volunteers, paid staff etc-for information sharing so that all organizations and up to date and at same page.
Voluntary Consumer Groups need to look at principles of planning.

Consumer Organisations need to think about sustainability of programs.

Using need analysis and evaluation system before starting any project.

Voluntary Consumer Organisations have to work for advocating for giving more teeth to the Consumer Protection Act, 1986

Working for Internal as well as external Capacity building-developing and creating ongoing professional development opportunities for staff as well as volunteers.

Initiating transparent procedure in their working and creating system of public accountability.

Effective use of media.

Spreading awareness amongst youth to be part of this movement.

Starting working harder in working in rural areas- small organizations can be of great help.

Some general suggestions for voluntary consumer associations which can help them in promoting Consumerism.

According to the researcher, some suggestions for the smaller consumer protection organizations are also given as under:

Small organizations should be organised, motivated, dedicated-efforts needs to be made to spread consumer education.

Infrastructure with organisation is not up to mark or we can say, they have small infrastructure. The small organisations do not have internet facility. Govt should give them some money to set up basic infrastructure. As there are so many sham organizations now, so to prove their credibility they need to make partnerships with bigger organizations.

They should include students and volunteers from colleges and schools.

Should make team of volunteers, who can go to the far flung areas and reach grassroot level consumers.

Try to work with big organisations- may link up temporarily with bigger organisation in their vicinity.
(vi) In order to get big they have to think big. Partnership with bigger organizations- may be temporarily.

(vii) Big organisations can help them, only if they come together to fight by getting united.

(viii) Smaller organizations need to work a little bit towards bringing professionalism in their working.

To conclude all the findings, the researcher has compiled last chapter along with some tips for consumer protection movement. Consumerism is likely to dominate the Indian market in the next millennium, thanks to the economic reforms and several agreements signed under the world trade organisation. The transition will be predominantly "sellers market" to a "buyers market" where the choice exercised by consumer will be influenced by the level of consumer awareness achieved. By "Consumerism" we mean the process of realizing the rights of the consumer as envisaged in the Consumer Protraction Act, 1986 and ensuring rights standards for the goods and services for which one makes a payment. This objective can be achieved in a reasonable time frame only when all concerned act together and play their role. The players are the consumers represented by different voluntary non-govt. consumer organizations, the govt., the regulatory authorities for goods and services in a competitive economy, the consumer courts, organizations representing trade, industry and service providers, the law makes and those in charge in implementation of the laws and rules.

Consumer Protection movement to be effective and meaningful needs the proactive support of the government, business, organisations of Civil Society, Educational Institutions - Schools, Colleges, Universities and Research Institutions. Over and above the support of pro bono publico and of every individual is a sine qua non for the Consumer movement to be purposeful. The policies, schemes and programmes of the Government of India through the Department of Consumer Affairs are no doubt useful but their effectiveness finally depend on the involvement of the institutions and the people at large. A number of schemes have already been in operation such as, Grahak Jagaran, Consumer Clubs in Schools, promoting involvement of research institutions, universities, colleges, etc. in consumer protection and welfare etc. Similar schemes and programmes are needed at the State Government level also to provide further impetus to the
Consumer movement in the country. Organisations of the civil societies are having special responsibility in this regard and so is the case of the educational institutions.  

Each product and service we use today is at time the result of many economic players acting in concert or in a chain. To judge the safety and consumer disputes consumer associations also have proved very successful, acting as watchers to ensure justice for consumers and creating awareness about consumer rights. Following are some more suggestions:

1. As government is major source of funding for major portion of funding for voluntary organisations, there is need to put some more money for the movement. Smaller organisations are struggling for having basic infrastructure and bigger organizations are finding it difficult to maintain its infrastructure e.g., labs for product testing. Voluntary consumer groups need ongoing funding for everything. There is begging bowl in hands of almost all consumer organisations and they compete with each other for small pie. Putting in some extra money in consumer protection will give some life to some of the needy consumer associations. Voluntary consumer groups need finances for everything and this is major problem contributing to other problems. Putting some money for integrated research is also need of the hour, which cannot be carried out by support from Govt. George Cheriyan mentioned that in the banking sector, rupees 15,000 crore lying unused. Moreover, Rs 680 crore is lying unclaimed in accounts where the bearer of account is dead and his family does not know about the account or otherwise. Government can put this amount to be used for consumer protection. Further, the Consumer Welfare Fund is not disbursed in an appropriate way. Consumer organisations are not getting sufficient funds to work efficiently. On the other hand, the organisations like the Council for Fair Business Practice got funds from the Consumer Welfare Fund. They are duplicating the role of consumer associations. They are not doing what they should be doing. They are stepping into another role. Govt. comes to the rescue of the consumer organisations only when they have interest. Otherwise they

say do it yourself, you are a NGO and that is your duty. Govt. is thus reluctant to part with funds. When approached by VCOs, office bearers in Govt department says come to us, only if you have big projects worth crores. Other is role/part which is to be played by the government is not being played actually. It has to play a lot more active role. They are not doing required work.

