CHAPTER - VII

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

In the present chapter, an attempt has been made to recapitulate the major findings of the study, to recommend suitable suggestions on the basis of the findings and also to give directions for future research. The present study on "The Role of Voluntary Consumer Organisations in Consumer Protection- A Study in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi Districts" was carried out to know the awareness of consumers about the consumer related issues, to study the various activities of the VCOs in D.K. and Udupi districts and also to measure the perceptions of the VCOs and the consumers regarding the role of VCOs in consumer protection. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the level of awareness among the Complainant Consumers about Consumer Protection Legislations and the Voluntary Consumer Organisations and also to understand the activities of different Voluntary Consumer Organisations in the study area.

2. To analyse the perceptions of the Complainant Consumers and the officials of Voluntary Consumer Organisations about the Role of Voluntary Consumer Organisations in protecting the interests of consumers and to identify the problems in the management of various Voluntary Consumer Organisations.

3. To compare and analyse the effectiveness of Voluntary Consumer Organisations with the District Fora in settlement of consumer complaints and to suggest measures to improve the functioning of VCOs to provide better protection to the consumers based on the findings of the study.

The study consists of 38 sample Voluntary Consumer Organisations and 472 sample Complainant Consumers. The officials of VCOs and...
Complainant Consumers from the study region were interviewed with the help of structured questionnaires for the purpose of study on a convenience basis. The study has been conducted in the two coastal districts of Karnataka viz., D.K. and Udupi.

The important observations and findings of the study are given in the following paragraphs.

1. **GROWTH OF CONSUMER MOVEMENT:** Consumerism first started in the USA in the early 1900s. Since then, more and more Consumer Protection Legislations have been passed in the USA, UK and many other countries. The movement received further impetus when the then American President John F. Kennedy (1962) declared the rights of the consumers for the protection of their interests. In India, the consumer movement historically began in the early part of the 20th century. Then the passing of various legislations and Consumer Protection Act in 1986 gave further impetus to the Consumer Movement in India.

2. **GROWTH OF VOLUNTARY CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS:** Voluntary Consumer Organisations have sprung up and have diffused across the world since the establishment of the first Consumer Organisation in the USA in 1927. From the middle of 1970s, VCOs in the field of Consumer Protection have gradually emerged in India. The consumers began to organize themselves and more and more VCOs were established to promote and protect various rights of the consumers. The enactment of Consumer Protection Act in 1986, has contributed tremendously towards the phenomenal growth of consumer groups in India.

3. **CONSUMER MOVEMENT AND VCOs IN THE STUDY REGION:** A small group of individuals in the study region began with the simplest issues and then gradually started working on consumer related issues. Finally, a Voluntary Consumer Organisation by name
“Balakedarara Vedike” started at Udupi in 1980. Inspired by the formation of this VCO, gradually VCOs have also been formed in other parts of D.K. and Udupi districts. These organisations are conducting consumer education and awareness programmes and settling consumer complaints.

PROFILE OF SAMPLES

PROFILE OF COMPLAINANT CONSUMERS

1. A majority of (70.97 percent) the Complainant Consumers belong to Udupi district comprising of 03 taluks and 29.03 percent of the Complainant Consumers belong to Dakshina Kannada district comprising of 05 taluks. A majority of (34.3 percent) the Complainant Consumers belong to Kundapura taluk of Udupi district. In Sullia, Bantwala, Belthangady and Puttur taluks of D.K. district, there are less number of Complainant Consumers.

2. Most of the Complainant Consumers belong to rural areas, accounting for 48.9 percent, while 30.5 percent belong to urban areas and 20.6 percent of consumers are from semi-urban areas. A majority of Complainant Consumers (77.8 percent) are males, while females accounting for only 22.2 percent. It shows that rural consumers are the major complainants of VCOs in the study region.

3. In the rural areas, 81.8 percent of Complainant Consumers are males and 18.2 percent of consumers are females. In the urban areas, 72.2 percent are males and 27.8 percent are females. And, in the semi-urban areas, 76.3 percent are males and 23.7 percent are females. It shows that male consumers are the major complainants of VCOs in the study region.

4. The consumers of the age group ranging between 30 and 50 are the major complainants of the VCOs in the study region. They account for 64.9 percent of the total respondents. The consumers of the age
group of below 20 and above 60 rank the least, accounting only for 0.6 percent and 5.7 percent respectively. This may be due to the reason that adults and aged people are not much involved in making purchase decisions.

5. In the study region, a majority of (31.6 percent) the Complainant Consumers have PUC as their qualification. Only 5.9 percent of the Complainant Consumers are Post-Graduates and 26.9 percent are graduates, whereas 1.7 percent of the respondents are illiterates. It shows that the consumers with higher qualification and illiterates do not file complaints in the VCOs in large number.

6. Of the sample Complainant Consumers, a majority (32.2 percent) are employees of private organisations and 19.7 percent are government employees. There are 9.7 percent agriculturists, 8.5 percent businessmen, 7.2 percent housewives and 3.6 percent professionals, 5.1 percent retired and 2.6 percent students.

7. In the study region, a majority (57.1 percent) of the sample Complainant Consumers belong to the income group ranging between Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 1,00,000. Only 5.5 percent have an income of less than Rs. 25,000. There are only 2.3 percent respondents with an income of more than Rs. 2,50,000.

PROFILE OF VOLUNTARY CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

1. Among 38 sample VCOs, 23 (60.53 percent) belong to D.K. district and 15 (39.47 percent) belong to Udupi district. Out of the total number of 38 sample VCOs, Mangalore taluk of D.K. district has a large number of 09 VCOs and Bantwala and Sullia taluks of the same district have one VCO each. Therefore, Bantwala and Sullia taluks are lagging behind in terms of the establishment of VCOs.

2. Out of the officials interviewed from 38 VCOs, a majority (68.4 percent) are Conveners. 13.2 percent are Secretaries, 10.5 percent
are Presidents and 7.9 percent are the Trustees. It shows that most of the VCOs in the study region are headed by the Conveners.

3. A majority of the officials of VCOs (73.7 percent) have experience ranging from 1 to 10 years. Only 10.5 percent of the officials have experience ranging from 21 to 25 years. It shows that most of the officials of the VCOs in the study region have only up to 10 years of experience.

4. The literature on consumer movement in India reveals that the VCOs are concentrated only in the cities and towns. But, most of the VCOs in the study region are established in the rural areas accounting for 52.6 percent. The reason for this may be that wide publicity is not given to the working of VCOs in the rural areas and they restrict their activities only to the place of their establishment. In the study region, 31.6 percent of the VCOs are located in the urban areas and only 15.8 percent of the VCOs are in the semi-urban areas.

5. A majority of (60.5 percent) VCOs in the study region are established between 1996 and 2006. 18.4 percent are established between 1980 and 1985 and only 5.3 percent are established between 1986 and 1990. Since 1996, there has been an increasing trend in the establishment of VCOs in the study region. The reason may be that from the year 1996, the Balakedarara Vedike, Basrur encouraged their members to establish the VCOs in their own region.

6. Out of the 38 VCOs in the study region, a majority (52.6 percent) are registered and the rest 47.4 percent are unregistered. Among the registered VCOs, 55.0 percent are registered under The Trust Act and 45.0 percent are registered under The Societies Act.

7. A majority of (63.2 percent) VCOs are accommodated in the residences of some of their members at free of cost. Likewise, 15.8 percent of VCOs are accommodated in the rented buildings and 21.0 percent are accommodated in the buildings donated by the
public. It is observed that in the study region no VCO has its own building for operation.

8. Most of the VCOs (60.6 percent) have their own jurisdiction for operation, whereas 39.4 percent of VCOs do not have any jurisdiction for their operation. Among 60.6 percent of VCOs which have their jurisdiction, a majority (31.6 percent) restrict their operation only to the local level, 7.9 percent to the taluk level, 13.2 percent to the district level and 7.9 percent to the state level.

9. Out of the 38 VCOs, a majority (57.9 percent) have ranked 'consumer education and awareness' as their first objective. 36.8 percent have ranked 'settlement of complaints' as their second objective, while 60.5 percent have ranked 'protecting consumers from exploitation' as their third objective. Likewise, 55.3 percent of VCOs have ranked 'concentrating on consumer issues of immediate importance' as their fourth objective and another 55.3 percent of VCOs have ranked 'uniting consumers' as their fifth objective. It shows that 'consumer education and awareness' and 'settlement of complaints' are the main objectives of the VCOs in the study region.

10. A majority of (44.7 percent) VCOs are managed by the trustees. 31.6 percent of VCOs have annual members and 36.8 percent have life members, whereas 13.2 percent of VCOs have honorary members and 5.3 percent have institutional members.

11. The members of 57.9 percent of VCOs are 'Aware' of Consumer Protection Legislations in the study region. The members of only 15.8 percent of VCOs are 'Fully Aware' of these legislations. And, the members of 2.6 percent and 7.9 percent of VCOs are 'Unaware' and 'Least Aware' of Consumer Protection Legislations respectively.

12. A majority of (44.7 percent) VCOs receive donations from the public to carry out their activities. 36.8 percent of VCOs receive subscriptions from their members. But, in 26.3 percent of VCOs, the
consumers have to bear their own expenses when they avail the services. And, 2.6 percent and 13.2 percent of VCOs receive government grants and sponsorships respectively. So, the subscriptions and donations are the main sources of finance for the VCOs of the study region.

13. Most of the VCOs (44.7 percent) spend less than Rs. 5,000 per annum for conducting their activities. Only 7.9 percent of VCOs spend more than Rs. 1,00,000 per annum for their activities. On the other hand, 10.5 percent of VCOs do not have any budget for undertaking their activities. It shows that most of the VCOs in the study region have financial problem for their operation.