2. The voluntary organisations must take an active part in educating the consumers about is rights and privileges. To create consumer awareness, the organisations must supply the adequate information to the consumer through various activities such as conducting seminars, public forums, audio-visual, exchange programs etc. To help the consumer the organisations must open consumer redress cells to hair the complaints and to render proper guidance to help them in overcoming the hurdles through the legal machinery. To assist the rural masses the organisations must operate informal education centers, Majority of consumer organisations are mainly in cities but untill we have voluntary organisations in every district and village we can go ahead and get justice for poor consumers. The voluntary organisations should not be restricted to urban areas only. Among the various organisations co-operation and co-ordination are needed. The voluntary organisations must always be vigilant in finding out the tricks of the manufactures or sellers and should have specific methods to inform the consumers. The organisations must always be cautious in observing the proper implementation of the laws, and also render assistance whenever they are called upon to do so by the Government. The organisations should not yield to any pressures either from the manufactures or from the Governmental sides. The organisations must evolve their own methods to generate their funds.

3. Customer complaint handling is an operational issue with strategic importance. Productive complaint handling should in fact, be an integral part of a company’s overall business strategy.\textsuperscript{11} A probable solution for this complex problem is by integrating the mutual interests of producer and consumer, by creating the mutual understanding of

their strength and weaknesses and convenience and inconveniences, with the help of
‘Producer-consumer-conscience developed through the consumer education. No amount
of effort by legislative and administrative machinery, besides the counter veiling actions
of voluntary associations can achieve the desired result of maximising the producer–
profit and consumer satisfaction, as long as the misunderstanding prevails in the minds
of both the parties. Setting up a separate complaint handling departments by all business
houses will help consumers as well as voluntary consumer organisations. It will build
good reputation for business houses with consumers. Conceptually seller self-regulation
represents an ideal solution to consumer protection problems. Large scale voluntary
action on the part of sellers to satisfy consumer complaints about their conduct in the
market place would be an indication that they have adopted consumer standards of
acceptable behaviour as their own.12

4. The researcher observed that consumer research is also required for creating an
atmosphere for promoting consumerism. Consumer research is relevant to each variable
in the marketing mix: product price, promotion and distribution. Consumer research
helps marketing managers make better decisions as to the selection of target markets,
the products and services that would be appropriate and acceptable.13 Consumer
research provides the basis for the development of new product and service concepts to
meet targeted consumer needs.14

5. Although we are all consumers, men as well as women, age long division of labour
gives special importance to the work of woman as managers and spenders of the family
income.15 Women, especially house wifes are not interested in attending any of
consumer education programmes, but actually she should be involved in this movement.
There is need to tailor consumer awareness programs according to needs of house wifes


13 Leon G. Schiffman, Consumer Behaviour, Leslie Lazar Kamk, Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1993,
p. 48.

14 ibid. at p. 25.

and other women. Efforts should be made to involve them as volunteers for the noble cause.

6. Women Should Form Self Help Groups. All-round development of society depends on the education of women. They should be aware of their consumer rights and the projects run by the Government for their welfare. She appealed to the community to come forward and make the national literacy mission project a success. Every woman should come forward for social change and nation building. There is need of formation of Self Help Groups by women.\(^{16}\)

7. Changes are needed in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 because it was meant only for the illiterate people who do not know their rights as consumers. As mentioned in problems faced by consumer organisations, loopholes in the 1986 Act are a hindrance in working of the consumer organisations. The Act, itself is very well composed, but private sector, is misusing and interpreting it according to their convenience. As Madam Swaran Kohli mentioned that when Consumer Protection Bill was drafted initially, they made it very clear that there should not be any lawyer representation. But private sector is hiring famous lawyers. These lawyers uses delaying tactics, which adds to harassment of common man. Voluntary organizations need to advocate for giving more teeth to COPRA regarding lawyer representation, time limit and strictly no adjournments.

8. Although consumer clubs are being run by few consumer organisations, but this needs to spread its tentacles in all parts of India and should not be promoted only in urban areas. There is desperate need of making youth of country aware about consumerism. Especially in rural areas, where it is very hard for consumer organisations to reach and work, these consumer clubs can play role in education whole family through children who go to schools.