14. A majority of VCOs (89.5 percent) have honorary part-time employees. Three VCOs (7.9 percent) have honorary full-time employees. And, 07 VCOs (18.4 percent) and another equal number of VCOs have paid full time and paid part-time employees respectively. Therefore, it is found that in the study region, a majority of the VCOs have only honorary part-time employees.

15. Only 34.2 percent of the VCOs have library facilities for the benefit of consumers. Most of the VCOs (65.8 percent) have bank account in their names.

STUDY OF COMPLAINANT CONSUMERS

CONSUMER AWARENESS AND ACTIONS

1. Only 31.4 percent of Complainant Consumers are aware of "Consumer Rights".

2. Of the Complainant Consumers who are aware of 'Consumer Rights', a majority (77.7 percent) know about the 'Right to be Informed'. The reason may be that the 'Right to Information Act' is passed recently in India. And, 48.6 percent know about the 'Right to Redressal', 43.2 percent are aware of the 'Right to Safety' and 27.7 percent of the
Complainant Consumers are aware of the 'Right to Consumer Education'.

3. Only 37.3 percent of Complainant Consumers in the study region are aware of Consumer Protection Legislations existing in India.

4. Of the Complainant Consumers who are aware of Consumer Protection Legislations, 59.1 percent know about Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940. Out of this, only 6.7 percent of consumers are 'Fully Aware' and 50.0 percent are 'Least Aware'.

5. Out of the 64.2 percent of Complainant Consumers who know about Prevention of Food Adulteration Act 1954, a majority of (58.4 percent) respondents are 'Least Aware' of it.

6. The Essential Commodities Act of 1955 is known to 68.8 percent of Complainant Consumers. But it is noted that only 2.5 percent of them are 'Fully Aware' of it. 58.0 percent know about MRTP Act, 1969. Among them only 2.0 percent are 'Fully Aware' and 52.0 percent are 'Least Aware'.

7. Out of the 65.3 percent of Complainant Consumers who know about Standards of Weights and Measures Act, 1976, only 4.4 percent are 'Fully Aware' and 50.4 percent are 'Least Aware' of it.

8. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and Right to Information Act, 2005 are known to 75.0 percent and 87.0 percent of Complainant Consumers respectively. Only 7.6 percent of respondents are 'Fully Aware' of Consumer Protection Act and 3.9 percent of respondents are 'Fully Aware' of Right to Information Act.

9. A majority of (86.4 percent) respondents came to know about Consumer Protection Legislations through newspapers, radios and TVs. And, friends, colleagues and neighbours are the sources of awareness for 36.4 percent of respondents. For 9.7 percent and 8.5 percent of respondents, VCOs and family members are the sources of awareness respectively.
10. Only 39.0 percent of Complainant Consumers are aware of the existence of CDRAs for the settlement of consumer complaints.

11. Of the Complainant Consumers who are aware of CDRAs, a majority of (50.5 percent) consumers are 'Least Aware', while 41.9 percent are 'Aware' and 7.6 percent are 'Fully Aware' of CDRAs.

12. A majority of (79.9 percent) consumers came to know about CDRAs through newspapers, radios and TVs and 44.0 percent through lawyers. Family members and schools & colleges are the sources of awareness for 7.6 percent and 15.8 percent of consumers respectively.

13. A majority of (71.6 percent) Complainant Consumers in the study region were aware of the working of VCOs before filing complaints.

14. Of the Complainant Consumers who are aware of VCOs, a majority (71.0 percent) are "Least Aware". 24.3 percent of consumers are "Aware" of VCOs while only 4.7 percent are "Fully Aware".

15. A majority of (40.2 percent) consumers came to know about VCOs through friends, colleagues and neighbours. Newspapers, Radios and TVs are the sources of awareness for 38.5 percent of consumers and only 7.7 percent of consumers came to know about VCOs through the lawyers.

16. Only 5.5 percent of Complainant Consumers are the members of VCOs in the study region. It may be due to the reason that to file a complaint in the VCO one need not be a member of that VCO.

17. Of the consumers who became the members of VCOs, a majority (61.5 percent) became the members out of self interest. Another 61.5 percent became the members as they are desirous of rendering social services. Only 3.8 percent of respondents became the members for getting the support to go to CDRAs for complaint settlement.

18. Among the non-members, a majority of (59.9 percent) consumers are interested in becoming the members of VCOs.
19. A majority of (32.2 percent) Complainant Consumers filed complaints against mobile phones, food items, courier services, travel agencies, gas agencies, automobiles, bakery items, garments and the like. Most of the consumers have filed complaints against dissatisfactory and deficient services when compared to the complaints against the defective household goods. This may be due to the reason that the services are bought frequently by all categories of consumers. Only 19.5 percent filed complaints against defective household goods, 11.9 percent against NBFCs, 0.2 percent against Airlines and 0.6 percent have complained against house construction contractors.

20. The complaints of 37.1 percent of consumers have been settled by the VCOs between 03 and 06 months. The settlement of complaints of 26.7 percent of consumers has taken the time ranging between 01 and 03 months. Only 3.4 percent of consumers said that the settlement of their complaints has taken more than 01 year. The study reveals that the VCOs in study region settle the consumer complaints in most of the cases within 06 months.

21. A majority of (32.2 percent) the complaints are settled by the VCOs through compromise in favour of consumers. 22.9 percent of complaints are settled through the repair of goods, 16.7 percent by way of replacement of goods, 14.2 percent through refund of the amount paid, and 14.0 percent of complaints are settled in favour of opposite parties. The study indicates that the VCOs in the study region settle the complaints through compromise in favour of consumers.

22. Only 34.3 percent of Complainant Consumers are exposed to the activities of VCOs other than complaint settlement. It is observed that a majority of Complainant Consumers in the study region are not exposed to the activities of VCOs.

23. Only 25.8 percent of Complainant Consumers are aware of the publications of VCOs.
24. Of the Complainant Consumers, who are aware of the publications of VCOs, a majority (80.3 percent) are aware of the newsletter 'Balakedarara Shikshana', 45.9 percent of consumers are aware of 'Balakedarara Vedike', while 34.4 percent are aware of 'Media Times'.

25. Out of the 25.8 percent of Complainant Consumers who are aware of the publication of newsletters by VCOs, a majority (78.7 percent) feel that publication of newsletters, periodicals and magazines is an effective activity of VCOs. 18.9 percent feel that it is highly effective and only 0.8 percent feel that it is highly ineffective.

26. Of 13.3 percent of consumers who know about the activities of VCOs, 76.2 percent feel that organising meetings, training programmes, conferences and street plays are the effective activities. 15.9 percent feel that it is highly effective while 3.2 percent feel that it is ineffective.

27. A majority of the consumers who are aware of the activities of VCOs are of the view that conducting surveys (8.3 percent), organising talks in schools and colleges (5.1 percent), giving talk in Radio, giving TV interviews (4.4 percent), conducting competitions (5.7 percent), organising demonstration cum exhibitions (5.3 percent) and consumer advocacy (100.0 percent) are the effective activities of VCOs.

28. A majority of (47.9 percent) Complainant Consumers are satisfied to the 'maximum extent' with the working of VCOs. 27.7 percent of respondents are satisfied to 'certain extent' while 7.2 percent are satisfied to a 'little extent'. 17.2 percent of respondents are not at all satisfied with the working of VCOs.

29. A majority of (68.2 percent) Complainant Consumers obtain the receipts 'sometimes' only while buying goods and services. 16.3 percent of consumers get the receipts 'always' whenever they make purchases. It is observed that 15.5 percent of consumers 'not at all'
obtain the receipt for the amount paid while purchasing goods and services.

30. A majority of (53.4 percent) consumers are interested in giving donations to the VCOs.

31. Of the Complainant Consumers who faced the problems while dealing with the VCOs, a majority (81.5 percent) felt that lack of awareness about Consumer Protection Legislations is the main problem while dealing with the VCOs. 69.0 percent of consumers had the problem of lack of supporting documents. 29.6 percent and 10.6 percent of consumers felt that lengthy procedure and threat from the opposite party respectively are the problems while dealing with the VCOs.

32. A majority of (54.2 percent) consumers opined that the VCOs are very important for the promotion and protection of consumer rights and interests. 41.7 percent felt that the VCOs are important. 3.0 percent of consumers could not rate the importance of VCOs. Only 1.1 percent of consumers opined that the VCOs are not important.

**STUDY OF VOLUNTARY CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS**

**CONSUMER EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES**

1. A majority of (66.0 percent) VCOs inform the public about consumer awareness programmes by way of sending oral messages through their trustees and members. 58.0 percent of VCOs inform the public through pamphlets and invitations. Accordingly, 8.0 percent of VCOs are giving information through Radio announcements and by using loud speakers.

2. Most of the VCOs (96.0 percent) collect the feedback related to Consumer awareness programmes. 82.0 percent of VCOs collect the feedback through letters, while 25.0 percent of VCOs collect through surveys.
PRODUCT TESTING

1. Only 5.3 percent of VCOs conduct product testing in the study region. The VCOs, which test the products, select the products for testing on the basis of complaints received against them.

2. A majority of (80.5 percent) VCOs do not undertake product testing in the study region since they do not have their own laboratories. Lack of funds (66.7 percent), lack of experts (44.4 percent) and poor consumers’ response (38.9 percent) are the other reasons for not undertaking product testing.

INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

1. Only 47.4 percent of VCOs in the study region keep contact with other VCOs. 31.6 percent of VCOs keep contact with schools and colleges. There is one VCO (2.6 percent) which has contact with Department of Weights and Measures.

2. A majority of (84.0 percent) VCOs in the study region are maintaining contact with other institutions through direct correspondence. And, 42.0 percent and 39.0 percent of VCOs maintain contact through direct visit and joint organisation of activities respectively.

3. Most of the VCOs (84.0 percent) get the benefits from their institutional relationship by way of mutual sharing of information. 55.0 percent of the VCOs get the benefit through consultation and 8.0 percent through mutual financial as well as moral support.

4. Only 23.7 percent of VCOs have representation in the committees of government in the study region. Out of these 44.4 percent of VCOs have representation in the State Consumer Protection Council, 33.3 percent in the District Consumer Protection Council and Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission, 11.1 percent of VCOs in the Pollution Control Board, Karnataka Urban Development Board, MESCOM Consumer Grievances Redressal Forum and Legal Reforms Committee, Karnataka.
5. Out of the 42.1 percent of VCOs, undertaking special programmes and campaigns, all the VCOs (100.0 percent) celebrate ‘National Consumer Day’. 31.3 percent of VCOs are conducting programmes in schools and colleges under Consumer Clubs, while 12.5 percent are conducting Mescom and Telephone adalat. Accordingly, 6.3 percent have undertaken LPG check-up campaign and have organised Zonal Consumer Conference.

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS AND THEIR SETTLEMENT

1. A majority of VCOs (89.5 percent) receive complaints related to both individual consumer and group of consumers. 7.9 percent VCOs receive complaints related to only individual consumers. There is only 01 VCO (2.6 percent) which receives complaints related to a group of consumers only.

2. All the VCOs (100.0 percent) receive complaints against Banks, Telecom, Electricity and defective household goods. 97.0 percent of VCOs receive complaints against postal department, 89.0 percent each against Insurance Company and NBFCs, 55.0 percent against miscellaneous items and 13.0 percent against Airlines.

3. A majority of (60.5 percent) VCOs receive on an average up to 50 complaints in a year from the consumers. 21.1 percent of VCOs receive complaints ranging between 50 and 100, 2.6 percent of VCOs from 150 to 200 complaints, 2.6 percent of VCOs from 200 to 250 complaints and only 7.9 percent of VCOs receive above 250 complaints from the consumers in a year.

4. A majority of (92.0 percent) the VCOs take up the complaints for settlement on ‘first come, first serve’ basis and 16.0 percent of VCOs take up the complaints on the basis of its repetitiveness.

5. A majority of (71.1 percent) the VCOs opined that the specialists are needed for complaint settlement.

6. Most of the VCOs (85.0 percent) need the help of Lawyers for complaint settlement. 63.0 percent of VCOs need Journalists, 56.0
percent of VCOs need Consumer Activists, 33.0 percent need the help of Food analysts and Engineers for the settlement of consumer complaints.

7. A majority of (92.0 percent) VCOs settle consumer complaints through correspondence. And, 34.0 percent and 32.0 percent of VCOs settle consumer complaints through face to face enquiry of both the parties and through CDRAs respectively.

8. No VCO in the study region (100.0 percent) charges the consumers for their services.

CONSUMER SURVEY

1. Only 18.4 percent of VCOs in the study region conduct consumer surveys. These VCOs conduct survey on different aspects like the problems of mobile phone users, testing of hotel food, problems related to ration cards etc.

2. A majority of (86.0 percent) VCOs use findings of the survey to provide consumer education. 71.0 percent of VCOs use it to provide the information to other VCOs and to publish in the media. 3.0 percent of VCOs use the findings to suggest amendments to the Consumer Protection Legislations.

3. Out of the 31 VCOs in the study region which do not conduct consumer surveys, 68.0 percent do not conduct consumer survey since they do not have infrastructural facilities. 65.0 percent and 35.0 percent of VCOs do not undertake consumer survey because of lack of funds and non availability of experts/specialists respectively.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. A majority of (63.2 percent) VCOs opined that government does not take any initiative to create consumer awareness.

2. Out of 36.8 percent of VCOs which opined that government has taken initiative to create consumer awareness, a majority (79.0 percent) felt that government is taking initiative by way of giving
publicity in the newspaper, radios and TVs about consumer protection. 64.0 percent of VCOs felt that government is taking initiative by way of passing Consumer Protection Legislations and 21.0 percent of VCOs have felt that opening of Consumer Clubs in schools and colleges is the government initiative to create consumer awareness.

3. In the study region, 50.0 percent of VCOs opined that the Consumer Protection Legislations of the Government of India are satisfactory.

4. Out of the VCOs dissatisfied with the Consumer Protection Legislations, a majority (79.0 percent) felt that lengthy procedures and time consuming process are the reasons for their dissatisfaction. 74.0 percent of VCOs are unhappy because of loopholes in the legislations. Likewise, 47.0 percent are dissatisfied, because the laws are not written in local languages.

5. Most of the VCOs (55.3 percent) have opined that to 'certain extent' Consumer Protection Legislations are adequate to protect the interests of consumers. 31.6 percent and 7.9 percent of VCOs have opined that Consumer Protection Legislations are adequate to protect the interests of consumers to the 'maximum extent' and to 'a little extent' respectively. And, 5.2 percent of VCOs have opined that the legislations are not at all adequate to protect the interests of the consumers.

6. Only 7.9 percent of VCOs in the study region are influenced by the pressure groups. Out of them, 66.7 percent are influenced by the Human Rights Agencies and 33.3 percent are influenced by the politicians.

7. A majority of (78.9 percent) VCOs rated their overall performance as 'satisfactory'. 15.8 percent of VCOs rated their performance as 'very satisfactory' and 5.3 percent rated as 'dissatisfactory'.

8. A majority of (66.0 percent) VCOs face financial problems to carryout their activities. The other problems are; 58.0 percent of VCOs have expressed that the consumers are approaching VCOs
without sufficient documents. Lack of manpower is also a serious problem in 55.0 percent of VCOs in the study region. Accordingly, 21.0 percent of VCOs opined that the consumers have a fear to approach CDRAs.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN VCOs AND DISTRICT FORA WITH REFERENCE TO COMPLAINT SETTLEMENT

1. The VCOs of DK and Udupi districts are settling the consumer complaints at the rate of 89.69 percent per annum on an average.

2. The DK and Udupi District Fora are settling the consumer complaints at the rate of 95.84 percent per annum on an average.

3. A majority of the complaints received by the VCOs are related to Banks, Telecom, Electricity and defective household goods.

4. A majority of the complaints received by the DK and Udupi District Fora are related to NBFCs.

5. The District Fora are more effective in complaint settlement when compared to the VCOs and a majority of the complaints are disposed of in favour of consumers in the VCOs as compared to the District Fora.

PERCEPTIONS OF COMPLAINANT CONSUMERS AND VCOs

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CONSUMER EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

1. A majority of (60.5 percent) VCOs and 50.4 percent of consumers strongly agreed to the statement, “Consumer education and awareness programmes of the VCOs are the possible solution to minimize consumer problems”.

2. Most of (34.2 percent) the VCOs and 55.3 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The efforts of the Voluntary Consumer Organisations are very meagre in popularizing their activities and programmes”. The consumers hold a very strong opinion about this as compared to the VCOs.
3. A majority of (57.9 percent) VCOs and 59.8 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “Publication of newsletters and consumer magazines by the Voluntary Consumer Organisations is the effective method of increasing consumer awareness”. The consumers have a strong hold on their opinion as compared to the VCOs.

4. A majority of (57.9 percent) the VCOs and 82.2 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations have a responsibility to pressurize business groups to frame consumer favoured programmes”. The consumers have a very strong opinion about this when compared to the VCOs.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PRODUCT TESTING ACTIVITY

1. Most of (55.3 percent) the VCOs and 68.4 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations should undertake product testing on the basis of ISI, Agmark, FPO and other standards”.

2. A majority of (34.2 percent) VCOs have strongly agreed and 39.2 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations must develop their own laboratories for testing the products”. A majority of VCOs have favoured this opinion as compared to the consumers.

3. A majority of (44.7 percent) VCOs and 52.8 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations should publish the results of product testing on a regular basis”. The VCOs have a strong opinion about this as compared to the consumers.

4. Most of (42.1 percent) the VCOs and 77.1 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations should test the commodities supplied through PDS”. The consumers hold a very strong opinion about this as compared to the VCOs.
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

1. A majority of (52.6 percent) VCOs and 57.0 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations do not have enough role in policy formulation as the government frames the main policies”. The consumers have a strong hold on their opinion as compared to the VCOs.

2. A majority of (65.8 percent) VCOs and 70.6 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations should take the help of other such organisations, business concerns and government departments in conducting consumer awareness activities and settling consumer complaints”.

3. Most of the (60.6 percent) VCOs and 65.0 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisation should be a bridge between the seller and the buyer for the smooth conduct of business”.

4. A majority of (50.0 percent) VCOs and 58.7 percent of consumers have disagreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisation should not work independently on its own capacity without taking any help from the government”. A majority of consumers have this opinion as compared to the VCOs.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CONSUMER COMPLAINTS AND THEIR SETTLEMENT

1. Most of the (65.8 percent) VCOs and 78.2 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “It is the responsibility of the Voluntary Consumer Organisation to assist the consumers in getting their grievances redressed”.

2. A majority of (47.4 percent) VCOs have strongly disagreed and 49.6 percent of consumers have disagreed to the statement, “Complaining to a Voluntary Consumer Organisations is of no use”. A majority of VCOs have this opinion as compared to the consumers.
3. A majority of (42.1 percent) VCOs and 43.0 percent of consumers have neither agreed nor disagreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations are the perfect substitutes for Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies”. The VCOs and consumers do not have clear opinion about the statement.

4. A majority of (36.9 percent) VCOs and 42.6 percent of consumers have disagreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations always do not ensure compensation to the consumers on settlement of their complaints”. The consumers hold a very strong opinion about this as compared to the VCOs.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CONSUMER SURVEY

1. A large number of (36.9 percent) VCOs have disagreed and 55.3 percent of consumers have strongly disagreed to the statement, “Consumer survey is time consuming and it should not be undertaken by the Voluntary Consumer Organisations”. The consumers hold a very strong opinion about this when compared to the VCOs.

2. A majority of (68.4 percent) VCOs and 82.6 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations have a responsibility in providing adequate information to the consumers on the basis of consumer survey”.

3. Most of the (68.4 percent) VCOs and 89.0 percent of consumers have agreed to the statement, “The Voluntary Consumer Organisations should share the findings of the survey among other institutions”. The consumers hold a very strong opinion about this as compared to the VCOs.

4. A majority of (63.2 percent) VCOs and 84.5 percent of consumers agreed to the statement, “Information collected through consumer surveys should be given to the government for the better formulation of consumer policies”. The VCOs have a strong opinion about this as compared to the consumers.
HYPOTHESES TESTED

1. The hypothesis, "Voluntary Consumer Organisations are playing a vital role in creating awareness among consumers about their rights and protection" is tested and found rejected.

2. The hypothesis, "There is a direct relationship between education level of the consumers and awareness of their rights and protection" is tested and found accepted.

3. The hypothesis, "Consumers who sought the help from Voluntary Consumer Organisations for settling the complaints are satisfied" is tested and found accepted.

4. The hypothesis, "Voluntary Consumer Organisations are performing their activities as per the expectations of consumers" is tested and found rejected.

5. The hypothesis, "Voluntary Consumer Organisations are more effective in complaint settlement when compared to the District Fora" is tested and found rejected.

A FEW SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the findings of the study and observation, the following suggestions are made to improve the functioning of VCOs and to popularise the VCOs to protect the interests of the consumers and to strengthen the consumer movement.

1. The government at the Centre and the State should feel the necessity of consumer education and awareness programmes. It should encourage the consumers to establish the VCOs in the district, taluk and village levels and it should provide them grants every year for their functioning and conducting of their activities. The services of legal experts should be made available to the VCOs at the cost of the government.

2. The government should give publicity about the existence and functioning of VCOs and CDRAs through electronic and print media
to encourage the aggrieved consumers to file the complaints. The VCOs should telecast consumer awareness programmes through Doordarshan and All India Radio more frequently. They have to organize panel discussions and phone-in-progrmmes to solve the problems related to consumers.

3. The government should include consumer education in the curricula of Schools and Colleges. The VCOs should be allowed to give consumer education to the students in the Schools and Colleges. They should also take the services of NCC, Bharath Scouts and NSS for creating consumer awareness, so that the future generation will be more vigilant and aware of consumer protection.

4. There should be a separate Ministry with full-fledged Secretary for Consumer Affairs in India to deal with Consumer Protection and Legislations. The government should make it compulsory for all the VCOs, government departments, schools and colleges to celebrate the World and National ‘Consumer Rights Day’ on 15th March and 24th December respectively. Similarly, various programmes, seminars and discussions concerning consumer protection should be organized by the VCOs every year. This will create more awareness among consumers.

5. It is observed that the level of consumer awareness is very low in the rural areas. Therefore, the VCOs should make serious efforts in organizing consumer education and awareness programmes and conducting training programmes in such areas targeting mainly women and poor illiterate masses.

6. The VCOs with the help of the District Fora should conduct ‘Lok Adalats every month in the district level to settle consumer disputes. It will help to save the time and cost attached in running a case. Based on the experience they must be allowed to suggest the government in decision making process on consumer policies.
7. The Consumer Protection Act recognises only the registered VCOs and the government is giving grants only for such VCOs. But, there are a number of VCOs remaining unregistered in the country. Therefore, all the VCOs should get themselves registered to get legal recognition and avail the benefits of the government.

8. All the VCOs, either individually or collectively should publish newsletters for educating the consumers about consumer related issues and to publish important provisions of various Consumer Protection Legislations in local languages. These newsletters should be circulated among the consumers at reasonable rates. The commercial advertisements in the newsletters should be banned so that the businessmen may not influence the working of VCOs.

9. The VCOs with the help of the Department of Weights and Measures, Drugs and Cosmetics and Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies should organize seminars and workshops to overcome the menace of short weights and measures, adulterated, duplicate, hazardous and sub-standard goods and spurious drugs. The government should set up product testing laboratories in the headquarters of each district to enable the VCOs to test the products. This will help in protecting the interests of the consumers against all kinds of unfair trade practices undertaken by some of the traders.

10. The VCOs should have their own building for accommodation to work independently. Many of the VCOs in the study region are accommodated either in the rented or in the donated buildings. They have to incur huge expenses for the payment of rent and in the case of donated buildings, there is every possibility of interference of the donors in the day-to-day functioning of the VCOs.

11. The VCOs should not have any jurisdiction for their operation. Especially, in the case of handling consumer complaints, they have to listen to the grievances of the consumers from any part of the
country. This will provide the consumers easy accessibility of the services of VCOs.

12. It is observed that most of the VCOs are run by the part-time honorary staff. They cannot concentrate fully on the working of VCOs and in most of the cases they open the offices during evening hours. Consequently, the working of VCOs is affected resulting in the poor performance of activities and delay in the settlement of consumer complaints. Therefore, the VCOs should work throughout the day with the help of full-time staff.

13. All the VCOs should be well equipped with libraries with literature on consumerism. They should possess the books on different Consumer Protection Legislations and the cases settled by different CDRAs in the country. This will enable the consumers to know much about consumer rights and protection.

14. All the VCOs in the district should come under one roof and establish an apex body of Consumer Organisations. It will enable them to conduct consumer education and awareness programmes in a more aggressive manner. They should not be affiliated to any political party and should not yield to any pressure against the interests of the consumers either from business side or from government side.

15. It should be made mandatory for the traders to display the address and telephone numbers of the nearest District Forum and VCO at prominent places in the shop. It would be ideal, if a system could be evolved whereby manufacturers, traders and service providers could, after due verification by VCOs, obtain a ‘Consumer Friendly Certificate’ from them which would assist consumers in their easy identification of such business enterprises.

16. The concept of ‘Lokayuktha’ should be applied to the marketing organizations. There should be a Lokayuktha which disseminates the information regarding product, product risk, price, quality etc. to the
consumers. In addition, it should receive consumer complaints directed to the business enterprise. It should also submit its report to the interested individuals and the aggrieved party.

17. Adequate infrastructural facilities should be provided to the VCOs and Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies. The vacant posts of President/Members must be filled up to make non-functional Consumer Fora functional.

18. The Consumer Protection Act should be amended from time to time and that even the services rendered by the government servants free of cost could be brought under its purview in order to improve their efficiency level. The VCOs must be vested with more power to settle consumer complaints.

19. The Consumer Protection Act should also be amended that the aggrieved consumer should be given the service of a lawyer free of cost by the government to fight his case in the CDRAs, if the opposite party appoints a lawyer. This will bring parity between the complainant and the opposite party.

20. Consumer Movement should become Peoples Movement. There must be total commitment from the Government, Businessmen, Voluntary Consumer Organizations, Consumer Activists, NGOs, Educational Institutions, Consumers and the Media to play an important role in disseminating various information related to Consumer Protection to the common consumers of the country.

PROPOSED MODEL

Complaint settlement is an important activity of VCOs. In order to settle the consumer complaints speedily in a scientific, systematic and an effective manner, a model is proposed by the researcher and is shown in Appendix IV.

According to the Model, whenever consumer/s approach VCOs for the settlement of complaints, the VCOs should identify the exact problem
of consumer/s and properly analyse it. They should confirm whether the complainant is a 'consumer' as defined in the 'Consumer Protection Act' and the problem can be dealt under Consumer Protection Act or not. If so, the VCOs should decide whether the problem is related to an individual consumer or a group of consumers. After getting it confirmed, the VCOs should ask the consumers whether any action is taken by them so far against the opposite party. If no action is taken, then the VCOs should guide the consumers to take an action against the opposite party. After the action is taken by the consumers and in spite of several actions, if the problem is not solved, then the VCOs should directly contact the opposite party for complaint settlement. Still the problem is not solved, then the VCOs should proceed in stages for the settlement up to the highest authority concerned to the opposite party. Even then, if there is no result, the VCOs should expose the matter in the leading newspapers to develop public opinion. If it does not yield any result, as a last resort, VCOs should file a case in the CDRAs and should fight on behalf of consumer to get justice.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study, "The Role of Voluntary Consumer Organisations in Consumer Protection- A Study in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi Districts" has been conducted within the framework of the research objectives. On the basis of the exposure to the literature and findings from the study, the researcher feels that the following areas need to be researched further.

There are a number of VCOs working for the promotion and protection of consumer rights and interests. In order to study the individual organisation in detail, a case study of an individual VCO can be taken up for the future research. A comparative study of rural and urban VCOs will be an interesting area in which the research could be taken up. The research can also be done by choosing some of the activities of VCOs like the training programmes for consumers and its effectiveness in enhancing the buying skills of the consumers. The nature of cases and their settlement
by the VCOs can also be studied in detail. The consumer protection measures taken up by different states in India is another budding area of diagnosis. An investigation can also be conducted related to the problems in the management of various VCOs. Evaluation of the impact of VCOs on business environment in the era of globalization will be an interesting area for the future research. A comparative study of the Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies and Voluntary Consumer Organisations in consumer protection is also a vital area in which research can be conducted in future.

To sum up, the rapid growth of economy coupled with the amazing progress of science and technology in the globalised world has changed the wants and needs of the society. The change of market structure and stiff competition forced the traders to device means and methods to place the consumers in a mood to buy. The complex manufacturing process forced them to rely more and more on the information disseminated by the producers. This gave much scope to the unscrupulous traders to exploit the ignorant consumers. The enactment of legislations by the government alone will not promote and protect the rights and interests of the consumers unless consumers realize their rights and protect their interests. There should be awareness, education, understanding and realization of the rights, privileges and responsibilities on the part of the consumers. The business organisations should also have a sense of responsibility towards consumer protection through self regulation. Besides, a strong network of Voluntary Consumer Organisations dedicated for the promotion and protection of the rights and interests of consumers throughout the country is required. Therefore, the consumers, government, business, VCOs and society must go hand in hand for the welfare of the consumers in the society and to make Consumer Movement a great success.